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# Performing LGBT Pride in Plymouth 1950 - 2012

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Plymouth University

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**RESEARCH  
DEGREES  
WITH  
PLYMOUTH  
UNIVERSITY**

**PERFORMING LGBT PRIDE IN PLYMOUTH 1950 – 2012**

by

**ALAN JOHN BUTLER**

A thesis submitted to Plymouth University in  
partial fulfilment for the degree of

**DOCTOR OF PHILOSOPHY**

Arts and Humanities Doctoral Training Centre

In collaboration with  
Plymouth & West Devon  
Record Office

**September 2015**

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Finally, I would like to dedicate this study to Edward (Ted) Whitehead, who passed away during the writing of this thesis. Ted's willingness to share his stories taught me a great deal about Plymouth's LGBT community but also a great deal about what it means to have pride.

## **AUTHOR'S DECLARATION**

At no time during the registration for the degree of Doctor of Philosophy has the author been registered for any other University award without prior agreement of the Graduate Sub-Committee.

Work submitted for this research degree at the Plymouth University has not formed part of any other degree either at Plymouth University or at another establishment.

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‘Pride in Our Past’ paper presented at Community Archives and Heritage Group South West Seminar, Devon Heritage Centre, Exeter, 21 October 2013.

‘Archiving the Ephemeral Pride’ paper presented at the Unspeakable! LGBT History and Archives Conference, London Metropolitan Archive, 7 December 2013.

‘Gathering Unheard Voices: Queer heritage in Post-War Plymouth’ paper presented at the Community Voices: Oral History on the Ground, Oral History Society Annual Conference, Manchester Metropolitan University, 19 July 2014.

‘Archiving the Ephemeral Queer Pride in Plymouth’ paper presented to the Queer Futures Working Group, International Federation of Theatre Research World Congress, University of Warwick, 31 July 2014

‘Gathering Unheard Voices and the Ephemeral Pride’ paper presented at Marginal Perceptions: International Queer Studies Conference, Penryn Campus, Falmouth, Cornwall, The University of Exeter and Falmouth University, 7 March 2015.

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Signed .....*Alan Butler* .....

Date .....*25<sup>th</sup> September 2015*.....

## **ABSTRACT:**

**Alan John Butler**

### **Performing LGBT Pride in Plymouth 1950 - 2012**

This thesis considers how the Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual and Transgendered communities of Plymouth have performed and signified their own culture and identities during the period 1950 to 2012. Its source materials were largely generated by conducting oral history interviews with members of Plymouth's LGB and T communities. This resulted in the creation of an archive which included thirty-seven interviews conducted with twenty-four individuals. These interviews, in conjunction with other uncovered archival memorabilia, now form a specific LGBT collection with Plymouth and West Devon Record Office. This PhD thesis interrogates this newly created community archive accession, using theories of performance as a tool, to consider how differing narratives and histories have been constructed, reproduced, contested and maintained.

Pride, as a political concept in LGBT culture, is linked to the belief that individuals should maintain and display a sense of dignity in relation to their sexual orientation or gender role as a response to the stigmatisation traditionally associated with being LGB or T. This study tests the relevance of the concept of pride for the lived experience of LGBT communities in Plymouth, concluding that it needs to be understood within personal narratives rather than as primarily manifested in outward-facing forms of performance (such as a parade or a public event). Particularly significant in this regard is the "coming out narrative". The thesis identifies spaces which, for various reasons, came to be accepted as safe places to accommodate sexual and gender differences in Plymouth in the 1950s and 60s. These strongly reflect Plymouth's location as a port, in combination with the fact that it has played host to each of the armed forces. It considers the impact of international public displays of gay pride from the Stonewall riots in the US through to performances as protest employed by groups such as Outrage! and legislation as Section 28 of the Local Government Act in the UK. The thesis concludes by considering the author's role in, and wider impact of, the "Pride in Our Past" exhibition, which took place at Plymouth City Museum and Art Gallery (April-June 2012) as part of this research project.

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# Introduction

On Saturday 22<sup>nd</sup> August 2009, approximately 100 people, including myself, gathered at the Plymouth City Centre Piazza to surround a fifty metre rainbow flag. The flag had been laid there for just over an hour to serve as – what the local newspaper had referred to as – “a symbol of Gay Pride.”<sup>1</sup> This six coloured version of the rainbow flag has been used internationally since the 1970s as a symbol of ‘pride’ which, according to the *Oxford English Dictionary*, is defined as “consciousness of one’s dignity”.<sup>2</sup> It could be said, therefore, that in this local context the flag was recognised, as it was around the Western world,<sup>3</sup> to symbolise a widespread desire on the part of many Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual and Transgendered (LGBT) people and communities to be treated with dignity and considered equal to their heterosexual or cisgender counterparts.

In Plymouth, weekend shoppers and other passers-by looked on as marshals blew whistles and directed the milling crowd around the flag. At 11.30am, it was lifted by the assembled crowd and carried towards the City Guildhall. The procession was led by veteran human rights activist Peter Tatchell.<sup>4</sup> This was his first visit to the city, made at the request of a group called Plymouth Pride Event, which had organized this rather understated, though significant, spectacle. Although local news coverage used the term “parade” in referring to this event, the journey from the Piazza to the Guildhall was a very short one – little over three hundred and fifty feet – and this was interrupted by a tentative crossing of a dual carriageway in the middle of this short pilgrimage. For reasons which will be discussed in Chapter Three of this thesis, the ‘parade’ has become synonymous with gay pride; and the act of carrying the flag across to the Guildhall was viewed in just such a way by many of the spectators and indeed the participants. It was, at the time, the most public performance of gay identity to have ever occurred in the city of Plymouth.

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<sup>1</sup> J. Omara. “Pride event is a Part of City Life”, *The Herald*, 19 August 2009: p13. Print.

<sup>2</sup> Oxford English Dictionary. (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2004)

<sup>3</sup> The Rainbow Flag was created by Gilbert Baker for the Gay Freedom Day Parade on June 25, 1978. Baker felt the gay community “needed that kind of symbol, that we needed as a people something that everyone instantly understands” and sewed the first flags with “sewing skills, honed as a drag queen who had to make his own costumes” <<http://hyperallergic.com/215327/museum-of-modern-art-acquires-iconic-rainbow-flag/>> [Accessed 15 August 2015]

<sup>4</sup> Peter Tatchell was born in Melbourne in 1952 but has been campaigning for human rights since 1967. He moved to the United Kingdom in 1971 and, since that time, as a gay man, much of his campaigning work has been centred on LGBT rights.

Pride as a word and as a concept has traditionally become synonymous with gay liberation and gay rights. Over the period of time under consideration in this study, notions of the gay movement have extended to encompass all individuals who define themselves in terms of LGBT+ or queer identities. The dictionary definition quoted above refers to an awareness of one's dignity and, in the context of this thesis, this dignity is most often a manifestation or response to stigma (which will be discussed in more detail in Part II of this chapter). Consequently, pride has traditionally been performed as a means of making visible the LGB or T aspects of one's identity without apology and continues to be performed in many ways as a challenge to a disapproving hegemony surrounding such identities.

Performing pride therefore, and so making visible that rejection of a stigmatised identity, can be manifested in a myriad of ways. Often pride is perceived to be performed in relation to notions of the carnival or festival, with parades through the streets including individuals wearing outlandish outfits, in a bold challenge to the status quo. At the same time, however, pride can be as simple as wearing a badge, holding a hand or adopting a manner to indicate that you are unashamed or not afraid of being told you are different.

Psychological research has indicated that human beings' repertoire of actions include a small collection of "pan-cultural nonverbal emotion expressions that are reliably linked to underlying affective states, which may have evolved to automatically communicate these states to observers"<sup>5</sup>, and that these include a "a facial and postural display that is reliably linked to the emotion of pride"<sup>6</sup>, which can include a small smile, the tilting back of the head, a visibly expanded posture, and raising of arms to the hips or possibly over the head. Many of these actions are exaggerated for a watching audience in a pride parade but also can be seen to occur on a much smaller scale in day-to-day interactions when an individual chooses not to accept their stigmatised role in society. In the interviews (which will be discussed subsequently), I sought to provide the individuals participating with an opportunity to explain moments that made them proud and, the extent to which that pride was made manifest in the moment. It was also possible to watch that pride being performed again for an audience which consisted of myself in the role of researcher.

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<sup>5</sup> J.L. Tracy, A.Z. Shariff, W. Zhao & J. Henrich. 'Cross-Cultural Evidence That the Nonverbal Expression of Pride Is an Automatic Status Signal' in *Journal of Experimental Psychology: General*. (Washington: American Psychological Association, 2013), Vol 142: pp163-180.

<sup>6</sup> *Ibid.*

Pride has historically been regarded as one of seven deadly sins and, of course, homosexuality has been similarly regarded through much of recorded history. As a result, writers find a certain degree of irony in the notion that pride presents the most appropriate response to confronting this stigma. “We searched for an antidote that would purge us of this poison, and found it in pride”<sup>7</sup> is one description. Being LGBT is not something to be intrinsically proud of, as notions of gay pride might suggest, but at the same time is not something for which one should be made to feel ashamed, despite cultural and historical discourses that have indicated otherwise. For many, pride is manifested in annual events or parades designed to make a political statement and often seen as “our annual rallying cry”.<sup>8</sup> However, many people experience it in a more individual manner, and so it seems very likely that they signify pride in more private encounters, actions and utterances. Consequential, the potential would seem to exist for pride to be generated by the process of saying you are proud and acting accordingly. This idea will be developed further later in this introduction and in Chapter One.

The reasoning behind this quasi-gay pride march taking place (for the first time in the city) in 2009 was derived from a willingness to create and perform a sense of pride in respect of the struggles of the LGB and T activists of the past. The LGB and T communities of Plymouth sought to mark the occasion of the forty-year anniversary of the “birth of the modern gay rights movement,”<sup>9</sup> which was described as taking place at the Stonewall Inn in New York’s Greenwich Village four decades previously.<sup>10</sup> The chair of the “Plymouth Pride Event” organising committee, Mike (surname withheld), sought to use this event to create a sense of historical pride in the communities of the present although, he recalled in an interview three years later, the intention had never been for this event to be specifically regarded as a public parade: “What we wanted to do was leave the flag laid out so people going past would actually say ‘What’s this flag about?’”<sup>11</sup> He said it created “quite a bit of interest” and also some controversy, when a local religious group objected to such a public display of a symbol of homosexuality, clearly feeling that such a public display was not appropriate for the wider Plymouth audience. Such stigma, along with an unwillingness to

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<sup>7</sup> D. Savage. ‘The Pride Issue: Queer’. < <http://www.thestranger.com/seattle/pride/Content?oid=1313/> [Accessed online 15 July 2017]

<sup>8</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>9</sup> Omara. “Pride event is a Part of City Life”, p.13.

<sup>10</sup> This event will be examined in further detail in Chapter Three of this thesis.

<sup>11</sup> Mike (Surname Withheld). *Interview 3901-38*. Personal interview conducted as part of the ‘Pride in Our Past’ project for the Plymouth LGBT Archive held at Plymouth and West Devon Record Office. Interview date: 16<sup>th</sup> February 2012.

implicitly explain the event's purpose, served to limit the degree to which the participants felt enabled to perform publically their varied sexual or gender identities with pride.

At that time, Peter Tatchell went on record to say how important the event was for the city and very publically criticised the Royal Navy for its lack of participation. "The Royal Navy is guilty of rank hypocrisy," were his words at the time. "It sent fifty sailors to march in the London Pride gay parade in July but has failed to support the gay festival in its home town of Plymouth".<sup>12</sup> The Navy was quick to respond that it was a staffing issue that caused their lack of attendance rather than any more deep seated sense of inappropriateness. Tatchell still regarded this as an oversight on their part in light of the city's close knit association with the Navy, feeling that it sent a message that the Navy was not proud of its LGBT personnel, and also that it did not consider Plymouth to be a significant location to challenge stigma and intolerance. He told the local media that:

Plymouth has a long, historic tradition and is one of the main ports of the Royal Navy. It's not the most tolerant city in Britain. Parts of the city are quite rough and homophobic. Given the sometimes less enlightened local attitudes, it's much more important that the navy has a presence at Plymouth Pride than at London Pride.<sup>13</sup>

This parade, which was not intended to be a parade, provided a brief performance of pride in a manner which, by this time period, was seen as a very established performance around the world – although it had not previously occurred in Plymouth. It lasted for only minutes before the procession moved out of public view and disappeared inside the institution of the city's Civic Centre; and, it can be argued, these limits of duration and space made it an appropriate representation of the lived experience of the communities in question. Public performances of pride had not happened on this scale or in this manner before. However, that is not to say that individuals had not felt or produced pride through their own actions and responses to stigmatisation in the past.

This thesis, and the wider community project it emerges from, is an attempt to address the fact that this history of LGBT pride in Plymouth has remained mostly undiscussed and underrepresented. To draw upon the intentions behind the 2009 event, it would seem that one manifestation of pride is to discuss and represent what has been hidden and stigmatised, and consequently, the key to understanding pride is to consider the issues around its presentation and representation. In developing these ideas, this thesis collects and analyses the narratives

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<sup>12</sup> Omara. "Pride event is a Part of City Life", p.13.

<sup>13</sup> *Ibid.*

shared by some members of these communities during the creation of an LGBT Archive for Plymouth, in order to consider and interrogate lines of enquiry about the presentation and representation of LGBT pride in the city. The overarching research questions driving this thesis are:

- How have LGB and T individuals and communities in Plymouth utilised performance in the signification of their identities?
- How might different forms of LGB and T performance (with particular attention to the oral history interview process) impact upon and inform one another?
- Which discursive and cultural elements have impacted on the history of LGB and T communities in Plymouth, as well as their presentations and representations of pride, in the second half of the 20th century?
- How have performances of LGB and T identities have been renegotiated locally, nationally and internationally during the second half of the 20th century?

## Plymouth's History and 'Hidden Communities': Literature Review

A review of published materials about Plymouth's history, at the outset and throughout the period of doctoral study, provided no specific information on the topic of LGB and T experience in the city. Writing in 1991, David Dunkerley extended notions of 'diversity' in the city only to questions of race, by stating Plymouth was "an overwhelmingly 'white' city"<sup>14</sup> and, in that regard, he felt that "one explanation might lie in the enduring influence of the Royal Navy rather than the merchant navy,"<sup>15</sup> which might have led to fewer jobs for those moving to the city. John Van Der Kiste touched briefly upon more 'alternative' aspects of Plymouth culture when he wrote about two artists based within Plymouth's historic Barbican area who had both received national attention – Beryl Cook and Robert Lenkiewicz. With regards to Lenkiewicz, he noted his work included "starkly realistic and often controversial portraits, particularly of what we called 'the hidden community', including the homeless and mentally ill."<sup>16</sup> As we shall see in Chapter Six, this included members of

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<sup>14</sup> D. Dunkerley, B. Chalkley & P. Gripaios. *Plymouth: Maritime City in Transition*. (Newton Abbot: David & Charles, 1991), p171.

<sup>15</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>16</sup> J. Van Der Kiste. *Plymouth History and Guide*. (Port Stroud: The History Press, 2009), p.149.



Plymouth's LGB and T communities but, for the most part, these hidden communities have not been referred to in literature relating to the city's past.

The majority of the local histories available begin with the starting point used in Chapter Two of this thesis: Plymouth had been severely damaged in World War II, due to its strategic importance as a port, and most sources go on to discuss how the city was rebuilt and reconstituted as a result. Titles refer to "A New History"<sup>17</sup> and "A Maritime City in Transition"<sup>18</sup> and, while referencing some of the city's more ancient history for context, all tend to begin their narratives from this point.

Plymouth has a number of notable moments in its more distant past, however, most of which are directly associated with its role as a port. As Chakley, Dunkerley and Gripaios inform the reader, "blessed by nature with one of the world's finest harbours, for Plymouth the sea does not simply mark the city's edge, it is central to its livelihood and personality".<sup>19</sup> They also acknowledge how "Plymouth's geography has also shaped its history"<sup>20</sup> and how it has been at the beginning of many stories of discovery including "Drake's circumnavigation, Cook's passages to Australia and the Pacific, and Darwin's scientific expedition on the Beagle"<sup>21</sup> as well as the Pilgrim Fathers leaving Plymouth in 1620 to establish the New England colony in America.

The focus for the majority of texts dealing with Plymouth, and its more recent history as a specific subject, consider the architecture and reconstruction of the city. A narrative has been created around Plymouth rising phoenix-like from the ashes of the Blitz. It is also possible to identify what Jeremy Gould referred to as "a feeling in Plymouth, prevalent from the 1960s, that somehow the new city was not quite good enough".<sup>22</sup> Writing in 2010, he claimed that:

Plymouth, now more than 50 years old, can be regarded as an historic city. But Plymouth is a work-a-day city and its accretions and shabbiness

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<sup>17</sup> C. Gill, *Plymouth A New History 1603 to the Present Day. (Volume Two)*. (Newton Abbot: David and Charles, 1979).

<sup>18</sup> Chalkley, Dunkerley & Gripaios. *Plymouth Maritime City in Transition*.

<sup>19</sup> *Ibid.*, p.11.

<sup>20</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>21</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>22</sup> J. Gould, *Plymouth Vision of a Modern City*. (Swindon: English Heritage, 2010), p.79.

obscure its real face. There is a lack of understanding and pride in the extraordinary achievement of the 1950s.<sup>23</sup>

This situation has been addressed to a certain extent in recent years by local historian, Chris Robinson, whose books are populated with old pictures and stories often shared with him by the people of Plymouth, as part of his role as a writer for the local newspaper, *The Herald*. In his consideration of the 1940s and 1950s, he identifies a picture of Plymouth which he describes as encompassing:

Streets with little or no street markings, and not that many cars; the last tram and the last of the horse-drawn roundsman; Nissen huts and prefabs; coach parties and carnivals; factories and funfairs; servicemen and cigarettes; girls with hula hoops and skipping ropes; boys on cycle speedway bikes with home-made tabards and football teams with ill-matching socks and shorts.<sup>24</sup>

Gender roles are comfortably maintained in this picture and Plymouth's hidden LGB and T communities remain obscured from the account.<sup>25</sup> Plymouth is not alone in this regard and very few LGBT histories of specific cities have been researched or published. Instead, researchers have tended to consider sexuality or gender roles on a national or, indeed, international level, which often charts a narrative of oppression and discrimination through to more general acceptance by the wider public. Yet, how far does this narrative match the lived experience of individuals and communities on a local level, particularly in a city such as Plymouth that might be considered peripheral or provincial due to its geographical location and history? As Vincent notes, there is a difficulty with taking "a simple linear-progress approach".<sup>26</sup> Such thinking

Tends to over-simplify and does not necessarily reflect the experiences of all LGBT people, for example along race or class lines. The constant focus on representative 'out' individuals misses the real complexities of people's lives.<sup>27</sup>

Similarly, the histories around LGB or T experience tend to be focused around the cities which visibly have the higher populations of LGB or T individuals. One of the first exhibitions being *Pride and Prejudice: Lesbian and Gay London*, held at the Museum of London in 1999. Prior to this, many of these earlier investigations actually took place outside

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<sup>23</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>24</sup> C. Robinson, *Plymouth in the Forties & Fifties*. (Plymouth: Pen & Ink Publishing, 2011), p7.

<sup>25</sup> Robinson himself tried to counter this situation, at the onset of this project, when he wrote a piece for one of his weekly newspaper columns ('Shed some Light on City's Gay Past' <http://www.plymouthherald.co.uk/Shed-light-city-s-gay-past/story-12954019-detail/story.html> [Accessed online 05 June 2014] to acknowledge how the LGB or T experience was missing in the local historical discourses and to call for participants for the oral history interviews.

<sup>26</sup> J. Vincent, *LGBT People and the UK Cultural Sector: The Response of Libraries, Museums, Archives and Heritage since 1950*. (Farnham: Ashgate, 2014)

<sup>27</sup> *Ibid.*

of the United Kingdom, influenced perhaps in part by the UK's Section 28 legislation (which will be discussed more fully in chapter four of this thesis) during the 1990s. When Paul Baker and Jo Stanley turned their attention to the history of gay seafarers, in 2003, their book (and subsequent exhibition) *Hello Sailor*<sup>28</sup> was mostly centred on the merchant navy and so cities such as Southampton and Liverpool featured strongly.

In 2006, Clare Summerskill premiered a play called *Gateway to Heaven* based upon interviews with twenty four older gay men and women in the London area. The interviews addressed issues from the 1940s up until the 1990s and a narrative which “begins in closets of fear – arrests and hidden basement bars – and emerges in courage with the first Pride marches and the repeal of anti-gay legislation”.<sup>29</sup> Subsequent to the play, Summerskill was commissioned by the London Metropolitan Police force to create a film around older LGBT people's relationship with the police and many of the interviews from both projects were published in the *Gateway to Heaven*<sup>30</sup> book in 2012 which drew its title from The Gateways lesbian club in Kings Road, London and Heaven, the popular London gay club. While providing authentic first hand narratives, these interviews spoke of the experience of being LGB or T in the capital and consequently the metropolitan experience comes to be seen as the only representation of LGB or T experience. Among the questions that drives this research project, then, are: did the communities of Plymouth experience the same linear shift from intolerance towards acceptance? If so, how did they interpret this shift and what did it mean for their communities and the meanings which they attached to this aspect of their identity?

The impact of the Stonewall riots (which will be discussed in Chapter Three) are central to notions surrounding the LGBT past and this moment in time is seen to have revolutionised the course of history for LGBT people but very little exploration has taken place in consideration of the narratives on a local level and, consequently, how significant events such as this were to individuals who, despite potentially self-defining as LGB or T, inhabited spaces which tended to be perceived as being outside the dominant narrative that surrounded such identities.

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<sup>28</sup> P. Baker & J. Stanley. *Hello Sailor! The Hidden History of Gay Life at Sea*. (London: Routledge, 2003)

<sup>29</sup> C. Summerskill. 'Gateway to Heaven'. <<http://www.gatewaytoheaven.co.uk/> [Accessed online 06 June 2015]

<sup>30</sup> C. Summerskill, *Gateway to Heaven*. (London: Tollington Press, 2012)

## The Pride in Our Past Project

This thesis is the result of an AHRC-funded collaborative doctoral partnership between the University of Plymouth, the Plymouth and West Devon Record Office (PWDRO) and the Plymouth Pride Forum (PPF), a local LGBT community group. This collaboration arose out of the ‘Pride in Our Past’ project, which was a Heritage Lottery Funded twelve month project to create an archive accession for PWDRO, which would specifically explore LGBT experience in Plymouth. The archive informed a nine-week exhibition at the Plymouth City Museum and Art Gallery. Both the record office and the museum were administered by Plymouth City Council’s Arts and Heritage department which enabled a liaison between the archive and the exhibition. The exhibition was planned to display the materials collected for the archive and highlight Plymouth’s LGBT history in a more public manner than had previously been attempted in the city, or indeed in many other places in the United Kingdom. The tagline adopted for the project was “Setting the Record Straight in Plymouth”.

It had been suggested at the end of the 20<sup>th</sup> century that “gay and lesbian history is tangible today because lesbians and gay men had the will and determination to constitute and reclaim histories by writing books and building presses, and by establishing community-based archives and history projects”.<sup>31</sup> Yet, despite this, LGBT community archives in the United Kingdom remained limited at the start of the new millennium; notable exceptions included the LGBT archives at Manchester Archives and Local Studies and the Brighton Ourstory community archive. Collaborative endeavours between community and mainstream archives have been even rarer, despite work towards the end of the noughties to “track down information about records of LGBT people in existing archives”.<sup>32</sup> John Vincent also offered that, “archives may hold documents relating to specific events (such as court cases) which have involved LGBT but, unless they hold papers belonging to someone who is known or believed to be LGBT, these are not likely to be indexed”.<sup>33</sup>

As a result, many archives were reassessing their holdings in a similar manner to PWDRO. The Plymouth city archivists felt that this process would best be undertaken by

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<sup>31</sup> P. Thistlethwaite. “The Lesbian Herstory Archives” in C. Cough & E. Greenblatt (eds) *Gay and Lesbian Service* (London: McFarland, 1995), Vol 10: p40.

<sup>32</sup> Vincent. *LGBT People and the UK Cultural Sector*, p105.

<sup>33</sup> *Ibid.*

members of the communities in question, which would have amongst them individuals who could uncover the stories that had been excluded or left unexplored within the records.

In 2010, PWDRO approached the Plymouth Pride Forum (PPF) to ascertain if there was interest in this project, and, if there were individuals willing to be interviewed. At this time, I was the secretary of the Plymouth Pride Forum (PPF) and was responsible for completing the funding application forms and submitting them to the Heritage Lottery Fund (HLF) in January 2011. The possibility that the oral history interviews being collected for this project could form the basis for PhD study had already been discussed at this point with Plymouth University, but had not yet been confirmed.

The aims of the Pride in Our Past project, as described in the HLF application, were:

- To record and compile the memories of older members of the LGBT communities.
- To create a permanent static and virtual archive of LGBT life within the city of Plymouth.
- To research the history of LGBT life within the city.
- To recruit and train members of the LGBT community to act as oral historians.
- To prepare and produce an exhibition of LGBT Plymouth based on the project activity. This exhibition had been agreed (at this time) by the Plymouth City Council for January/February 2012 and would be hosted by the City Museum and Gallery.
- To promote intergenerational learning in terms of schools and other youth groups.<sup>34</sup>

These aims were agreed by both PPF and PWDRO to ensure that the experiences and memories of LGB & T people of Plymouth are recorded and preserved for their own benefit, heritage and empowerment, and as a tool of education and empowerment for the wider community. Volunteer 'Oral Historians' would gain knowledge and interview skills while the interviewees would be given the opportunity to share their stories and contribute to LGBT heritage. These interviews provided a unique opportunity to enable individuals to explore how proud there were of their own past. Furthermore, through preparation and production of

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<sup>34</sup> Adapted from Heritage Lottery Fund application for "Your Heritage" fund, submitted on 20<sup>th</sup> January 2011 by Alan Butler.

an exhibition based on the project, volunteers had the opportunity to disseminate what they had uncovered and learn new skills in curation and presentation. The final aim was specific to the next generation of LGB and T individuals and was designed to consider how heritage materials (or indeed lack of access to them) pertaining to sexual or gender identities might impact upon the LGB and T next generation.

The offer of an exhibition from the Plymouth Arts and Heritage service, from the onset of the project, made *Pride in Our Past* different from previous LGBT archive projects in the UK. It was very rare for such collaborations to take place and for a museum exhibition to be confirmed and included as part of the original bid for funding. While the agreement to deposit the ‘*Pride in Our Past*’ archive in Plymouth’s mainstream local history archive was not unique, there had only been a limited number at this stage, such as the Hall-Carpenter Archives at the London School of Economics and the Rukus! Black, Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual and Trans cultural archive at the London Metropolitan Archives. However, the initial promise of an exhibition to showcase the, as yet undiscovered, findings was something of a leap of faith by the Arts and Heritage staff. As the Learning Officer for both PWDRO and the museum, Tony Davey,<sup>35</sup> was in a position to make the offer of the project, along with relevant support and training to PPF, and also to include the promise of the exhibition from the museum. This aspect of the project certainly assisted in obtaining the support of the Heritage Lottery Fund who confirmed they would fund the project in March 2011 following a successful application to the Arts and Humanities Research Council for this collaborative doctoral study to be undertaken.

The *Pride in Our Past* project was approved to begin on 17<sup>th</sup> March 2011 and work began in earnest in collection of oral history interviews following a training session on 25<sup>th</sup> June at PWDRO facilitated by Tony Davey. However, just prior to this session, I had successfully interviewed for the collaborative doctoral awards post to commence in October 2011. Also, included in the HLF bid was the remit for a part time Research Assistant role, based at Plymouth University, which was advertised on 4<sup>th</sup> July and Helen Phillips was appointed to the role 17<sup>th</sup> August. The majority of the first year of this study, therefore, was focused on the continuing collection of the Oral History interviews, which were conducted principally by myself and Helen Phillips but also by a number of volunteers who had attended the training course in June.

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<sup>35</sup> Tony Davey has been a member of my PhD supervisory team throughout the course of the project.

Over the next nine months until the exhibition opening, volunteers participated in one or more of the following working groups: (i) Oral history interviewing, (ii) archival research, (iii) exhibition planning, (iv) website design and (v) a photography competition to engage individuals from outside the volunteer base. Helen Phillips and I played a part in each of these groups, which continued to evolve. My involvement was particularly focused on the oral history group where I provided ongoing training for new volunteers who became involved during the duration of the project.

As we approached the exhibition dates, it became clear that the display of these newly discovered archival materials would become and enable a public performance of Plymouth LGBT pride in its own right. I therefore became increasingly involved in the curation of the exhibition as part of the initial year of my PhD methodology. This process will be discussed more fully in Chapter Six of this thesis.

## The Timeframe under Investigation (1950 - 2012)

The overarching aim of this thesis is to consider how the Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual and Transgender communities of Plymouth have performed and signified their own cultures and identities during the period 1950 to 2012 through consideration of the materials generated through archival research and thirty seven oral history interviews with twenty four different members or associates of Plymouth's LGB and T communities conducted as part of the Pride in Our Past project. These interviews, in conjunction with other uncovered archival memorabilia, now form a specific collection, based at the Plymouth and West Devon Record office, which reflects the lives of local LGB and T people. As a result, the heritage of Plymouth's LGB and T communities has been explored through the living memory of people who have been part of it. This thesis explores how they either appeared to adhere to or else disrupted heteronormative discourses and expectations in different periods of time, spaces and with/to/for public audiences.

The sixty-two year time period which is considered in this thesis was decided upon for two reasons. Firstly, and perhaps most compellingly, is the fact that the earliest recollections of a Plymouth LGBT culture by interviewees was the 1950s. In other words, the primary method of data collection – that is, the oral history interview – was limited by living memory.

Also, this period saw very significant shifts in attitudes and legislation. The decision to end with the exhibition in 2012 was borne from the realisation that the exhibition was in itself a very significant moment of LGBT pride in the city, the performance of history which in turn impacted on performances of pride for the future.

It is also important to acknowledge at this stage a shift in the use of descriptive language for lesbian, gay, bisexual and transgender people throughout the period of time focused on within this study. For example, the word 'queer' at different stages in this time frame is used in a disparaging manner to describe gay people but then later is reclaimed and used to describe both political and theoretical opposition to heteronormativity. LGBT as a term to encompass these four groups of people only comes into being late in the twentieth century so it is incorrect to discuss an LGBT culture in a decade such as the 1950s. This term then brings its own tensions, in enabling the discussion of lesbian, gay, bisexual and transgender communities as one homogenous community when they are, in fact, very different communities with specific concerns at different times. As a result, the language used in each chapter will often reflect the time in question even if some has been reinterpreted or is currently considered inappropriate at the time of writing. I shall also seek to reflect upon the implications of this shift of language.

## Studying Performance

As will be discussed fully in Chapter One, the broad methodology of this PhD project is to examine the archival materials collected for and now available through the Pride in Our Past Project by using 'performance' as both an object of study and a model of enquiry, in conjunction with an oral history methodology. Together these create narratives and understandings of place which are constituted through the flow of discourses surrounding performing arts, queer cultures, sexualities, politics and memorialisation. Analysis will focus, in particular, on a sense of performed identity, even if not perceived as being performed (at the time of the interaction or thereafter) by the individuals concerned, and considered against prevailing hegemonic norms.

Performance, in terms of this study, is considered as an act of doing. According to Richard Schechner, "any action that is framed, presented, highlighted, or displayed is a



performance”.<sup>36</sup> At the same time, however, performance is “always a doing and a thing done [and] describes certain embodied acts, in specific sites, witnessed by others (and/or the watching self)”.<sup>37</sup> In this way, an expanded understanding of the term performance can include a wide-ranging field of human activity, so all communicative actions, along with the meanings and interpretations that are attached to them, may become material for analysis.

It is in this way that Performance Studies can provide “a methodological lens that enables scholars to analyse events as performance. Civic obedience, resistance, citizenship, gender, ethnicity, and sexual identity, for example, are rehearsed and performed daily in the public sphere”.<sup>38</sup> As discussed in Chapter One of this thesis, daily acts of social performance or the performance of everyday life are often referred to as ‘performative’. A researcher employing a Performance Studies approach considers “texts, architecture, visual arts, or any other item or artefact of art or culture not in themselves, but as players in ongoing relationships . . . whatever is being studied is regarded as practices, events and behaviours not as ‘objects’ or ‘things’”.<sup>39</sup> Instead, the performance in question is interrogated as an aspect of this on-going relationship between lived experience and its relation to historical hegemonies of time and place.

All performances include an aspect of restored behaviour, also described by Richard Schechner as “twice-behaved behaviour”.<sup>40</sup> He suggests that all “physical, verbal or virtual actions are not-for-the-first time”,<sup>41</sup> and each involves an aspect of training or practice, be that formal training for the stage or training in life which enables us to make sense of and negotiate our day to day existence. Schechner refers to this type of knowing as the individual’s repertory. It is the means through which they create an identity which is perceived by others through repetition, expectation and their own internalised subjectivity and how far that aligns or opposes cultural expectations of the time.

Repetition is at the core of the concept of performativity which, for the purposes of this investigation, I will consider to relate to the repetition of social performance which then, in turn, serves to produce socialisation. In her consideration of gender, Judith Butler (whose work will be discussed in greater detail in Chapter One) drew upon John Austin’s

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<sup>36</sup> R. Schechner. *Performance Studies: An Introduction. 2<sup>nd</sup> Edition*. (New York & London: Routledge, 2002), p.2.

<sup>37</sup> E. Diamond. *Performance & Cultural Politics*. (London & New York, 1996), p.1.

<sup>38</sup> D. Taylor. *The Archive and the Repertoire*. (Durham and London: Duke University Press, 2007), p.19.

<sup>39</sup> Schechner. *Performance Studies*, p.2.

<sup>40</sup> *Ibid.* p.29.

<sup>41</sup> *Ibid.*

conceptualization of ‘performatives’ which he considered to be linguistic declarations which perform actions and so form a sense of the order of things.<sup>42</sup> Some examples can be the pronouncing of a couple to be man and wife or proclaiming a new born baby to be a boy or a girl. Butler offers that, through the exercising of these performatives, actions can then “bring into being that which they name”.<sup>43</sup> Consequently, performativity becomes the process of invoking the subject rather than being simply a performance or display of the subject. Butler tells us that “this repetition is performed *by* a subject: this repetition is what enables a subject and constitutes the temporal condition for the subject”.<sup>44</sup> So, through repetition, in individual performances, one appears to produce one’s own identity through a process of reiteration. This, in turn, allows for the possibility to skew these discourses by altering one’s individual social performance and, as a result, perform in a way that may well be perceived to be incorrect in relation to the norm. In the case of LGB or T individuals these performances may relate to gesture, movement, attire, language or action which can be considered to be contrary to heteronormativity or assumptions of cisgender. If these alternative performances are intended to challenge the stigma that can often be associated with being LGBT then this thesis will seek to explore how far that performativity can produce pride as a response to stigmatisation.

Interviewing, together with the collection of memorabilia and other archival artefacts, is used as a method of collecting material for research within Performance Studies, and in this way the project constructs a history of LGBT performance in Plymouth in the second half of the 20th century. Through use of the interview, I have been able to explore the more ephemeral recollections of individuals and introduce these to the historical record held in a traditional archive. Through the oral history interviews, I will seek to uncover previously hidden narratives of members of Plymouth’s LGB and T communities, through the recollections of people who participated in that aspect of life in the city, analysing how they maintained or disrupted acceptable discourses in relation to differing times, spectators and locations or venues within the city which were regarded as ‘safe’ for performance of an LGB or T identity.

The interactions between performances and archives offer rich potentials for exploration, as the conventional concept of the archive is traditionally unconcerned with the

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<sup>42</sup> J. L. Austin, *How to Do Things with Words* (2<sup>nd</sup> Edition). (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1975), p.5.

<sup>43</sup> J. Butler. ‘Gender as Performance’ in P. Osborne (Ed) *A Critical Sense: Interviews with Intellectuals*. (London: Routledge, 1996), p.112.

<sup>44</sup> J. Butler. *Bodies that Matter: On the Discursive Limits of ‘Sex’*. (New York: Routledge, 1993), p.95.

ephemeral. Instead, archives tend to contain those items often viewed as being more concrete and suitable for rigorous analysis such as “documents, maps, literary texts, letters archaeological remains, bones, videos, films, CDs, all those items supposedly resistant to change”.<sup>45</sup> However performance, when considered as an area of study, “assembles a vast network of discourses and practices”<sup>46</sup> and, although Performance Studies as a discipline makes full use of archival materials, the focus is often on the moment of the performance itself and the meaning to which it is attached.

Witnessing and spectatorship are fundamental to the process by which meaning is attached to a performance or performative act. In this thesis, the audience can vary greatly, from a solitary interviewer carrying out the oral history interview (with the process of the interview itself as a performance in its own right) to the wider population of the city of Plymouth. Alternatively, it can specifically relate to the relevant aspect of the LGBT community within which the performance is taking place. As the historian Alistair Thomson has suggested, “there are also imagined audiences outside the recording room whose presence at the back of the narrator’s mind affects the story”.<sup>47</sup> The potential audiences, in the minds of interviewed participants in this project, were a wider Plymouth museum audience who quite probably would have not engaged in this form of history before and also current members of Plymouth LGB and T communities who would be offered narratives similar to their own being presented in this format for the first time.

The use of oral history in conjunction with performance is not a new phenomenon and, used as a lens through which to interrogate individual’s recollections, has the potential to uncover the “complex relationship between ourselves, our bodies and our environment, between our physical and sensual experience of a place, and . . . the impact a particular location can have on our lives”.<sup>48</sup> Performance can, therefore, be used “as a means of exploring the myriad ways in which meaning is created and social life is shaped”<sup>49</sup> and, as a result, “it is essential to include different histories, genealogies, geographies and politics in

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<sup>45</sup> Taylor. *The Archive and the Repertoire*, p.19.

<sup>46</sup> J. McKenzie. *Perform or Else*. (London & New York: Routledge, 2001), p.4.

<sup>47</sup> A. Thomson. ‘Moving Stories, women’s lives: Sharing authority in oral history’, *Oral History*, Volume 39: No 2, 2011, p.72.

<sup>48</sup> H. Roms, ‘Moving Landscapes: A Glance back at Recent Developments in Welsh Dance Theatre’. *Planet*. Volume 126 (1997), p.80.

<sup>49</sup> M. Pearson & M.Shanks, *Theatre/Archaeology*. (London & New York: Routledge, 2001), pxiii

the fabric of the academic discipline.”<sup>50</sup> In short, performance can provide new ways of both “looking and telling”.<sup>51</sup>

This is particularly important with the LGB or T experience which has traditionally been excluded through heteronormative discourses but, is particularly useful in uncovering the specific locational experience of the LGB and T communities in a specific site such as the city of Plymouth. The aim for both the formation of the archive and the exhibition that occurred in the first year of this study, was to share the hidden history of LGBT individuals but also to discover what was unique about that experience in the city of Plymouth.

Performance maker and scholar Mike Pearson views his work as “operating within a triangular field of attention which includes at its apexes the terms ‘practice’, ‘context’ and ‘analysis’”.<sup>52</sup> Practice refers to the act of making something, which in the case of this PhD, was both an archive and an exhibition through which to display and share the narratives that had been uncovered through the process. Context is important because we must be interested in the “ramifications of social, cultural, political and historical context about the nature, form and function of performance”.<sup>53</sup> The manner and extent to which LGB and T people performed pride over the last sixty plus years was not only affected by their sexual orientation or gender identity but also impacted upon by a multitude of factors that arose from their location, upbringing, social class, economic position, friendship groups, etc.; for each, the experience of being LGB or T in Plymouth would be unique and often contradictory to others’ experiences. Through careful documentation and consideration, however, the possibility exists to uncover and highlight the complexities of that lived experience. This brings us to analysis, the third aspect identified by Pearson, and it is with this thesis, that I shall seek to appropriately “describe, document and ultimately legitimise performance practices”.<sup>54</sup> These include performances as protests, performances of gender, social performance, some theatrical plays, parades and festival, the oral history interview as performance (both in terms of interviewer and interviewee) and, in Chapter Six, shall consider the exhibition, informed by the formation of the Plymouth LGBT Archive, as being a negotiated performance of pride.

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<sup>50</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>51</sup> *Ibid.*, p. xiv

<sup>52</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>53</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>54</sup> *Ibid.*

## Sex and the City

Since the 1980s, the city as an entity has become an area of significant academic interrogation and study. Initially, this consideration encompassed ideas of economics, geography and politics but in the last twenty years the discourse surrounding the city has been transformed until:

The culture of the contemporary city is not just the subject of representations constituted through different categories of knowledge (the humanities as well as the social sciences) and different disciplines (comparative literature, as well as sociology), it is also addressed by different genders, ethnicities, ideologies, races, classes, sexual orientations, nationalities, theoretical differences in every shape and form.<sup>55</sup>

In this way, we can see how the representation and perception of the city is now less defined by its geographical or economic position and instead ties directly into the performances, representations and narratives being formed by its population. Individual understanding and sense of place shape the environment around them and vice versa. Plymouth has also undergone a more tangible shift during this time, moving from a city defined by its links to the navy and the dockyard, into a city much more defined economically by its university. This social and economic shift has also created a city which is home to a more diverse population.

Hubbard defines cities as “sites where disconnected people, perhaps from different cultural and geographical backgrounds, are drawn into sexual relationships bound by the rules of attraction”.<sup>56</sup> He acknowledges that these encounters move from a normal degree of sociality into the realm the “socio-erotic”. As evidenced in this thesis, there is also often an expectation that “alternative” rules of attraction will require them to connect together as a community to stand apart from “the heterosexual matrix””. The latter refers to a situation in which heterosexuality is presented and perceived as the norm and so space becomes inscribed as being “inherently heterosexual . . . to the extent that heterosexual space no longer appears to be sexualized space.”<sup>57</sup> As a result, the majority of public spaces become places where it is regarded as inappropriate to perform aspects of LGB and T identities.

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<sup>55</sup> A. King. *Re-Presenting the City*. (London, Macmillan, 1996), p.2

<sup>56</sup> P. Hubbard. *Cities and Sexualities*. (New York: Routledge, 2012), p.xii.

<sup>57</sup> *Ibid*.

In urban theory, the city provides a crucial staging for analysis and potentially social change. By considering the city of Plymouth as a whole, and also specific locations which have meaning for its LGB and T inhabitants as a stage for them to perform, then we can see how the city becomes a place where “social differences are imposed and adopted, resisted and celebrated; they are sources of constraint and platforms for creativity”<sup>58</sup> and in this way they provide the potential to consider how the performances in question have been affected by taking place in this location.

The city can also be regarded as providing spectators or audiences for performances of LGB and T identity, including a mainstream audience comprising the population of the city at large and also a complicit audience existing within the LGBT subcultures which have existed at various stages since the 1950s. In Michael Warner’s reinterpretation of the concept of “publics”, he claims that “much of the texture of modern social life lies in the invisible presence of publics that flit around us”.<sup>59</sup> His analysis is particularly helpful in identifying and categorising potential spectators for the reception of the queer performances under consideration (and will be discussed again, more fully, in chapter two). When considering a queer subculture he suggests that performance can also be interpreted by counterpublics “who are defined by their tension with a larger public”<sup>60</sup> and are performatively constituted as a response. This is not necessarily to say that these counterpublics are made up of participants of the subculture in question. Instead, it can be any group whose gaze upon the queer performance is askew from the normative prevailing discourses. In this, he echoes Foucault with his identification of differing views of the world looked in a power struggle to be accepted as valid and true. The history of the city of Plymouth has created, and is created by, its own public and counterpublics; queer performances which have occurred within the city will have been negotiated in relation to these potential spectators.

Consideration of Plymouth as a specific place makes it possible to explore “representations constituted through different categories of knowledge and different disciplines”.<sup>61</sup> According to urban theorist, John Rennie Short, the city is a place where “social differences are imposed and adopted, resisted and celebrated; they are sources of constraint and platforms for creativity”.<sup>62</sup> This project considers how individual

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<sup>58</sup> J. Rennie Short. *Urban Theory: A Critical Assessment*. (London: Palgrave, 2006), p.9.

<sup>59</sup> M. Warner. *Publics and Counterpublics*. (New York: Zone Books, 2005), p.7.

<sup>60</sup> *Ibid.* p.56.

<sup>61</sup> A. King. *Re-Presenting the City*. (London, Macmillan, 1996), p.2.

<sup>62</sup> Rennie Short. *Urban Theory: A Critical Assessment*, p.9.

performances of LGB or T identity intersect with the dominant representations of sexuality and gender, which have been produced and maintained by the city's mainstream population.

Hubbard acknowledges that encounters move from what he regards as a "normal" degree of sociality into the realm of the socio-erotic. According to Judith Butler, because heterosexuality is presented and perceived as the norm, space becomes inscribed as being "inherently heterosexual . . . to the extent that heterosexual space no longer appears to be sexualized space".<sup>63</sup> As a result, it had been regarded as inappropriate, until recently, to perform aspects of LGBT identity in public space.

This study identifies and considers the places in Plymouth's history that have been claimed and reinterpreted as havens for differing forms of 'alternative' performance, particularly those venues which, for various reasons, have come to be accepted as safe places to accommodate sexual differences and their public display. Historically these have included places adopted for sex such as public toilets and other areas associated with "cruising", where gay men met with a view to sexual activities and also venues associated with the city's night time economy which were regarded as appropriate for similar encounters. This was initially often due to the sensibilities and inclinations of the owner, or the staff, although the changes in attitudes and legislation have come to reinterpret these venues' place within the city's culture and economy.

## Research Practices

As discussed in this introduction, the practices that have led to the production of this thesis include the oral history interview and my involvement in the curation of the museum exhibition. The latter was a means of sharing the multiple narratives uncovered and also testing them with an audience that included both members of the LGB and T communities as well as a wider audience who take interest in the history of the city of Plymouth. Up until this time, the very limited number of public exhibitions displaying an LGBT narrative had done so on a national or international scale, so the "Pride in Our Past" exhibition provided an

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<sup>63</sup> *Ibid.*

opportunity to shape and share a contextualised narrative that was as much about Plymouth as it was about pride.

The thesis itself also provides both the opportunity and method of reflecting on the multiple narratives which have been shared through the archive and exhibition and provides the opportunity to construct a meaningful account of LGBT life in Plymouth over the latter half of the 20<sup>th</sup> century and beyond. It also provides the opportunity to compare those experiences with the national and international LGBT experience (which tends to be assumed to fully acknowledge the experience of members of these communities despite their location). The writing of this thesis has also enabled a consideration of how far these narratives were able to create a representation of LGB or T experience in Plymouth and how that representation, in the form of an exhibition, was interpreted and received by its various audiences.

## Thesis Structure

Chapter One defines the methodology employed throughout the study in both the collection of the oral history interviews and in their analysis. It discusses more fully how performance paradigms are used as a methodological lens through which to consider this material and the means of data collection and frames of analysis which will be employed.

Chapter Two explores the underground subculture which Plymouth's gay community maintained throughout the 1950s and into the 1960s. It considers those spaces which were claimed and interpreted as havens for non-heteronormative performances of sexual identity, particularly those places which, for various reasons, came to be accepted as safe sites to accommodate sexual and gender differences.

Chapter Three plots the historical development of the performance of LGBT pride nationally and internationally. It examines the impact of specific performances of gay pride which were witnessed by large scale publics, such as the Stonewall riots in the US, through to performances as protest employed by groups such as Outrage! in the United Kingdom. The chapter then considers their impact on discourses of LGBT history and how far these performances were interpreted by the Plymouth LGB and T communities.



Chapter Four draws upon the work of Foucault in his consideration of disciplinary power and disciplinary technology to make certain sexualities and their performance illegitimate. The chapter considers how pride can be policed and its relationship to legislation, particularly the decriminalisation of male same sex sexual encounters in the UK and its impact on the practice of cruising. The implementation of Section 28 of the Local Government Act and its impact of the performance of LGBT identity is also considered. Both changes in the law were designed to restrict representation of gay culture but often unexpected responses occurred which ran contrary to expectations.

Chapter Five examines stigma in the city with particular attention to the stigma associated with the HIV/AIDS epidemic. The chapter considers places which seemed to exist in opposition to this stigma and how far those who inhabited these spaces challenged, or interpreted, the dominant discourses of the time. Further consideration is also given to the practice of cruising and a homophobic assault which took place in Plymouth in the mid-1990s and, in particular, its impact on the organisation and representation of the local LGBT communities in the aftermath.

Chapter Six explores the “Pride in Our Past” exhibition in 2012, as a public performance of pride in the city, as well as other methods by which the archive materials have been employed in the signification of pride since that time. It identifies significant recent discourses about the presentation of LGBT history and considers how far the exhibition adhered to or challenged these notions as a performance of Plymouth LGBT pride by considering participation, curation and feedback. In terms of the PhD project as a whole, the exhibition was actually the first aspect to take place chronologically. However, its positioning in the thesis reflects its purpose and its place in the city’s LGBT timeline, as well as the way it draws together many of the narratives shared and themes arising during the course of this investigation. This final chapter enables an analysis of the ways in which different forms of LGBT performance can impact upon and inform one another.

# Chapter One: Research Methodology

Pride, as a concept in LGBT culture, has often been linked to a political position that lesbian, gay, bisexual and transgendered individuals should be proud of their orientation or gender role rather than embracing the stigma that has traditionally been attached to this type of ‘difference’. This study explores notions of “pride”, in direct relation to Plymouth LGBT communities, tests how far this concept has had relevance for their lived experience, the extent to which it has been adopted, interpreted and performed in the city of Plymouth and how this has changed over the last half of the 20<sup>th</sup> century.

As outlined in the introduction, this PhD project is the result of a collaborative partnership between the University of Plymouth, the Plymouth and West Devon Record Office and the Plymouth Pride Forum. In its first year it ran alongside the Heritage Lottery Funded ‘Pride in Our Past’ project, which created both a community archive of LGBT experience in Plymouth and a specific accession that has become part of the city’s formal archives, and then displayed some of this material during a nine week exhibition at the city museum and art gallery. These activities are also at the heart of the project’s research methodology in terms of knowledge generation.

This first part of this chapter discusses my principal means of data collection - that is, archival research and ethnographic engagement principally through the practice of oral history. The material generated will then be interrogated by considering the materials as performances, in relation to pride as a concept, and by the application of performance theories as a means of analysis.

## Part I: Methods of Data Collection

### Archival Research

An archive has been defined by Jacques Derrida as a system that is:

Created as much by state organizations and institutions as by individuals and groups, the archive, as distinct from a collection or a library, constitutes a

repository or ordered system of documents and records, both verbal and visual, that is the foundation from which history is written.<sup>64</sup>

It is possible to detect multiple implications from within this relatively straightforward explanation. Derrida takes this definition back to its origins, the ancient Greek word *arkheion*, which referred to the domicile of the superior magistrates of that culture who commanded and “held and signified political power [and] were considered to possess the right to make or to represent the law.”<sup>65</sup> Within these dwellings documents were held which in effect were used to “speak the law: they recall the law and call on or impose the law”.<sup>66</sup> In this way, a discourse was formed around the inherent “rightness” of the archive and it has come to be seen as the most valid system for preserving acceptable history. It is only in more recent years that archives held by individuals and non-judicial organisations have come to be seen as having validity. According to Derrida “what is no longer archived in the same way is no longer lived in the same way”,<sup>67</sup> so with changes in technology and attitudes, the concept of the archive and indeed history as a discipline is being caused to reshape itself. I experienced a degree of this first hand, when I attended a number of Plymouth City Council history “open days” to discuss the inclusion of the LGBT experience in the historical record. Individuals told me they were surprised at the inclusion of the Pride in Our Past project at such events and seemed uncertain of the value of this type of history. This demonstrates the strength of feeling surrounding what is suitable for inclusion in “the archive”.

While other LGBT archives had previously existed within the United Kingdom at the onset of this project they had tended to be located in the larger cities or those more associated with the LGBT experience, such as London or Brighton. These archives also tended to be specific LGBT archives such as LAGA (the Lesbian and Gay Newsmedia Archive based in London) or community archives which operate independently of their home city’s records. As a result, most of the materials held relate to more national LGBT concerns and the community archives often include national periodicals, films and books rather than explicitly exploring LGBT life in the city in question.

In addition to supplementing PWDRO’s archive with specific oral histories and obtainable documentation and memorabilia, the archivists employed there suggested that members of the LGB and T communities may be better placed to uncover stories which may

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<sup>64</sup> C. Merewether. *The Archive*. (London: Whitechapel, 2006), p.10.

<sup>65</sup> J. Derrida. *Archive Fever: A Freudian Impression*. (London & Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1995), p.2.

<sup>66</sup> *Ibid*.

<sup>67</sup> *Ibid*, p.19.

contribute to LGBT history, even if they had not be accessioned in that manner previously. This provoked an endeavour to access materials which were already part of the collections but which might have unconsidered connections to the LGBT history of the city. Prior to this investigation, no records were explicitly catalogued in that archive under the search terms of lesbian, gay, bisexual or transgendered but it was possible some stories had been archived under different parameters.

In this archival sift of materials, it became possible to find records of deviations from hegemonic notions of accepted lifestyles, however, these were often categorised in terms of criminality or mental illness. The “Disorderly Houses Act” of 1751 was a law implemented to target and prosecute taverns, cafes and clubs which were seen as supporting individuals who were acting in inappropriate ways and so was used to target prostitutes and homosexuals who frequented these places. The frequency of prosecutions against the individual John Blake and the terminology used in describing his “disorderly house” within records of the Plymouth Magistrates’ Court for the period 1875 to 1905<sup>68</sup> would indicate that homosexual activities took place in his tavern but such behaviour was often considered too deviant to record. An exception to this can be found in the Volume One of *The Justice of the Peace and Parish Officer*, a guide by Richard and John Burn, dated 1797 and presently held at the Record Office, which defines the practice of buggery as:

A detestable and abominable sin, amongst Christians not to be named, committed with carnal knowledge, against the ordinance of the Creator, and order of nature, by mankind with mankind.<sup>69</sup>

This sense of the act being too terrible to be named by Christians endured, along with a connection between a gay lifestyle and prostitution; many of the interviews for this project referred to links between the gay scene of the 1950s and 60s and the sex workers of that time. Newspaper archives contain accounts of men “soliciting” for purposes normally only defined as being immoral and many of these offences brought sentences that involved hard labour.

One example, which was concealed in the early 1930s but has become more well known in recent years, involved Robert Gould Shaw III, the eldest son (from her first marriage) of one of Plymouth’s best known historical figures, Lady Nancy Astor, who was the first woman to take a seat in parliament. Shaw is reported as being imprisoned for six

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<sup>68</sup> *Plymouth Magistrates Court Record of Summary Convictions*. (Plymouth and West Devon Record Office, 1875 to 1905, Accession number PCC/1540)

<sup>69</sup> *The Justice of the Peace and Parish Officer*. (Plymouth and West Devon Record Office, 1797, Accession number PCC/3708/120)

months in 1931 after being caught in a park in the city carrying out a 'homosexual act'.<sup>70</sup> Family connections to *The Times* and *The Observer* newspapers kept the story from the newspapers. These same links caused *The Observer* to become one of the main intellectual forces behind a move to decriminalise homosexuality, and Lord Astor personally became the main financial backer of the Homosexual Law Reform Association.<sup>71</sup>

The *Western Morning News* archives are home to an exception that seems to prove the general rule: a very positive story reported in the *Evening Herald* newspaper just over a decade later, when a thirty-year-old British athletic champion, Mary Weston of Plymouth, transitioned from female to male and became Mark Weston. The story was noticed across the country and appears in some national newspapers, including the *News of the World*, on May 31<sup>st</sup> 1936. What is particularly significant is the supportive manner in which the story is presented in the press. For instance, Mr L.R. Broster, the Harley Street surgeon who treated him, was quoted as saying, “Mark Weston, who has always been brought up as a female, is male and should continue to live as such”.<sup>72</sup> Subsequent reports in newspapers over the next few months saw Mark Weston take on a degree of local celebrity in Plymouth, attending various events and openings. The paper also reports him marrying a childhood friend in his new role as a man. Much is made of his offer to return his gold medals as they were won while he was not “in his true element”<sup>73</sup> and there seems to have been wide acceptance for his change in gender role. Much of this material would become particularly useful in curating the subsequent exhibition as discussed in Chapter Six.

Also, during the initial months of this study, I visited the LGBT community archive in Brighton known as *Ourstory*, which was a large scale resource but contained mostly national materials, such as an almost complete run of *Gay Times* magazine. They advised me they did have some oral history interviews but mostly from younger gay men. Apparently they had struggled to find older LGB and T people who had specific local knowledge going back through the decades and they believed this was due to a more transient population.

I also dealt with representatives from the LAGNA to access materials they held nationally which had impacted on Plymouth. Again, it became clear that much of their material concentrated on LGB or T experience on a national level. Later, during the course of

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<sup>70</sup> P. Higgins. *Heterosexual Dictatorship*. (London, Fourth Estate, 1996), p.147.

<sup>71</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>72</sup> *Evening Herald*, Plymouth, 28<sup>th</sup> May 1936.

<sup>73</sup> *Ibid.*

the *Pride in Our Past* exhibition, I came into contact with a Bristol based LGBT archive *Out Stories* who presented an exhibition of their own, in 2013, at the MShed museum, and came to use *Pride in Our Past* as their inspiration. Due to the limited nature of LGB and T archival material much of my archival research therefore was centred around Plymouth as a city with the extensive records of PWDRO and also, in particular, two newspaper archives relating to the *Plymouth Herald* and the *Western Morning News* (mentioned above) which extended back to the 1930s and could provide an ongoing account of the city of Plymouth throughout the time of my study.

My initial findings, therefore, further indicated the absence of LGB and T experience in local archives but also the very limited representation of local experience in LGBT archives and it was confirmed that archival research alone would be insufficient to capture the histories of local LGB or T people in Plymouth. Instead more of an ethnographic, multi modal methodology would be necessary to directly intervene with the capturing and archiving of these recollections through engagement with the community and interviewing.

## Oral History

Ethnographic research normally encompasses interviewing and for this project I have employed a large number of oral history interviews. This PhD project is based on over thirty five interviews included in PWDRO's LGBT archive, of which thirteen were completed by myself, with the remainder undertaken by the project's postdoctoral Research Assistant (see Introduction to thesis) and other volunteers of the *Pride in Our Past* project. Each interview was carried out with a view to obtain the recollections of an individual often based around a particular event, place or time around Plymouth's past. Many of the individuals came forward with a view to supporting the exhibition, which occurred during the twelve-month project, wishing to see aspects of their history included in that public display.

Oral history, as an historical method of enquiry, grew in use during the second half of the twentieth century as an "effort to recover the histories of groups previously overlooked or excluded from mainstream historiography".<sup>74</sup> This makes it a particularly suitable methodology for redressing the lack of LGBT experience currently held in traditional

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<sup>74</sup> J. Boswell. 'Revolutions, Universals, and Sexual Categories' in M.B. Duberman, M. Vicinus & G. Chauncey Jr. (Eds) *Hidden from History: Reclaiming the Gay & Lesbian Past*. (Ontario: New American Library, 1989), p.17.

archives. Paradoxically, oral history has the distinction of being a relatively recent method in history as a discipline, while also being regarded by many as being “as old as history itself. It was the *first* kind of history”.<sup>75</sup>

An individual’s lived experience can be accessed by encouraging him or her to talk about a specific time, situation, issue or circumstance from his or her life experience. This exchange is recorded, transcribed and used to become part of the historical record and consequently can be subjected to further analysis. While researchers in the field have come to realise there is no prescribed way in which to conduct an oral history interview, “few oral historians are forced to submit their work to public criticism . . . Oral historians are still prone to rush out and ask how it happened without spending the arduous months ploughing through related written materials.”<sup>76</sup> This is an oversight on their part because, as noted earlier, in addition to value of the materials held in an archive often the omissions can be just as informative of attitudes of the time under consideration. The need for flexibility in approach is required as each encounter between two people will always be different, and often the exact nature of the material sought will vary depending on the research aims. The interviewer must find the most effective way to make the subject both comfortable in the process and willing to talk about the issues of interest.<sup>77</sup> Often it is the most significant times in a person’s life that are most readily attached to higher emotion and so, if the interviewer does not feel prepared or comfortable asking questions around such times, then final results may be partial, although the interviewer’s approach might generate other material that would otherwise have been overlooked. My position as a member of one of the communities I was investigating often enabled me to find a common ground around areas of sexuality that might have felt inappropriate for a researcher less connected to the local community. Indeed, it should always be remembered that the oral history process occurs through human interaction and so many of the limitations and failings that can occur in regular, day-to-day communications between people can be levied against this research method.

The case has been made that oral history should be considered as a “genre of discourse which orality and writing have developed jointly in order to speak to each other about the

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<sup>75</sup> P. Thompson. *The Voice of the Past Third Edition* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2009), p.25.

<sup>76</sup> R.J.Grele. ‘Movement without Aim: Methodological and Theoretical problems in Oral History’ in R. Perks & A. Thomson. (Eds) *The Oral History Reader*. (London & New York: Routledge, 1998), p.40.

<sup>77</sup> This process also requires a commitment on the part of the interviewer to do no harm and if the interview causes a subject to revisit a painful memory then there should be guidelines which the researcher adheres to (such as University of Plymouth’s *Research Ethics: A Policy for Staff and Research Students*) and a method of signposting to support.

past,” and three distinct modes of investigation have been identified.<sup>78</sup> Firstly, there is a reminiscence and community model where the researcher has engaged a process of recording voices and stories for the “sole purpose of recovery and to place them onto the historical record”.<sup>79</sup> In this case, the material provided is considered of use purely in relation to its own capture. It is perceived as nothing more than a reflection of the interviewee’s recollections of a time in their own lives and so achieves its own form of validity, whilst also being subject to all the shortcomings and criticisms normally levelled against the products of memory and reminiscence, such as bias and incorrect recollection. This type of investigation was the driving force behind the Pride in Our Past project and provided the motivation for many of the volunteers from the community to work as oral historians in an attempt to add to the historical record.

The second mode of investigation is concerned with historical discourse, in which interviews are collected with the specific notion of proving or disproving an argument. In this way, the researcher may already have a hypothesis or notion that he or she is seeking to analyse and either support or disprove, as with ethnographic research. In this scenario, the oral history will be conducted around a very specific question and interviewee’s recollections will serve to support or oppose the viewpoint being investigated. Interviews will normally be much more specifically structured around certain topics and less driven by the sensibilities of the interviewee in terms of subject matter, which he or she wishes to discuss. This tended to occur with the interviews for this archive as the only initial remit for the interviewer was to learn something of the interviewee’s life as an LGB or T individual. Initially conversations, prior to the formal interview would, normally indicate some interesting points to cover but as long as the interview dealt with this aspect of their identity it could move into many different aspects.

The third model is a theoretical one. In this instance the oral histories are intended as a source of materials upon which can be applied an analytical model. In working with this material the historian “combines theoretical or interpretive insight with the evidential”.<sup>80</sup> While each method can yield material that is useful for the formation of the LGBT accession of the city’s archive it is this third method that will be most useful to contribute to this thesis

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<sup>78</sup> A. Portelli, ‘Oral History as Genre’. M. Chamberlain & P. Thompson. (Ed) *Narrative and Genre: Contexts and Types of Communication*. (London: Transaction, 2004), p.23.

<sup>79</sup> L. Abrams. *Oral History Theory*. (London & New York: Routledge, 2010), p.15.

<sup>80</sup> *Ibid.*



where interviews, in all their various forms, are interrogated in relation to performance and other forms of ethnographic engagement which will be discussed later in this chapter.

The forth theoretical, model for oral history allows for the possibility of interviewer having his or her subject matter of interest. The interviewee can offer recollections and memories that he or she deems relevant and the material is then scrutinized, in relation to a theoretical framework to reveal certain moments in time and their relation to the world. Even with those interviews that were not carried out by myself, there was the opportunity to analyse the recordings and transcriptions with a view to their performance elements.

Memories of past experiences are rarely recalled in a linear manner. It should therefore be no surprise that an interviewee's memory for a "hard fact and chronological sequence"<sup>81</sup> is not something that can be taken as granted or even expected. Instead, things that are of significance to them, in the recollections of their lives, will often be clearer and therefore more easily and readily relayed to the interviewer. If the topic of enquiry is not something which they consider especially relevant, then they may struggle to recall details in the interview. The interviewer must also always remain mindful of the subject's credibility as a witness. Were they actually at a scene or event that they are discussing or have they come to believe some information they were told is now a memory of their own? Memories of single events which occur in a person's life or around personal circumstances at the times of national events are often stronger. As an example, most people around the world who then had access to the media can recall what they were doing on 11 September 2001 when the World Trade Centre was attacked in New York. For many, the events of that day would simply be part of their day to day existence, such as another day in work or dealing with household matters, but most people now can recall where they were and what they were doing when they first saw the media reports on that day.

Memories can also be subject to nostalgia, in that individuals seek to view their past in a positive light: "dissatisfaction with present conditions makes the past look far better; and people's very survival can convince them that the hard times were not so bad after all".<sup>82</sup> When representing your own life to an audience, you often desire that the account, and the choices made within it, gain approval from the listener. As a result, the temptation is there to

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<sup>81</sup> A. Seldon and J. Pappworth. *By Word of Mouth: Elite Oral History* (London and New York: Methuen, 1983), p.17.

<sup>82</sup> D. A. Ritchie. *Doing Oral History*. (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2003), p.34.

embellish to a degree and possibly even provide a narrative that the interviewee anticipates will be well received by an audience and will present him or her in a favourable light.

As attitudes, public opinion and sometimes even legislation change around certain issues it may cause the individual to mis-remember his or her own actions or even to adapt them in an interview situation, so that they fit more comfortably with current sensibilities. For example, an interviewee may feel self-conscious about an action or event that, with hindsight, may be considered inappropriate or even illegal now or alternatively might have been illegal at the time but is not so in the present. One interviewee asked me to stop recording while he considered whether to talk about a relationship he had as a sixteen year old in the 1980s with a forty year old man. Considered illegal at the time but not so at the time of the interview (2012), this caused the subject to re-evaluate his experience and his narrative in light of changes in law. The interview process is not a standard conversation as the interviewee is being asked specific questions relating to these memories and so will consider why he or she is being asked these questions and potentially try to establish what information the interviewer is looking for. A very human reaction then, based upon the relationship being built up with the historian, is to tailor the answers to support the perceived desired narrative.

In this way, the interviewer's participation in the process cannot be ignored and so can also be called into question. He or she could be accused of bias in terms of the selection of who to interview and then towards the interviewee themselves and with the questions being asked. Historians often talk of the "need to establish a 'right relationship' with the subject – where they gain the interviewee's trust but where they also establish their position as detached critics".<sup>83</sup> A "right relationship" is very difficult to define in this context, however, since too close a relationship to the subject can result in bias on both sides, while too formal a relationship may reduce the willingness for the subject to share and may even become confrontational or hostile.

All these factors need to be considered when interpreting interviews but these tensions can in themselves, if analysed in an appropriate manner, provide insights: "when talking about their lives, people lie sometimes, forget a lot, exaggerate, become confused, and get things wrong. Yet they are revealing truths".<sup>84</sup> This does not necessarily refer to "truths" in the usually understood sense of being all-encompassing and universally agreed, but instead

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<sup>83</sup> Seldon and Pappworth. *By Word of Mouth: Elite Oral History*, p.29.

<sup>84</sup> Personal Narratives Group. "Truths in Personal Narratives". (Ed) *Interpreting Women's Lives: Feminist Theory and Personal Narratives*. (Indiana: Indiana University Press, 1989), pp.261-264.

that all actions and encounters contain their own subjective reality and value when considered in relation to the individual.

Lynn Abrams notes this process “permits the purposeful intervention of historians in collecting the data needed to illuminate particular areas about which too little information has survived from other sources”,<sup>85</sup> and she calls for the need to move away from the idea of an indisputable truth to history, which must be proven, in the same way as Alistair Thomson, who argues that historians must no longer claim that:

The fact that we compose our memories invalidates the use of memory by historians. That might be true for oral historians who have sought to use memory as a literal source of what happened in the past. But if we are also interested, as we must be, in the ways in which the past is resonant in our lives today, the oral testimony is essential evidence for analysis of the interactions between past and present.<sup>86</sup>

Developing this further, Abrams identifies that, in recent years, oral historians have tended to “speak increasingly of narrators instead of interviewees and respondents, and of narratives instead of answers or responses.”<sup>87</sup>

A narrative therefore becomes something that is created by the encounter between the interviewee and interviewer and, while may not necessarily provide historical ‘fact’, it forms “an ordered account created out of disordered material or experience”<sup>88</sup> and so can provide insight into how people use storytelling to make sense of the world. By considering the performance of the oral history narrative we are able:

To think about how the story works in the present because the performance is usually before our eyes. The physical act of telling the story involving the combination of voice and gesture makes the performance something to be noticed and it gives the researcher clues on how to read or interpret the story being told.<sup>89</sup>

Abrams calls for the need to view the interview process as more of a collaborative endeavour and further suggests that researchers should consider the process as a performance in its own right with the interviewee in the role of performer and the interviewer as the spectator. When we consider the actual interview itself, as an encounter happening in time and space, we must acknowledge that the interviewee will “rarely speak in a conversational mode because they

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<sup>85</sup> T. Lummis. *Listening to History*. (London: Hutchinson, 1987), p.17.

<sup>86</sup> A. Thomson. ‘Anzac Memories: Putting Popular Memory Theory into Practice in Australia’. R. Perks & A. Thomson, (Ed) *The Oral History Reader*. (London & New York: Routledge, 1998), p.301.

<sup>87</sup> Abrams. *Oral History Theory*, p.106.

<sup>88</sup> *Ibid*.

<sup>89</sup> *Ibid*, p.140.

are responding to questions put to them and usually recognise that ‘a bit extra’ is needed and modify their reflections accordingly. They sense that they are on a stage and performing for the interviewer and his or her sound recorder”.<sup>90</sup> The interviewer can do a great deal to combat this effect and to make the subject feel comfortable and relax with the process, but it is unlikely that they will ever be able to talk in an entirely conversational manner, because there are always audiences to be considered beyond the interviewer. As Thomson notes, “there are also imagined audiences outside the recording room whose presence at the back of the narrator’s mind affects the story”.<sup>91</sup> Consequently Abrams uses performance as a metaphor for considering the encounter but this can be taken further through a more disciplinary specific understanding of performance which will be explained further, later in this chapter.

Abrams defines oral history as a “discipline with undisciplined tendencies”,<sup>92</sup> which would fit very neatly with the vast array of discourses and practices that are included under the banner of performance. However, it is important to remain mindful that the term oral history can also refer to the data itself which can be identified and considered in four different forms: the original oral interview, the recorded version of the interview, the written transcription and the interpretation of the interview material. History’s predilection for the written form as being the most valid form of evidence tends to result in the transcription of the interview being viewed as the final outcome of the endeavour while consideration of the actual interview process itself or the recording of the interview tends to be very much secondary. It has been asserted “while oral historians are often at pains to detail the number of interviews conducted, the nature of those interviews (whether formal or informal, with a questionnaire or not and so on) much of what actually takes place in the interview goes unreported”.<sup>93</sup> In the shaping of the transcription, whether intentionally or not, the historian is again empowered to shape the historical discourse surrounding the interview. He or she interprets incorrect or misused words which emerge from stumbles, hesitations and inflections and chooses whether they have a place in the finished product and, if so, what their meaning is within that narrative. Often a wider audience will not return to the original interview, so a challenge is rarely made to the interviewer’s interpretation in transcription. In

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<sup>90</sup> *Ibid.*, p.132.

<sup>91</sup> A. Thomson. ‘Moving Stories, Women’s Lives: Sharing authority in Oral History’. J. Bornat (Ed) *Oral History* Volume 39: No 2 (London: Oral History Society, 2011), p.74.

<sup>92</sup> Abrams. *Oral History Theory*, p.32.

<sup>93</sup> *Ibid.*, p.9.

terms of discussing subjects that are still regarded as somewhat personal or sensitive, tone of voice and hesitations or pauses can be telling.

For the material being generated from the oral history process to have any real worth to the historian the interview practices must stand up to scrutiny in terms of their methodology, aims and implementation. In short, they must be explainable and open to interrogation by individuals who were not privy to the initial interview but who seek to make use of and engage with the product of that interview. At the same time, any attempt to eradicate the fact that oral history is an exchange of communication occurring between at least two people would be to ignore an aspect of its unique nature. The presence of an interviewer therefore shifts authority away from the traditional narrator and instead creates a “shared authority between the two”.<sup>94</sup> This shared authority may not even be verbalised but will have a bearing on the final interview.

As a result, the onus is placed firmly upon the interviewer to be aware of his or her own reasons for the interview, the material that he or she is looking to explore and also the sensibilities of both people in the room and how all of these factors can play into the interactions occurring between the two of them. The interviews carried out as part of the Pride in Our Past project seek to redress certain omissions of a group of people from traditional archives and create a means by which their life experiences could be performatively recreated for inclusion in the archive and so consequently interrogation, analysis and research.

## Ethnographic Research

Ethnographic research, in its broadest sense, relates to fieldwork that “focuses on the interactive (e.g., processes, activities, and acts) and interpretive (e.g., definitions, perspectives and meanings) aspects within a particular setting.”<sup>95</sup> As a result, ethnography becomes the “art and science of describing a group or culture”<sup>96</sup> through engagement with that group or culture. This provides the researcher with a means to understand the perspectives of others as

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<sup>94</sup> M.Frisch. *A Shared Authority: Essays on the Craft and Meaning of Oral and Public History*. (New York: University of New York Press, 1989), p.3.

<sup>95</sup> S.Grills. *Doing Ethnographic Research*. (London & New Delhi: Sage Publications, 1999), p.3.

<sup>96</sup> D.M.Fetterman. *Ethnography (2<sup>nd</sup> Edition)*. (London & New Delhi: Sage Publications, 1998), p.1.

“social objects (e.g., ideas, language, actions, symbols, physical objects and identities) lack any inherent meaning”<sup>97</sup> without the insight of the meanings which the subjects of the research attach to them.

Traditionally ethnography has revolved methodologically around the “duality of observed and observer,”<sup>98</sup> but increasingly this line has become blurred and advantages can be seen in the removal of an insider/outside dichotomy:

Ethnography is more often conducted by members of a culture, or related cultures, than by complete strangers. Moreover cultures are not in themselves homogenous, and never were. So who is a stranger or a member, an outsider or an insider, a knower or an ignoramus is all relative and much more blurred than conventional accounts might have us believe. The path between familiarity and strangeness; knowledge and ignorance; intimacy and distance is far from straightforward.<sup>99</sup>

For much of my engagement in this project, my ethnographic methods have been focused around the oral history interview and occasionally taking advantage of having a ‘community-insider knowledge’ in the process of these interviews, and their subsequent analysis. I position myself as gay man raised and living in Plymouth so I consider myself a member of Plymouth LGBT community that I am investigating. As a result, there is the possibility for me to adopt an autoethnographic approach and yet I am considering a wider community than just gay men and so I am an outsider in terms of the lesbian, bisexual or transsexual experience, in addition to discussing places, times and events of which I was not part. As a result, my sense of self as being located ‘within’ the research enquiry is immediately problematised but remains useful through reflective engagement that is mindful of the strengths and weaknesses inherent in my own subjectivity when engaging with all aspects of Plymouth’s LGBT community. Instead I have endeavoured to remain open and receptive to engagements with anybody with a connection to Plymouth’s LGB or T communities and have kept notes of significant comments and encounters that have taken place outside the formal interviews.

As with all research, an ethnographic study must begin with an underlying theory or model and also with a problem which that theory or model will seek to explain or perhaps disprove. For this study, the question surrounds how far pride, as a concept, has meaning for the LGB and T communities of Plymouth and what that meaning may be. An ethnographer’s epistemology should “embrace a multicultural perspective because it accepts multiple realities. People will act on their individual perceptions and those actions have real

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<sup>97</sup> Grills. *Doing Ethnographic Research*, p.4.

<sup>98</sup> A.Coffey. *The Ethnographic Self*. (London & New Delhi: Sage Publications, 1999), p.20.

<sup>99</sup> *Ibid*, p.22.

consequences”.<sup>100</sup> An individual or group’s sense of self is negotiated through interactions with others and so, by partaking in those interactions, the ethnographer becomes privy to and so achieves an understanding into the formation of that identity. It is suggested that it is “this dynamic of the social self that makes questions surrounding the presentation, management and negotiation of self ethnographically interesting.”<sup>101</sup> Questions can be asked and theories tested to enable a deeper understanding of the groups or individuals under consideration.

Fieldwork research then follows, based upon “an idealized blueprint or road map that helps the ethnographer conceptualize how each step will follow the one before to build knowledge and understanding.”<sup>102</sup> It involves observation and, normally, questioning that would otherwise be unavailable. The researcher undertakes work which “involves gaining access to the lived experiences of others – their routines, concerns, activities, perspectives, and relationships.”<sup>103</sup> Ethnographers then look for patterns in their data which can be considered a form of reliability, and so, “patterns are a form of ethnographic reliability. Ethnographers see patterns of thought and action repeat in various situations with various players. Looking for patterns is a form of analysis”.<sup>104</sup>

## Sample

Identifying disruptions in patterns can indicate challenges and reinterpretations of the hegemonic norms, and this required access to people who have lived lifestyles that might have been deemed to be “alternative”. In the months leading up to the exhibition, over thirty-five oral history interviews were completed, catalogued and deposited with PWDRO.

Many of the subjects of the first interviews were identified through direct work with the Plymouth Age Concern’s LGBT group. Gaining access to this group was key in gaining trust as a researcher as this project required an exploration of an aspect of their lives that, for many of them, had been their most closely guarded secret. I attended a number of their meetings before any of the members agreed to an interview and I was completely aware of the insider/outsider dichotomy described earlier. I presented myself to them as an ‘insider’ by

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<sup>100</sup> Fetterman. *Ethnography (2<sup>nd</sup> Edition)*, p.8.

<sup>101</sup> Grills. *Doing Ethnographic Research*, p.8.

<sup>102</sup> Fetterman. *Ethnography (2<sup>nd</sup> Edition)*, p.9.

<sup>103</sup> Grills. *Doing Ethnographic Research*, p10.

<sup>104</sup> Fetterman. *Ethnography (2<sup>nd</sup> Edition)*, p.96.

merit of being a homosexual male, but the age divide was a significant enough factor to provoke a degree of mistrust in my intentions. It took my attendance at a number of meetings before the group seemed to feel fully comfortable with my presence. It was only then that individuals agreed to engage with the project. Many of the subsequent interviewees then came forward as participants having achieved good “word of mouth” through these initial encounters.

This approach resulted in the availability, at the onset of writing this thesis, of an archive of materials which included thirty-seven interviews with twenty-four individuals.<sup>105</sup> Some of those people were subsequently re-interviewed with the aim of delving more deeply into subject matter. Of the sample fourteen participants were male and eleven were female. While this seems relatively well-balanced, it is important to note that while all the men interviewed defined themselves as gay, some of the women took part in the project because they had worked with the community or because they were the parent of an LGBT child.

The ages ranged from individuals from their twenties up to their mid-seventies, and the individuals were chosen based upon their willingness to participate, although some people were deliberately approached due to their involvement in particular events or incidents which seemed of significance based upon other interviews. One of the interviewees was a trans women who discussed aspects of her journey from one gender role to another. There were fewer voices of lesbians included in the archive, a common feature with projects of this nature but still a limitation of this study, along with an absence of interviewees who defined at the time as bisexual, although some interviewees spoke of past relationships with the opposite sex.

## Interview Protocols

The interviews took place in a variety of places, depending on the wishes of the interviewee. The majority of people either wanted to be interviewed within their own home, explaining that they would feel most comfortable there and that they were more likely to have memorabilia to hand if anything came up in conversation. Occasionally this meant a partner

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<sup>105</sup> Please refer to Appendix 1 for further information and a complete list of interviews and participants can be found in the Primary Sources section of the Bibliography.



may be in the room also but this happened very infrequently. The other option, which around a quarter of the respondents chose, was for the interview to take place in a neutral space, and so myself and Helen Phillips held interviews in rooms which we booked in Plymouth University and also in her office. Interviews in these offices took on a somewhat more serious air, but some interviewees told me they found this less intimidating than someone visiting their home. The location of the interview was always discussed and agreed in the preliminary conversations to make the interviewee feel as comfortable as possible.

The vast majority of interviews lasted between forty-five minutes to an hour and it was always possible to break during this time, although the need to do so happened very infrequently. On two occasions interviewees became upset, the first while relating to some troubles with the law in their earlier days and the second when recalling the homophobic murder of a friend. On both occasions, recording was stopped and we only continued in a manner in which the interviewee was comfortable. Very informal follow up contact occurred in most cases as the majority of those interviewed became involved in the ongoing work of Pride in Plymouth CIC, particularly around the continuation of the archive and also in the putting on of Pride events in the city. While re-performing painful situations in the interview setting could be upsetting, it was also possible to note that, by invoking subjects to which the interviewee seemed to attach feelings of pride, pride was often recreated again within the present. Individuals would share stories around former partners, sexual conquests, family, friends and moments in which they had chosen to ignore, stand up to or at least tried to ignore the traditional stigma which had been attached to their sexual or gender identity. Through posture, language and even levels of excitement in telling the tale it was possible to observe their social performance, both indicating the pride which they may or may not have felt at the time (due to social constraints); but also, with the benefit of hindsight, in a time where attitudes were changing, pride was being performatively produced in the telling and sharing of that story.

The semi-structured interviews began with an initial series of questions, which are listed in Appendix Three of this thesis. These served a dual purpose of both relaxing the interviewee before moving onto the more personal questions around sexual orientation and gender identity. The most significant question was always to enquire about the interviewee's coming out story. For the vast majority of LGB or T people, coming out as other than heterosexual or cisgender is a significant moment in their lives and, therefore, a strong memory. In particular, this memory related to an early performance of being LGBT and so

contains significant connotations in terms of associating that performance with either stigma or shame. I chose to not explicitly ask the interviewees about their relationship to the notion of pride, as I felt it more important for the individual to share those moments that they considered important and then, through analysis of both their use of language and their social performance in the interview situation, endeavour to ascertain what made them proud, both in the past and today.

The coming out story was particularly significant in creating a sense of common ground between myself and the interviewees. I was trained to undertake this project by the Plymouth and West Devon Record Office, based on guidance from Oral History Society. As a member of the community which I was researching, I was very aware of maintaining professional boundaries within the interview process. However, I found the more confident I became in that role the less I needed to maintain an air of separation. Much as in the way described by Abrams earlier in this chapter, a shared narrative was formed. This was principally authored by the interviewee and supported or scaffolded by my role in the interview process.

There are a number of aspects of LGBT oral histories that often do not apply to other communities. For example, by talking about a person in their recollections, an interviewee is often outing them. I was unprepared for how significant other people's stories would be in terms of my own sense of pride, however, and of my own perception of being part of a community. When I began this process, I considered myself to be a "mostly out" gay man but I did not associate anything resembling pride to that aspect of my identity. In asking individuals to share these stories, and be part of the process, I was implicitly offering a scenario in which they were exploring how far they were proud of their own histories and, through my part in the process, I grew to perceive my own history with an increased sense of pride. I found the majority of the people I spoke to, and the stories I was told, to be courageous and inspirational and consequently I gained a sense of pride both in my own narrative but also in a community which I now felt part of to a far greater degree.

### Practice-based Research

The process of being involved in the curation of the "Pride in Our Past" exhibition enabled me to engage in a form original practice based research in which I could formulate a

creative investigation to share and test the narratives which were being uncovered. Taking place in the latter part of my first year into this study, I was provided with a platform with which to share the archive findings, at that point in time, with two very specific audiences: the regular attendees of the museum who, it would seem reasonable to assume, would have an interest in Plymouth history, and also an LGBT audience who may or may not have that interest in heritage but would be interested to see their own heritage represented. This audience could be drilled down further into LGB or T individuals who had participated in the archive project and those who had not. Those who had not were, at this stage, given the opportunity to comment and input into how far the stories shared spoke of their own experience.

This process did lead to some tensions as museums are often considered a form of archive and so, as discussed by Derrida, are perceived in terms of being a display of the ‘correct’<sup>106</sup> form of history. Initially the exhibition was challenging for parts of the museum as an institution with pleas to remain mindful that they were a “family museum”. At the same time, there were some surprised comments from members of the LGBT community in discovering that “their” history was to be displayed in such an institution. The transformation of the Hurdle Gallery into a space presenting aspects of the history of Plymouth’s LGBT community enabled me to witness first hand public manifestations and performances of pride in members of this community which were supported by feedback forms that were included as part of the exhibition.

The exhibition provided a unique opportunity to view reaction to a public display of the various archive materials and I spent a great deal of time within the gallery carrying out tours and talks but also, often, just watching the reaction of people to the exhibit. I received a great deal of feedback in person, through the completion of feedback forms and even through social media. These responses and the process as a whole will be explored further in Chapter Six.

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<sup>106</sup> Derrida. *Archive Fever: A Freudian Impression*, p.2.

## Part II: Frames of Analysis

### Performance Studies

Performance is an epistemology in its own right and can be used in conjunction with other cultural theories and practices to provide “a way of knowing”<sup>107</sup> while considering, and indeed embracing, the fact that the subjects and situations under examination:

Do not occupy a single, “proper” place in knowledge; there is no such thing as the thing itself. Instead, objects are produced and maintained through a variety of socio-technical systems, overcoded by many discourses, and situated in numerous sites of practice.<sup>108</sup>

Considered in this manner, Performance Studies, as a disciplinary framework can allow for a synergy of theories, approaches and methodologies that are not normally brought together.

Diana Taylor states that:

Every performance enacts a theory, and every theory performs in the public sphere. Because of its interdisciplinary character, performance studies can bring disciplines that had previously been kept separate into direct contact with each other and their historical, intellectual and sociopolitical context.<sup>109</sup>

In terms of pride and LGB and T identities in Plymouth, therefore, performance theory can provide the opportunity to consider what is being signified by these communities in specific locations and what is being withheld in other environments. Schechner distinguishes between those events which are performance (“is” performance) and can be considered “as” performance. The notion of “as performance” can be applied to anything that fits our initial definition of an act of doing (see Introduction to thesis) while “is performance” is more defined by “historical and social context, convention, usage, and tradition”.<sup>110</sup> Different actions are therefore regarded as being performance in different cultures, societies and contexts based upon their cultural norms and accepted hegemonies.

Taylor discusses performance in terms of two distinct types of memory. The first is archival memory which relates to those physical artefacts which are most commonly regarded

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<sup>107</sup> Taylor. *The Archive and the Repertoire*, p.3.

<sup>108</sup> J. McKenzie. *Perform or Else*. (London & New York: Routledge, 2001), p.18.

<sup>109</sup> Taylor. *The Archive and the Repertoire*, p.24.

<sup>110</sup> Schechner. *Performance Studies: An Introduction*. 2<sup>nd</sup> Edition, p.38.

as acceptable sources to the historian: enduring papers and documentation which can withstand scrutiny and analysis. This form of memory crosses time and space and, she notes, “separates the source of ‘knowledge’ from the knower”.<sup>111</sup> In tandem with this concept of archival memory, however, she builds upon Schechner’s understanding of the repertoire by defining the repertoire as that knowledge which “enacts embodied knowledge: performances, gestures, orality, movement, dance, singing – in short all, all those acts usually thought of as ephemeral, nonreproducible knowledge”.<sup>112</sup> As discussed previously, the archive is taken as containing acceptable knowledge in an unconsidered way and Taylor here champions the need for alternative forms of knowledge to be given equal weight when considering the historical discourse.

It is at the intersection and interaction between these two forms of memory that the oral history interview sits; that point where the historian is endeavouring to capture aspects of the repertoire for inclusion in the more traditional archive. The use of performance as a tool for analysis of these interviews and other archival and ethnographic findings provides the opportunity to consider how performance is “a system of learning, storing and transmitting knowledge”<sup>113</sup> in the LGBT communities of Plymouth. For much of the period under consideration, this lifestyle was regarded as taboo and, for gay men at the onset, illegal. As a result, traditional archival materials had little place in these communities. Diaries could fall into the wrong hands and letters could become a means of blackmail. Communal identity was forged in the moment and through interaction in those places considered safe to do so. As a result, much of the history of this community can only be found within the repertoire of those who were and are a part of the communities under investigation. Performance Studies therefore provides a means to “take seriously the repertoire of embodied practices as an important system of knowing and transmitting knowledge”<sup>114</sup> and these embodied practices do not just encompass formal training in aesthetic skills and techniques but also extend out to encompass areas such as storytelling and recollection.

Diana Taylor’s conceptualisation of the repertoire as being an enactment of embodied memory which “keeps and transforms choreographies of meaning”<sup>115</sup> requires a consideration of how these meanings, in relation to space, subjectivity and embodied

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<sup>111</sup> Taylor. *The Archive and the Repertoire*, p.19.

<sup>112</sup> *Ibid*, p.20.

<sup>113</sup> *Ibid*, p.16

<sup>114</sup> *Ibid*, p.26.

<sup>115</sup> *Ibid*, p.20.

memory, come to be interpreted and performed. If dominant ideas are formed through discourses being transmitted across the discursive field and counter performances are being made in opposition then the individuals involved in lived encounters must situate any performance in terms of their perception of the world around them. This kind of internalised stock of knowledge can be related to the work of Pierre Bourdieu and his concept of 'habitus' which he defines as being:

Dispositions acquired through experience, the variable from place to place and time to time. This 'feel for the game', as we call it, is what enables an infinite number of 'moves' to be made, adapted to the infinite number of possible situations which no rule, however complex, can foresee.<sup>116</sup>

Bourdieu explains that our practices and experiences provide us with both freedoms and also constraints during our interactions with others. These interactions are formed in relation to, and then interpreted through, our habitus which access the dispositions or common sense stocks of knowledge which are instilled in us during socialisation. Some information is taught but much arises solely from experience. In this way, much of what we take for granted is never consciously considered and instead we just see things as being "the way they are" with no consideration of any alternatives. We come to develop a second nature or a way of interacting with the social world which we have never deliberately chosen with a sense of agency. Our thoughtless actions and assumptions are normally consistent with our backgrounds and are produced routinely.

Bourdieu coined the term habitus to emphasise that "this 'creative', active, inventive capacity was not that of a transcendental subject in the idealist tradition, but that of an acting agent".<sup>117</sup> It can be argued therefore that it is our habitus which generates the normal practices that we follow and what we consider normal or acceptable behaviour is derived from our background and experience. Despite our ability to reason and respond to stimuli, our habitus remains a system of "durable, transposable dispositions".<sup>118</sup> While new experiences may cause us to make modifications to the manner in which we see the world our starting point often limits the scope for change.

When considering the individual's ability to reconcile themselves to an unfamiliar situation, Taylor suggests a move away from traditional texts and narratives and towards a consideration of scenarios. She relates these to their more traditional use in the theatre – that

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<sup>116</sup> P.Bourdieu. *In Other Words: Essays Towards a Reflexive Sociology*. (Cambridge: Polity Press, 1990), p.9.

<sup>117</sup> *Ibid*, p.13.

<sup>118</sup> P.Bourdieu. *The Logic of Practice*. (Chicago: Stanford University Press, 1992), p.53

is, “a sketch or outline of the plot of a play, given particulars of the scenes, situations etc”,<sup>119</sup> but explains that this framework of considering the factors that create performance allows for the analysis of social structures and behaviours by drawing from both the archive and repertoire. A scenario requires a location in which to occur and the performance requires a consideration of the “social construction of bodies in particular contexts.”<sup>120</sup> At this point it is possible to highlight any tensions or distances that exist between the sensibilities of the performer and the performance. While an individual’s habitus remains for the most part constant, scenarios are snapshots which can “adapt constantly to reigning conditions [and] refer to more specific repertoires of cultural imaginings”<sup>121</sup> while causing participants and witnesses to consider their relationship to the event under consideration. As a result, a scenario can be viewed and analysed as a “completed event framed in time and space and remembered, misremembered, interpreted and passionately revisited across a pre-existing discursive field”.<sup>122</sup>

## Knowledge, Power and Discourse

In analysing the discursive field across which performances are to be interpreted, I turn to the work of Michel Foucault. Foucault concerned himself with the “archaeology of knowledge” or “discourses as practices specified in the element of the archive”.<sup>123</sup> In this way he believed that the knowledge, which he sought to uncover, was given weight and made meaningful through the transmission of power occurring at differing stages in history. This process of being made meaningful, he argued, occurred through the exchange of discourses, which he identified as “ways of talking, thinking and representing a particular subject or topic. They produce meaningful truth or knowledge about that subject. This knowledge influences social practices and so has real consequences and effects”.<sup>124</sup> Each discourse could be seen to have formed its own particular knowledge which served a “regime of truth” from which to interpret the world at that time. Foucault suggested that:

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<sup>119</sup> Taylor. *The Archive and the Repertoire*, p.28.

<sup>120</sup> *Ibid.* p.29.

<sup>121</sup> *Ibid.* p.31.

<sup>122</sup> E. Diamond. *Performance & Cultural Politics*. (London & New York, 1996), p.1.

<sup>123</sup> M.Foucault. *The Archaeology of Knowledge*. (Oxon: Routledge, 1989), p.148.

<sup>124</sup> S. Hall & B. Geiben. *Formations of Modernity*. (London: Verso, 1992), p.295.

We must not imagine a world of discourse divided between accepted discourse and excluded discourse, or between the dominant discourse and the dominated one; but a multiplicity of discursive elements that can come into play in various strategies.<sup>125</sup>

Every aspect of an individual's positioning and interaction with a discursive field, therefore, can be considered as performance and is viewed and considered in relation and response to this multiplicity. It comes to be seen as events or scenarios, which have the potential to "predispose certain outcomes and yet allow for reversal, parody, and change".<sup>126</sup>

Judith Butler builds upon Foucault's work which concerned power and control but, by way of a contrast, "speaks of a life of possibilities outside of institutions . . . and, especially, public demonstration of identities that challenge hegemonic images and practices".<sup>127</sup> As was noted in the introduction, she developed her approach through a consideration and exploration of the concept of 'performativity', which she situated as being separate to performance. In her analysis, performativity or social performance relates to an individual's adherence or digression from social norms. When considering the performative, however, Butler offers that:

The subject is not determined by the rules through which it is generated because signification is not a founding act, but rather a regulated process of repetition that both conceals itself and enforces its rules precisely through the production of substantializing effects.<sup>128</sup>

Power, in the manner that was described by Foucault, can be found in prescribing identity but performativity provides a means to reject this determinism by acknowledging that "words, acts, gestures, and desire produce the effect of an internal core or substance [but] are all performative in the sense that the essence or identity that they otherwise purport to express are fabrications manufactured and sustained through corporeal signs and other discursive means".<sup>129</sup> In her analysis of gender, Butler says that a gender role "is only real to the extent that it is performed".<sup>130</sup> Instead gender is "not exactly what one 'is' nor is it precisely what one 'has'",<sup>131</sup> so consequently becomes the apparatus which by which the masculine and the

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<sup>125</sup> M. Foucault. *The History of Sexuality*. (London: Penguin, 1976), p.100.

<sup>126</sup> Taylor. *The Archive and the Repertoire*, p.31.

<sup>127</sup> A. McKinlay. 'Performativity and the politics of identity: Putting Butler to work', *Critical Perspectives on Accounting* Volume 21 (Amsterdam: Elsevier, 2009), p.234

<sup>128</sup> J. Butler. *Gender Trouble: Feminism and the Subversion of Identity*. (New York: Routledge, 1990), p.145.

<sup>129</sup> *Ibid*, p.362.

<sup>130</sup> J. Butler. 'Performative Acts and Gender Constitution'. *Theatre Journal* Volume 40: No 4 (Baltimore: John Hopkins University Press, 1998), p.52

<sup>131</sup> J. Butler. *Undoing Gender*. (New York & London: Routledge, 2004), p.42



feminine are drawn into an accepted binary matrix while, in truth, these roles are little more than:

An act that has been going on before one arrived on the scene. Hence, gender is an act which has been rehearsed, much as a script survives the particular actors who make use of it, but which requires individual actors in order to be actualized and reproduced as reality once again.<sup>132</sup>

Identity is enacted through repetition and normalization of roles (for example gender) and so is not an expression of any inward sense of identity but instead something familiar which is performatively constituted. This rejection of any internalised sense of self makes her, along with Foucault, major contributors to a movement of thinking that became known as Queer Theory.

## Queer Theory and Practice

Queer Theory as an academic discourse emerged in late 1980s growing out of lesbian and gay studies. It encourages the “problematization of sexual and gender categories, and of identities in general. Identities are always on uncertain ground, entailing displacement of identification and knowing”.<sup>133</sup> Queer Theory’s strength in the exploration of ideas is a willingness to cast aside what has previously been accepted as common sense and instead being able and willing to take a different analytical position rather than consider why an individual is lesbian, gay, bisexual or transgender, queer would consider what makes an individual heterosexual equally as open to interrogation. It revolves around the performative nature of individual identity and makes a deliberate choice to stimulate this performance of identity against social norms rather than criticising its ability to conform or fit in. So, instead of a methodical sense of enquiry in the normal sense, it can be argued that “what queer signals is an ontological challenge that displaces bourgeois notions of self as unique, abiding and continuous while substituting instead a concept of the self as performative, improvisational, discontinuous and processually constituted by repetitive and stylized acts”.<sup>134</sup>

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<sup>132</sup> J. Butler. ‘Performative Acts and Gender Constitution’. *Theatre Journal* Volume 40: No 4 (Baltimore: John Hopkins University Press, 1998), p.526.

<sup>133</sup> A. Stein & K. Plummer. “I Can’t Even Think Straight”: “Queer” Theory and the Missing Sexual Revolution in Sociology. S. Seidman. (Ed) *Queer Theory/Sociology* (Oxford: Blackwell, 1996), p.134.

<sup>134</sup> M. Meyer. *The Politics and Poetics of Camp*. (London & New York: Routledge, 1994), p.87.

Since the 1980s, “Queer” has been a term applied to various political movements and campaigns before its association with academic theory. An example of such a movement is ACT UP (AIDS Coalition To Release Power) movement, originating in New York, formed to bring about legislation and policies to contribute to battle against the disease. Similarly, in the United Kingdom, the Stonewall organisation was set up in 1989 as a campaigning and lobbying group to oppose the Section 28 legislation which aimed to prevent “the so-called ‘promotion’ of homosexuality in schools; as well as stigmatising gay people it also galvanised the gay community”.<sup>135</sup> Such movements, which will be discussed more fully in Chapter Three, do not always sit comfortably with Queer Theory as an academic discourse because, as noted by Hubbard, “queer is not simply a label used to label lesbian and gay individuals, but describes a politics of transgression”.<sup>136</sup> In this way, queer practice can relate to actions where individuals are prepared to challenge heteronormative notions therefore often through direct action.

While many Pride events often make the claim that the purpose of such celebrations are political and designed to raise awareness of LGBT communities and create a sense of community, if queer’s purpose is to challenge and destabilise the hegemonic norms then it is “by definition whatever is at odds with the normal, the legitimate, the dominant. There is nothing in particular to which it necessarily refers. It is an identity without essence”.<sup>137</sup> As a result, a stable queer identity becomes impossible as that stabilisation paradoxically legitimises that identity. If applied to notions of space, for instance, then queering the heteronormativity of spaces should not involve an attempt to legitimise gay and lesbian space but instead should be seen as means to “interrogate, and destabilize, its heteronormativity”.<sup>138</sup> The impossible notion of a homogeneous LGBT community therefore is actually highlighted in this manner therefore and a queer community can be viewed as a community in action, challenging heteronormativity in specific times and spaces.

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<sup>135</sup> Stonewall Website. <[http://www.stonewall.org.uk/about\\_us/2532.asp](http://www.stonewall.org.uk/about_us/2532.asp)> [Accessed 15/12/12].

<sup>136</sup> P. Hubbard. *Cities and Sexualities*. (New York: Routledge, 2012), p.27.

<sup>137</sup> *Ibid*, p.27.

<sup>138</sup> *Ibid*, p.27.

## Stigma

Interviews and research to date have provided accounts of various narratives and scenarios, which can be analysed as performance and provide insight into the LGBT community in Plymouth. This expanded approach can then be applied to themes that have come to light in the interviews and materials around such areas as identification, representation, community and pride in the varying forms of LGBT identity, often performed as a response to stigma traditionally associated with these roles. It is possible to detect, in many of the interviews and engagements with Plymouth's LGB and T communities, a sense of anticipated stigma which often goes hand in hand with any public display of these identities. Often, this anticipation has been borne out in response of spectators.

Many explorations of stigma have their origins in the work of the sociologist Erving Goffman, writing in the late 1950s and early 1960s, about the presentation of self. Goffman noted that societies tended to have "a means of categorizing persons and the complement of attributes thought to be ordinary and natural for members of each of these categories."<sup>139</sup> He went on to suggest a performative dimension to these social interactions, writing that when dealing with others an individual "infuses his activity with signs which dramatically highlight and portray confirmatory facts which might otherwise remain unapparent or obscure".<sup>140</sup> In Goffman's work, he considered all social interactions to be performances in their own right with individuals employing backstage and front stage behaviours depending on the nature of the interaction, or performance, they were employed in. Goffman suggested that a social performance therefore could be seen as "all the activity of a given participant on a given occasion which serves to influence in any way any of the other participants."<sup>141</sup> He saw the additional participants in such performances as those who contribute "as the audience, observers, or co-participants".<sup>142</sup> Repetition of these roles, by all involved, lead to the maintenance of the status quo, while any deviation would be highlighted by its difference, in addition to its interpretation and response, by an audience and observers.

For Goffman it was from these social interactions that stigma was formed and then reinforced through social exchange and by the assumptions made by the individuals taking

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<sup>139</sup> E.Goffman. *Stigma: Notes on the management of Spoiled Identity*. (London: Penguin Books, 1963), p.11.

<sup>140</sup> E.Goffman. *The Presentation of Self in Everyday Life*. (London: Penguin Books, 1959), p.40.

<sup>141</sup> *Ibid*, p.26.

<sup>142</sup> *Ibid*, p.27.

part. He stated that “evidence can arise of [a stranger] possessing an attribute that makes him different from others in the category of persons available to him to be, and of a less desirable kind”.<sup>143</sup> In extreme circumstance this person is “thus reduced in our minds from a whole or usual to a tainted or discounted one”.<sup>144</sup> It was in this reduction that stigma occurred and this stigma can cause the person to be viewed as less valid and less important than those who inhabit traditional roles. Participants who inhabit the role of audience or spectators can come to perceive the individual in terms of nothing more than his or her difference to them and so can consequently come to be seen as little more than a stereotype. These negative connotations can extend to the individual’s subjective view of themselves. Writing about Goffman’s theories, Manning identifies an ego identity which relates to “an individual’s subjective of himself or herself as a result of various experiences. Each of these identities can be jeopardized by stigmata that expose discrepancies between virtual and actual selves.”<sup>145</sup> It is in this way individuals can come to accept and inhabit a stigmatized role.

Link and Phelan, writing in 2001, acknowledged that Goffman’s ideas surrounding stigma remained unchallenged for more than four decades. They extended his work by identifying two main challenges to be broached when studying a stigmatized group. Firstly, those individuals carrying out the research are seldom from the group that is perceived as stigmatized and so do so “from the vantage point of theories that are uninformed by the lived experience of the people they study”.<sup>146</sup> Secondly, the investigation of stigma tends to focus on interrelations between individuals and specific groups, and in the course of this study I will begin to consider how far an individual’s sexual identity causes him or her to identify with groups and communities.

While Goffman wrote of the need to find “a language of relationships, not attributes”<sup>147</sup> often “the stigma or mark is seen as something in the person rather than a designation or tag that others affix to the person”.<sup>148</sup> This consideration of the individual and his or her difference can remove focus away from why people discriminate and instead onto what factors lead a person to be discriminated against. In an attempt to address these shortcomings, Link and Phelan offer a conceptualization where:

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<sup>143</sup> Goffman. *Stigma: Notes on the management of Spoiled Identity*, p.12.

<sup>144</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>145</sup> P.Manning. *Erving Goffman and Modern Sociology*. (Cambridge: Polity Press, 1992), p.98.

<sup>146</sup> B.Link & J.Phelan. “Conceptualizing Stigma” *Annual Review of Sociology*. (Annual Review Inc, 2001), 27:p365.

<sup>147</sup> Goffman. *Stigma: Notes on the management of Spoiled Identity*, p13.

<sup>148</sup> Link & Phelan, “Conceptualizing Stigma,” *Annual Review of Sociology*, p366.

Stigma exists when the following interrelated components converge. In the first component, people distinguish and label human differences. In the second, dominant cultural beliefs link labelled persons to undesirable characteristics—to negative stereotypes. In the third, labelled persons are placed in distinct categories so as to accomplish some degree of separation of “us” from “them.” In the fourth, labelled persons experience status loss and discrimination that lead to unequal outcomes.<sup>149</sup>

Through this process, those who can be regarded as part of the dominant culture, with access to social and cultural power, can effectively exclude and legislate against a group that is seen as outside of accepted and acceptable behaviour. At the same time, as we will see in Chapters Two, Four and Five in particular, that group can come to accept their exclusion as reasonable and, in the case of some subcultures, come to embrace (or even create) that difference.

## Conclusion

The unique positioning of the new LGBT materials collected for the Pride in Our Past archive as part of this PhD, exist in that space between the archive and the repertoire. They provide a wide range of data and a means of forming queer scenarios which can challenge assumed knowledge of what it means to be lesbian, gay, bisexual or transgendered in the city of Plymouth and how that culture and identity has been signified or performed since the 1950s.

As Taylor notes, by considering both:

Scenarios, as well, as narratives we expand our ability to rigorously analyze the live and the scripted, the citational practices that characterise both, how traditions get constituted and contested, the various trajectories and influences that might appear in one and not the other.<sup>150</sup>

The oral history interview, analysed in conjunction with performance theory, can provide an opportunity to highlight and consider scenarios which explore in the reality of what it means to be LGB or T in Plymouth and how far having pride in that identity has meaning for the individuals concerned, both as individuals or as communities.

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<sup>149</sup> *Ibid*, p.367.

<sup>150</sup> Taylor, *The Archive and the Repertoire*, p.32.

## Chapter Two: Hiding in the Light:

### Plymouth's Gay Spaces in the 1950s and 60s

The Plymouth of the 1950s was a place of rebuilding. Its strategic importance as a port had made it a target for Germany in the Second World War and the city suffered massive destruction as a result. While the attacks were still taking place, however, planning for the rebuilding began when the Lord Mayor, Viscount Astor, convinced the City Council of the necessity of “A Plan for Plymouth.” This was created by the city engineer, J. Paton Watson, and Professor Patrick Abercrombie and presented publicly in 1944. In his introduction to the plan, Astor referred to Plymothians’ spirit during the time of blitz as a “piece of gay and gallant defiance in the Elizabethan mood”.<sup>151</sup> He felt the plan was necessary to do justice to the unconquerable nature of the people of the city while doing “no violence to historic Plymouth”. His vision was to create “a new Plymouth worthy of both its fame and its site between the hills and the water” and Astor felt the plan could do all this “without sacrificing the amenities of Plymouth or blurring its traditional quality”.<sup>152</sup> The reconstruction of this new Plymouth continued well into the 1950s and framed many aspects of life within the city at that time.

Some of Plymouth’s other “traditional” qualities, in terms of being a place where servicemen and travellers could indulge in revelry, could be observed in the Union Street area of the city which had been relatively less affected by the destruction brought by the blitz than the main city centre area:

Union Street had already achieved a degree of international notoriety long before the war on a par with Bugis Street in Singapore and Gut in Malta. Servicemen, particularly Bootnecks (Royal Marines) and Matelots, would attempt to drink their way from one end of the ‘Strip’ to the other and back.<sup>153</sup>

With over twenty pubs crammed into this area the space could become somewhat colourful. The Strip’s primary attractions were referred to as “The ‘Three P’s’ – Pubs, Prostitutes and the Paramount.”<sup>154</sup> The Paramount, which will be discussed later in this chapter, was a small

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<sup>151</sup> J.P. Watson, & P.Abercrombie. *A Plan for Plymouth* (Plymouth: Underhill Ltd. 2<sup>nd</sup> Edition, 1943), preface v

<sup>152</sup> *Ibid*, p. vi

<sup>153</sup> C. Robinson. *Plymouth in the Forties & Fifties* (Plymouth: Pen & Ink Publishing, 2011), p.165.

<sup>154</sup> Robinson. *Plymouth in the Forties & Fifties*, p.165.

first floor dance club on Union Street which was well supported by individuals from an array of social groups and backgrounds in the city.

This chapter aims to examine some of ‘new’ spaces which individuals from the gay community inhabited in the 1950s and 1960s and consider them in relation to the research aim of exploring the discursive and cultural elements impacting Plymouth’s LGBT (gay) scene at this time. Most of the places under discussion are bars and public houses so a picture is formed of a gay scene that could be accessed by those who knew where to go. Most of the accounts provided are from gay men so much of the analysis will be restricted to that particular community although there are some narratives shared from lesbians interviewees which display women being part of the scene in the 1960s. Regrettably there are no accounts from interviewees who considered themselves bisexual or transgender and part of this culture. It is unclear if this is due to a lack of interviewees coming forward or if these were terms that the queer culture of the 1950s and 60s did not use to define themselves. Individuals seemed to adopt binary positions of being either gay or straight and any use of the word queer was often used as an insult.

In this chapter, I will seek to analyse the members of this gay scene’s own perceived performance of their sexual identity, during this time and within these places, while also considering their interactions with individuals and groups around them. In this way, I can consider identities were renegotiated in these spaces during this era. The process of marking difference to find meaning can also be related to the aims of queer theorists to challenge and destabilise assumptions around sexes, genders and sexualities which will be explored further throughout this chapter.

In 1956, against the local backdrop of the city, Section 13 of the Sexual Offences Act was introduced. This legislation defined the offence of Gross Indecency, implicitly characterising the undefined ‘immoral acts’ as being sex between two men, which, in the previous Criminal Law Amendment Act, had been considered too distressing to discuss. This led to a rise in police activity against homosexuals, and homosexual behaviour, around the whole United Kingdom in the 1950s, in particular in those spaces where men went seeking sex with other men, which, in turn, caused the creation of more secretive subcultures in spaces where it felt safe to signify sexualities which were perceived as contrary to dominant culture. In Plymouth, those spaces tended to cluster around the more colourful bars that already existed in the Union Street area and so the gay communities interacted, on a nightly

basis, with the various armed forces, local revellers and prostitutes who frequented these lively clubs and bars while managing to stay somewhat out of sight of the mainstream view of the wider community.

Jenks described a subculture as a means of understanding “new times and places that people occupy. Subcultures are the new sources of identity, subcultures are the new signifier of difference”.<sup>155</sup> When an identity is marginalised, subcultural groups can claim a:

Right to speak and equivalence of significance. Perpetually, fresh questions are raised about the relationship between the core of social life and the periphery: the centre and the margins; identity and difference; the normal and the deviant, and the possible rules that could conceivably bind us into a collectivity. Now this is the conceptual territory occupied by ideas such as ‘subculture’. They mark our difference, they hold it tight, and they give meaning to it.<sup>156</sup>

By choosing companions, spaces and circumstances in which they could signify their sexual identities to others who either shared that sexuality or were sympathetic or untroubled by it, Plymouth’s gay community were able to make themselves visible to one another whilst retaining a degree of anonymity and hide in the light.

## Into the Lion’s Den: Cruising in the City

I interviewed Ted Whitehead in December 2011 to discuss his recollections of the underground gay scene around the Union Street area, which Ted had been part of, from the time he was first introduced to The Lockyer Tavern in 1954, at the age of seventeen after leaving the army, until he left, to spend eight years in London, in 1960. Throughout that period of time he recalls that groups of people:

Would come from the Lockyer mainly, walk down through, you could go into the Paramount dance hall or you could carry on down to the Castle pub or, if it was too late for that, you’d go down to the Mambo. We’d all meet up under the canopy of the Palace Theatre and pay the odd call to the loo up in Phoenix Street, at the bomb site for cider. Memories! (Laughs) and the back of the Mambo had a garden with a loo in it and that was (laughs) a danger zone. The garden was pitch black and ‘it would be matelots out there’. Really, you didn’t know what was happening out there half the time as you couldn’t see a thing!<sup>157</sup>

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<sup>155</sup> C.Jenks. *Subculture The Fragmentation of the Social*. (London, Thousand Oaks & New Delhi: Sage,2005), p.145.

<sup>156</sup> Jenks. *Subculture The Fragmentation of the Social*, p.142.

<sup>157</sup> Interview with Edward Whitehead, 75 year old gay man from Plymouth. Recorded 5<sup>th</sup> December 2011. Plymouth and West Devon Record Office (PWDRO). Accession 3901-24



On one level, the ‘danger zone’ to which Ted was referring was the possibility of losing one’s footing in the darkness but his laugh and the wry smile that accompanied his comment led me, as interviewer, to conclude that Ted was actually referring to the possibilities that location offered for an anonymous sexual encounter with a sailor.

The practice of cruising had long been associated with gay culture and, in the 1950s and 60s, the practice provided another means of access for those men who would not necessarily define themselves as homosexual: for example, bisexual men or men who have sex with men who might engage in the action of casual sex with other men but without considering the identity of ‘gay man’ to apply to them. These men would not necessarily participate in the gay subculture of the time but instead would visit this world at the most anonymous, yet also strangely, most intimate point of engagement. The gay subculture under consideration in this chapter was variable and reactive enough to support alternative expressions of both masculinity and sexuality in scenarios of variable levels of intimacy and interaction.

Munoz refers to cruising as “a mode of queer performativity – that is, not the fact of a queer identity but the force of a kind of queer doing”.<sup>158</sup> In this way, cruising can be seen as a form of performance that sits at the intersection between the subcultural style and the performativity of sexual identity as it intersects with gender. It is an action which gay men can undertake which allows them to explore and display their sexuality in a manner which is considered other to heteronormative practices and so enables them to ‘act queer’ in the process of exploring the boundaries of their own sexuality. As a result, cruising became an accepted behaviour for gay men while it remained outside the boundaries of wider society, as legal, cultural and social restrictions encouraged such interactions to only occur in places hidden from the gaze of dominant culture. A resultant sense of being other served to fuel a sense of excitement and even danger that made the practice more appealing to many. Ironically, the practice also serves to play out rather stereotypical masculinist hunter scenarios with notions of the ‘thrill of the chase’ in which the individual hunts, and subsequently wins his prey due to prowess and physical desirability, whilst also negotiating the inclusion of men who are willing to be hunted.

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<sup>158</sup> J.E.Munoz. *Cruising Utopia – The Then and There of Queer Futurity*. (New York & London: New York University Press, 2009), p.84.

Attempts by the authorities to stamp out the practice of cruising served only to continue to push it further underground whilst heightening some of the thrill that was attached to it. Indeed it has served as the basis of a perception, held by much of the gay male community at this time and beyond, that the most appropriate and desirable type of male same sex encounter is one that is anonymous and fleeting. This in turn served to directly impact upon the way in which gay men went about performing and signifying their willingness to participate in a same sex sexual encounter. Interactions needed to be low key and easily explained away if confronted. Should an encounter take place as a result, it would often be outdoors, hidden and with little personal interaction, other than the sex act, between the two parties.

One interviewee for this thesis recalled, after the interview, being engaged in a sex act with another man in a bomb damaged building in Union Street in the early 1950s. When they became aware of the approach of a naval policeman, his companion urged him to tell him his surname and shared his as they tidied themselves up before the officer reached them. He then asked a series of questions related to what they were doing there and one of the questions was to establish if they knew one another's full name. As they did, he concluded that they could not have been cruising as there was no way two men engaged in such behaviour would be prepared to share such information with one another. Of course, they would not have done if not for the necessity of trying to avoid arrest. The encounter demonstrates how interactions in differing scenarios needed to be negotiated and renegotiated within this subculture for a variety of external reasons.

Throughout the 1950s, just being a man alone in a specific place in the city after nightfall was sufficient to indicate that you would be open to a same sex encounter. One of these places was The Lion's Den cove, situated on Plymouth Hoe, which in this decade had a large sign saying it was also for "Men Only" during the daytime. It had a curved opaque glass roof which obscured the view from the public pathways and the cove was usually crowded with men who would "spend the day there, right until the evening. And some of them would be starkers and the more ladylike ones would keep their knickers on. There was a sign saying 'Male nude bathing. Men only', something like that".<sup>159</sup> The sign was removed during the 1960s and the glass roof was also removed following some bad weather. From this time, it was considered much less socially acceptable for men to sunbathe in the nude in the day and

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<sup>159</sup> PWDRO, Accession 3901-24

the Lion's Den became increasingly associated, in terms of the gay community, as cruising ground. Again, the name conjures images of hunting and predatory desires which has come to be associated with individuals engaging in the process of cruising both as hunter and as prey.

Spaces like this, in addition to the "cottages", which were the commonly used term for various public toilets around the city where it became known men would meet other men for sex, became reinscribed as queered places where simply being there meant an implicit acceptance of their rules of engagement. However, some interviewees recall how it was possible for individuals who were not interested in cruising to enter the space, urinate and leave. Through body language, lack of eye contact and simply speed, they could indicate that they were not engaging with this practice while still being aware of the situation. This type of reaction also indicated that they were aware they had entered a space which had, at least temporarily, been claimed as a queer space.

On occasion though even walking could include moments of tensions, as Ted Whitehead recalled. He was walking through the street one evening and heard a woman's voice shout out, "I'm gonna tell your mother, Teddy Whitehead". Then, several nights later he had a similar experience, "Another time she saw me she was in a friend's flat in Union Street and the same person, same woman, saw me walking down with a group of chaps, late at night, and again I heard this voice from the darkness: 'I'm gonna tell your mother, Teddy Whitehouse' and she was looking out the upstairs window. But I'm pleased to say that she has got a lesbian granddaughter now".<sup>160</sup> I asked Ted if this type of attitude, that his sexuality was something to be ashamed of and to be kept hidden from his family, was of great concern to him and he replied that it felt like two separate worlds at the time. He said that "people on the whole, sort of Plymouth people then, they were quite accepting. I mean I never broadcast it, I just lived my life".<sup>161</sup> In recreating this scenario, for me in the interview, it became clear that pride was not something he expected to associate with being "caught" out and about with a group of gay friends. Indeed, the assumption from his accuser was that he should be ashamed of the discovery, however, he responded to this with quiet dignity while refusing to hide away. The fact the incident felt significant enough for him to recall and include in our narrative showed how important it was to him (both then and in the present of our interview) in relation to his performativity of pride. His refusal to accept the intended stigma and, further, to allow it to affect his actions at the time, indicated an individual performance of

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<sup>160</sup> PWDRO, Accession 3901-24

<sup>161</sup> *Ibid.*

quiet resistance to the woman's opposition. From this scenario we begin to see how 'not broadcasting it' provided a means to allow the gay community to explore ways to perform a subcultural identity with a sense of pride.

In his consideration of subcultures, Dick Hebdige begins by attempting to define the "notoriously ambiguous concept" of culture. He draws upon the work of Raymond Williams who suggested that the term referred to a "particular way of life which expresses certain meanings and values not only in art and learning, but also in institutions and ordinary behaviour".<sup>162</sup> Such 'ordinary behaviour' is then read, by those who are part of it, as being the norm and this status quo is maintained. This aligns with Parker and Sedgwick's observation that "performativity has enabled a powerful appreciation of the ways that identities are constructed iteratively through complex citational processes."<sup>163</sup> Hebdige draws on Roland Barthes' consideration of myths and signs to be aware of "the normally hidden set of rules, codes and conventions through which meanings particular to specific social groups (i.e. those in power) are rendered universal and 'given' for a whole society".<sup>164</sup> These serve to form an agreement of "normal common sense"<sup>165</sup> where ideological frames of reference are most "firmly sedimented and most effective."<sup>166</sup> This is because they remain unconsidered and accepted as the correct way of things and so lead to hegemonic representations of acceptability. Dominant culture can only be maintained for as long as those in power "succeed in framing all competing definitions within their range."<sup>167</sup> In this way, if the subordinate groups do not act in a manner which adheres to the social norms they can at least be "contained within an ideological space which does not seem at all 'ideological', and which seems instead to be permanent and 'natural', to lie outside history".<sup>168</sup>

For the gay community in Plymouth therefore the ability to access a subculture in which they could perform their sexual identity was instrumental in both the formation of a sense of community as well as individual performativity within that community. Jenks draws upon the work of Thorton in comparing the theoretical frameworks of subculture and community. While speculating that the two are almost interchangeable he does draw out some factors specific to community, noting that "Communities conventionally suggest a

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<sup>162</sup> D. Hebdige. *Subculture: The Meaning of Style* (London & New York: Routledge, 1979), p.6.

<sup>163</sup> A. Parker & E.K. Sedgwick. *Performativity and Performance* (New York & London: Routledge, 1995), p.2.

<sup>164</sup> Hebdige. *Subculture: The Meaning of Style*, p9

<sup>165</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>166</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>167</sup> *Ibid.*, p.11.

<sup>168</sup> *Ibid.*, p.16.

greater permanence than subcultures, that they tend to be geographically aligned to a specific locale, and in general that they comprise families and kinship groups.”<sup>169</sup> As a result, although I continue to refer to Plymouth’s gay “community” of the 1950s and 60s, subculture seems a more (or at least equally) appropriate description.

Being attached to a gay subculture would have impacted upon individuals, particularly in how far and where they would have felt safe to signify their sexuality through readable actions and mannerisms. In exploring the distinction between gender and sex, Judith Butler points towards a matrix that exists between bodily sex (i.e. the physical aspects of our bodies and genitalia) and gender (i.e. the social conventions that influence the way we live our lives in those bodies). While physical difference exists between bodies, she claims genders are social constructions in the culture in which we live. Sex “is an ideal construct which is forcibly materialized through time. It is not a simple fact or static condition of a body, but a process whereby regulatory norms materialize 'sex' and achieve this materialization through a forcible reiteration of those norms”.<sup>170</sup> We communicate cultural norms around an often unconsidered and assumed inherent correctness of the matrix and so create accepted norms of sex and gender to which individuals are expected to subscribe and strive to achieve. Performative acts are endlessly repeated which match the sexed body and so form the impression of “a stable sex expressed through a stable gender” which is then “hierarchically defined through the compulsory practice of heterosexuality.”<sup>171</sup> Deviations from heteronormativity can therefore be seen to bring into question the “normal” relationship between sex and gender (that is, men should be masculine and women should be feminine).

According to Hebdige, alienation from these expectations provides an impetus for the ‘deviants’ to “move from man’s second ‘false nature’ to a genuinely expressive artifice; a truly subterranean style.” Individual performativity can either challenge or appear to reaffirm the matrix based on reception. Through exposing the matrix and considering how sex, gender and sexuality interact, Butler seeks to “expose the heterosexual matrix and to displace the effect of its necessity”.<sup>172</sup> Butler notes the potential implications of this process for alternative performances of sexual identity such as camp for a biological man or butch for a biological woman. Each “initiates a set of punishments both obvious and indirect,” just as a social

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<sup>169</sup> Jenks. *Subculture The Fragmentation of the Social*, p.13.

<sup>170</sup> J. Butler. *Bodies that Matter: On the Discursive Limits of 'Sex'*. (New York: Routledge, 1993), p.2.

<sup>171</sup> J. Butler. *Gender Trouble: Feminism and the Subversion of Identity*. (London & New York: Routledge, 1990), p.206.

<sup>172</sup> Butler. *Bodies that Matter: On the Discursive Limits of 'Sex'*, p.15.

performance that reaffirm the heterosexual matrix “provides the reassurance that there is an essentialism of gender identity after all”.<sup>173</sup>

In one of the oral history interviews carried out for the Pride in Our Past archive, Peter Buckley discussed his earliest recollections regarding his sexuality during his teenage years in the late 50s:

I don't think I specifically knew what it was, I just knew I wasn't the same. I didn't actually make an announcement or do anything dramatic, I mean I was a hairdresser for a start so everyone assumes you're gay. I just let people think whatever they want I suppose in a way I was kinda of cowardly because I never had to stand up and put my hand in the air or anything, so I just didn't want to make excuses for being gay.<sup>174</sup>

In the interview, Peter's interprets his low key performativity at this time as being “cowardly”, and it could be argued that it is because his public performance at this time was not designed to specifically out him as a gay man. Instead though, he adopted a career which people of the time might have perceived as an indication he was a gay man, and also he was prepared to “just let people think whatever they want” which, in itself, seems to indicate his public performance at the time was not without the potential of generating a sense of pride as his individual performance remained outside of notions of stigma. An individual is not normally perceived as lesbian, gay, bisexual or transgender until they adopt culturally recognised mannerisms or behaviours which adapt their performance and signify themselves to relevant spectators as such. The normal association for a man signifying himself to be gay is a camp performance, with camp referring to an exaggerated effeminate, often theatrical, performance. Peter recalls that such signification did not provide him with any positive gay role models. “I didn't want to be gay because all the gay people I saw were ‘camp’ and ‘queenie’ and kinda of out there on the telly,” he said. “Even the people that people thought were straight like Frankie Howerd and it was obvious to me that he was a gay man. I didn't want to be that person really. I didn't like myself very much”.<sup>175</sup> The fact that Peter could reflect on this in the interview, with some distance from that feeling, indicates how far he had reconciled himself to this aspect of his identity, and that the interview itself had become a scenario in which he could more easily access and display that pride in the present.

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<sup>173</sup> J. Butler. “Performative Acts and Gender Constitution: An Essay in Phenomenology and Feminist Theory”, Theatre Journal 40:4 (John Hopkins University Press, 1988) pp 519-531

<sup>174</sup> Interview with Peter Buckley, 67 year old Gay man from Plymouth. Recorded 30<sup>th</sup> January 2012. PWDRO. Accession 3901-41.

<sup>175</sup> PWDRO, Accession 3901-41.

Peter's assertion regarding his own self-image and his struggle to reconcile his own identity with the camp performances that the media and his local experiences had afforded him are very telling in terms of his ability to relate to any form of pride in his sexual identity. At this time, it is clear that he did not view the potential for a camp performance to be resistant or reactionary to the heteronormative norms when employed in certain scenarios. The potential for camp to be revolutionary will be considered further in the next chapter when looking at the Stonewall riots. Also, the notion of a camp man as being a figure of fun is complicated by the practice of cruising and its hunter/hunted notions.

Sinfield has identified the four features of camp performativity as “irony, aestheticism, theatrically and humour.”<sup>176</sup> As a young man struggling with both his own performance of sexuality and the reaction of those around him, it would seem that the only aspect Peter was aware of was humour – and furthermore, not an empowering, self-reflexive humour but one he felt produced the ridicule and jeers of mainstream audiences. When asked if there were any positive role models visible at this time he responded with “No there weren't any, none at all. No, they were all ‘queers’ and ‘pansies’ and ‘pufters’ and ‘shirt lifters’ and ‘child molesters’”.<sup>177</sup>

Hegemonic ideology was being successfully maintained here, with the only language available to discuss people who did not present themselves as heteronormative defining them as deviant. Hebdige acknowledges that the struggle between discourses is “always, at the same time, a struggle within signification: a struggle for possession of the sign”<sup>178</sup> which in this case relates to the signification of language. These objects, actions or commodities can be “‘stolen’ by subordinate groups and made to ‘carry’ secret meanings which express, in code, a form of resistance to the order which guarantees their continued subordination”.<sup>179</sup> For Hebdige subcultures are concerned with transformations which “go against nature, interrupting the process of ‘normalization’. As such, they are gestures, movements towards a speech which offend the ‘silent majority’, which challenge the principles of unity and cohesion, which contradicts the myth of consensus”.<sup>180</sup> Such transformations are made though unspoken ‘rules,’ since what is considered normal is so deeply ingrained in those who are bound by their constraints.

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<sup>176</sup> A. Sinfield. *Gay and After*. (London: Serpent's Tail, 1998), p.149.

<sup>177</sup> PWDRO, Accession 3901-41.

<sup>178</sup> Hebdige. *Subculture The Meaning of Style*, p.17.

<sup>179</sup> *Ibid*, p.18.

<sup>180</sup> *Ibid*.

This is where Sinfield sees camp performativity sitting, acknowledging its position in the gender/sexuality matrix and the fact performances of sexual identity are perceived in relation to what we recognise. He considers that this “gay sensibility is a specific formation we have pieced together in the conflicted histories that we have experienced . . . and from our determination to seize them and make them work for us”.<sup>181</sup> In this way, within specific areas of the city, Plymouth’s gay community could push against perceived limits by employing a performance of camp which was “both political and critical”.<sup>182</sup>

## The Flexible Sexuality of Matelots

The night time scene on Union Street throughout the 1950s and into the 1960s arose from the city’s role as a port. This led to a large presence of various members of the armed forces in many of the drinking establishments on most nights. From many of the interviews, it became clear that the gay men’s interactions with servicemen in the pubs and bars of Union Street created a unique situation and their presence was an instrumental factor in the formation of gay subculture. Most recollection focused on Royal Navy sailors (who are locally referred to as ‘matelots’) interacting with the gay community in this post war space.

In one of his interviews, Ted Whitehead said that, during the eight years he was back in the city during the 1950s, the matelots “would spend their money on the girls and then the girls would say ‘Good night’ and go home. Different with the prostitutes, but the ordinary girls who were just out for the evening, for a dance and so on, they were quite well behaved.”<sup>183</sup> As they were paid each fortnight, these activities were usually restricted to the weekend closest to their pay day. This meant in turn that every other week they could not afford to go out drinking and this was known by the matelots and the gay community as “blank week”.

Gay men knew that that was the week they should take to the town and that many of the sailors would be happy to be entertained by them for the night if it meant their drinks were bought for them. As Ted recounts: "Of course the matelots would be at a loose end and would come in to the Mambo and you know, you’d probably buy them a coffee and get off with a

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<sup>181</sup> Sinfield. *Gay and After*, p.150.

<sup>182</sup> M.Meyer. *The Politics and Poetics of Camp*. (London & New York: Routledge, 1994), p.1.

<sup>183</sup> PWDRO, Accession 3901-24



matelot”.<sup>184</sup> The willingness of many of the matelots to be fluid in their choice of partners, regardless of the assumed fiscal reasons, displays the apparently flexible nature of the matelots’ sexuality. While it would be inappropriate to assume all these matelots were effectively heterosexual men who were prepared to negotiate their performance of that sexuality it does seem likely that the majority of these men considered themselves to be just that.

During the weeks when lack of finance was not an issue, heteronormative courtship and sex were being performed and the matrix surrounding gender, sex and sexuality was being correctly displayed and reaffirmed through these encounters. When the situation was complicated due to a lack of money, however, the matelots were happy to amend the performance of their roles around courtship and sex and take full advantage of their desirability to the gay men of Plymouth. With this action, they moved outside of the accepted cultural rules, and assumed a unique and privileged role within the subculture environment on alternative weekends. Their positioning cannot be explained in terms of a “coming out” narrative in which they identified as gay and accepted that they should actually be part of this alternative subculture because they continued to participate in both hetero and homosexual encounters and, indeed, moved without difficulty between the two. This flexibility indicates that monetary concerns and a capacity to socialise and drink were more important maintaining the status quo in terms of the gender/sex matrix. Alternatively, their actions could be seen as truly queer as they could willingly and unproblematically step outside of the normal binaries applied to sexuality. It could be argued they not performing pride in this scenario, as they were not defining themselves as part of the LGBT community, but they were also refusing to associate their actions with a need for shame or stigma.

Parker and Sedgwick detect that elements of the performative are “linked with the perverted, the artificial, the unnatural, the abnormal, the decadent, the effete, the diseased” and go on to consider if the performative “has been from its inception already infected with queerness”. In making this point, they refer to the United States military’s “Don’t ask, don’t tell, don’t pursue” policy relating to gay men and lesbians and implemented in 1993. In this, it is stated that “Sexual orientation will not be a bar to service unless manifested by homosexual conduct” which is defined as “a homosexual act, a statement that the member is homosexual or bisexual, or a marriage or attempted marriage to someone of the same

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<sup>184</sup> *Ibid.*

gender”.<sup>185</sup> The performativity of matelots and the men of the Plymouth gay community came to create the subculture of the time.

Ted recalls “Oh, yeah, yeah. I never knew any trouble with them. You know, they were very ‘pro-gay’”<sup>186</sup> but these sailors were being more than supportive of a subculture in their actions. The Paramount Dance Hall in the 1950s was something of the jewel in the crown for the Union Street area and was regarded as the place to go for an evening out for the larger population of the city, particularly young couples wanting to dance. As Ted often went into the dance hall on his own, he was aware of standing out from the crowd to a certain extent:

I sat there this particular night and a group of matelots came in and came over and sat beside me. And I was at the back of the dance hall. And there were five of them and they started coming on to me, chatting me up, and I was very wary, you know, five. You can cope with one. Or maybe two. They started to say you know, ‘Come back with us’ and I said ‘Where are you?’ and they said ‘We’re off the frigate. You can come back on board with us’. And I said ‘No’ and they said ‘No, we’re all right’, and they all started kissing each other to prove they were OK. This was in the full lit dance floor. Nobody took any notice if two men or two matelots got up and danced together. It was okay.<sup>187</sup>

In the interview, it was clear that Ted recalled this scenario as being significant to him and his individual performance of pride. The matelots were perceived as a significant part of the Plymouth social scene and for them to perform in that manner to attract his attention was a moment that had clearly impacted on him. As he verbally repeated the scenario for me again in the interview it was easy to detect that over fifty years on that feeling of pride was being recreated in the moment. The Paramount Dance Hall was a place designed to speak to the sensibilities of heterosexual courting couples, and yet here five matelots are displaying behaviour that is in direct opposition to the ideology that informs the place. While Ted recalls this very public display as being significant he is also clear that people were not particularly concerned by two men dancing together in this space. It seems possible that this type of performance was reconciled with the perceived rules of conduct because it involved the matelots who were accepted as problematising the expectations of dominant culture. Perhaps to onlookers such a display seemed just the hijinks of groups of young men back from serving at sea. As we have seen, humour and the perception of humour is often a very powerful tool in maintaining the rules around sexuality or allowing for boundaries to be stretched or indeed broken.

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<sup>185</sup> Parker & Sedgwick. *Performativity and Performance*, p.5.

<sup>186</sup> PWDRO, Accession 3901-24

<sup>187</sup> *Ibid.*

The ease with which some members of the armed forces moved between the acceptable culture surrounding sexuality and the underground subculture when on the streets did not seem to apply to the roles they were required to play while on duty. Jeanie recalled she was afraid to access any of the Plymouth gay scene until after she left the army in 1964 because she had to remain discrete. She recalls that “you’d got to in the army if you want to stay. In those days you had to more or less pretend you were straight and you knew everybody else up there was carrying on”.<sup>188</sup> The pressures on her to maintain an expected role only got worse when she was promoted to corporal:

Then when I got my stripes, I was, well not me, we were told us NCOs that we’ve got to, if anyone below us was in that situation we had to report them. If you knew someone was gay or lesbian, you, it was your duty to report it to the top so I never, I just closed my eyes to it, because I just didn’t feel it was my duty to do that, especially when I knew it was going on and it still is going on.<sup>189</sup>

Historically a homosexual officer has been more prone to blackmail and yet, it is only through defining something as other or inappropriate that society empowers it as a subject for blackmail. Jeanie recalls that the enforcement of acceptable sexuality was rigorous:

The military police always going through a search and the scurry was to hide everything under the lino. All the letters and what have you. Yes, it was so, I mean it got in the paper, I don’t know if you remember the *Daily Mirror* got hold of a story about a girl who was supposed to have been brow beaten into becoming a lesbian and now I think of it what a joke that is, now everything is out in the open, it’s all a waste of time really, isn’t it?<sup>190</sup>

The notion that individuals could be ‘recruited’ into homosexuality, in the same manner in which they had been recruited into the army or navy, was one that was accepted for a long time. Jeanie’s distance from that thinking was now very apparent though as she recreated the scenario in the interview and displayed her distance now from that thinking with the phrase “what a joke that is”. That discourse clearly no longer impacted on her sense of pride and hindsight and the interview process was helping her distance herself from the stigma it was designed to make her, and her peers, feel. The idea of blackmail, at the time, was tied into the ideology that non-normative sexualities are the result of corruption, or disease, that an individual could be corrupted or infected through interaction with gay subculture. The actions of the matelots, in Plymouth, during blank week would seem to run in direct opposition to this very heavy handed enforcement of the heterosexual matrix by the armed forces

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<sup>188</sup> Interview with Eugenie Crook, Former Woman’s Royal Army Corps and Lesbian from Plymouth. Recorded 29<sup>th</sup> February 2012. PWDRO. Accession 3901-35

<sup>189</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>190</sup> *Ibid.*

regulatory powers. However, their ability to effectively legitimise their participation in the gay subculture seemed to avoid the stigmatisation usually resulting from such actions.

## The Mambo: Free Territory

The Mambo, where the outside toilet was recalled with such fondness by Ted Whitehead earlier in this chapter, was a rundown venue, with egg boxes on the ceiling to provide soundproofing from neighbours, which survived on word of mouth between members of the gay community. It was run primarily as a venue for gay men by a gay man called Reg who, Ted recalled, in his interactions with mainstream customers, “wouldn’t stand any nonsense from anybody. He would tell them where to go if they were causing trouble, if they were laughing at anybody”.<sup>191</sup> The Mambo only served coffee and Reg would open up during the day and serve food. It would then close and in the evenings open at 10 o’clock when he would return from one of the pubs himself, with friends in tow and open the café. Ted remembers: “we would all go in and the girls would go in, the prostitutes, and they’d bring in their matelots and all the single matelots would come in and chat us up or we’d chat them up, whichever”.<sup>192</sup> One of the prostitutes, Rosie, would hide one of her arms and pretend it was missing to try and win some sympathy and sell more of her roses to her unsuspecting clientele. Unfortunately, she would often forget which one she had hidden on a previous occasion so would have switch from left to right. Either way, she had no problem with telling the gay men she shared the space with to “‘F off’ if you didn’t give her some money for her flowers”.<sup>193</sup> Despite these occasional moments of conflict, however, the prostitutes and gay men managed to contribute to this shared environment very successfully together. Indeed, although different from one another in many ways their agenda with regard to the matelots was very similar in that both were seeking to attract the sexual attention of these servicemen.

In terms of public visibility within the city at large, this venue was at the other end of the spectrum from the Paramount or, to a lesser extent the Lockyer Tavern which will be discussed more later in this chapter. The regulars who came to the Mambo were in the know and known by Reg as he only opened when he liked and for who he liked. The matelots were

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<sup>191</sup> PWDRO, Accession 3901-24

<sup>192</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>193</sup> *Ibid.*

the visitors to this space and were either brought to the venue or informed by word of mouth and so were aware of its nature when stepping through the doors. As a gay man who was part of the subculture Reg was in a position to separate the inner sanctum of the Mambo from the mainstream world that was maintained and reproduced outside of its doors. It was what Lyman and Scott describe as free territory which is “carved out of space and affords the opportunities for idiosyncrasy and identity”; “central to the manifestation of these opportunities are boundary creation and enclosure. This is because activities that run counter to accepted norms need seclusion or invisibility to permit unsanctioned performance”.<sup>194</sup> As Warner notes “not all sexualities are public or private in the same way. Same-sex persons kissing, embracing or holding hands in public view commonly excite disgust even to the point of violence whereas mix-sexed persons doing the same things are invisibly ordinary”.<sup>195</sup>

In the interactions between the gay community, the prostitutes and the matelots, gay identity was being interpreted and performed unashamedly at the Mambo for an audience who stood outside of the mainstream. This might be considered as a manifestation of proto-gay pride. Here homosexuality was accepted, for a limited time within this limited space, and performances of that sexual identity were legitimised within the spatial boundaries of the Mambo. It is also possible to detect a shared thrill for a place where it was encouraged to step away from the expectations and ideas that informed much of day to day life. Several interview participants recalled a sense of excitement that was attached to the Mambo’s unsavoury reputation and perhaps it is possible to detect pride within that elation: A sense of pride in being prepared to step outside of dominant culture for a time and be unashamed in a sexuality which was regarded as inappropriate almost everywhere else.

## The Lockyer Tavern: A Safe Space to Come Out and Stay Inside

The Lockyer Tavern began its life as the home of Plymouth surgeon, Sir George Magrath. It was known as George House and was located on the junction of Lockyer Street and George Place. Sir George was at one-time Surgeon of the Victory, flagship of Lord Nelson. He was also a medical officer at Dartmoor Prison and later, Inspector of Hospitals. In

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<sup>194</sup> S.Lyman & M.Scott. *A Sociology of the Absurd* (New York: Appleton Century Crofts, 1970), p.12.

<sup>195</sup> M.Warner. *Publics and Counterpublics* (New York: Zone Books, 2002), p.14.

his later years he practised as a physician in Plymouth. Illness then struck and he spent the last four years of his life confined to his residence. Sir George was a local celebrity, a confirmed bachelor known for his wearing of a wig and padded calves. He died at his home in June 1857. The house remained empty for several years until it was reopened on Saturday 19th April, 1862 as Harvey's Family Hotel. Sometime between 1888 and 1890 Harvey's Hotel came under new ownership and expanded the building. This created new office suites, later to become Lloyds bank, whilst the hotel changed its name to the Lockyer Hotel. The effects of World War II brought damage to the building but its location meant that it was mostly spared from the blitz and it managed to survive as a public tavern.

In the post war years, the back bar of The Lockyer Tavern became well known as a safe place for gay men to drink and socialise. Peter Buckley recalled his first visit to the place in 1967: "I walked in eating an apple which is very strange. I don't know if Freud would make something about that".<sup>196</sup> He also recalls, very clearly, the men he met there:

There was a guy in there called Sophie and he was very camp and there were some very positive gay people in there. Very butch and very in your face and slightly aggressive. Which kind of was refreshing. I met, I think it was on the first time I ever went there, and I met a marine PTI (Physical Training Instructor). I suppose he met me really, because I was very green and I had a relationship with him for a year, wow, yeah a marine PTI, what a catch.<sup>197</sup>

Peter's entrance eating an apple seems to have been significant as he recalls that in the interview decades later. Possibly it was an attempt to look nonchalant and to hide any nerves he may have had. The man called Sophie, seems to have been performing the more traditionally expected role of a camp queen within the confines of the back room. It is significant though that Peter recalls the "very positive gay people" as being "very butch and very in your face".<sup>198</sup>

Previous commentary from Peter, quoted in this chapter, has provided a strong sense of how he struggled with camp representation being the only option open to him to perform his sexuality so he was clearly excited to find a range of representations in the Lockyer. While he had been delighted to find "refreshing" individuals who did not conform to his expectations of camp behaviour in this space, men like Sophie seemed to confirm to stereotypes to him by being men who applied make up as "a type of ironic gender play

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<sup>196</sup> PWDRO, Accession 3901-41

<sup>197</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>198</sup> *Ibid.*

through notions about mimicry and masquerade”.<sup>199</sup> Although Peter would possibly not see the subtleties of this performance challenging binary gender roles and, instead, would focus on the humorous aspect of the performance. As Taylor notes, the “aesthetics of everyday life vary from community to community, reflecting cultural and historical specificity as much in the enactment as in the viewing/reception”.<sup>200</sup> So, instead, both as a spectator and a participant in Plymouth’s gay subculture, he considered the most effective performances to be individuals seeking to maintain a butch, masculine performativity. According to Warner, “Nelly boys are said to be ‘flaunting’ their sexuality, just by swishing or lisping. They are told to keep it to themselves, even though the “it” in question is in relation to their own bodies, Butch men, meanwhile, can swagger aggressively without being accused of flaunting anything.”<sup>201</sup> It would seem, from Peter’s recollections that this perception can also occur within spaces appropriated for queer performativities. It is not by accident that Peter was picked up by a Royal Marine Personal Training Instructor as this was exactly the type of man he was seeking to attract.

Just entering Lockyer’s back bar, alone, meant a man could be perceived as making a statement about his sexual identity. Mavis Arnold, who worked as a barmaid in the back bar of the tavern from 1967 to 1969, recalls:

Where the toilets were situated they [gay men] would never have gone through the bar because the toilets were on either side. So it was really “That’s your part”. There was a complete red line, went down through the middle. You know, you don’t go over that line. And people didn’t cross over. You would go that way and there was no way you could get through that bar. Which was sad.<sup>202</sup>

Mavis’ reflections indicate a space within a space, where homosexuality was tolerated and significations of that sexual identity could be included in the interactions that took place but only as long as it was confined to that one area. In this way it was never necessary to bring it into the view of the pub’s more mainstream clientele. The physical boundaries which often apply to the location of a subculture can be seen here. There was an accepted space, within the larger space, which Plymouth’s gay community could inhabit.

Mavis Arnold was not told about the nature of its clientele before her first night working in the back bar of the Lockyer:

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<sup>199</sup> Meyer. *The Politics and Poetics of Camp*, p.5.

<sup>200</sup> Taylor. *The Archive and the Repertoire: Performing Cultural Memory in the Americas*, p.3.

<sup>201</sup> M. Warner. *Publics and Counterpublics* (New York: Zone Books, 2002), p.14.

<sup>202</sup> Interview with Mavis Arnold, Former barmaid at the Locker Tavern, Plymouth. Recorded 10<sup>th</sup> March 2012. Plymouth and West Devon Record Office. Accession 3901-28

So, I'm sitting there, looking at them and I'm thinking 'I'm sure that chap's got lipstick on over there'. This is how naïve I was! Nail varnish and then I started talking to them and then right through that evening, it still didn't dawn on me. I'm thinking 'Well these are nice - nothing like the rugby team where they want to come up and pinch your backside. I'm liking it up here like, you know!' So, I go downstairs, catches up, 'Oh, how did you get on?' 'Lovely' I said, 'Christ, I really liked it up there. Aren't they polite? Must be like a men's evening, like a weekend away'. Then they started laughing and they said to me, 'Well they are the Plymouth's gay society. Penny dropped! 'Oh' I goes, 'oh right.' 'We've got to put them up there because they're not really welcome down in the main bar'.<sup>203</sup>

Mavis provides us with a privileged 'visitor's' insight into the performance of the subcultural community within that space. It was also very clear in the interview scenario that she felt a sense of pride in being asked to contribute to the archive and to share her stories and recollections of the back bar from this time. She recalled she very quickly differentiated the space from the more traditional macho trappings she experienced in the main bar. She also picked up on more decorative performative aspects such as lipstick and nail varnish on some of the patrons, which in this time period would be considered taboo for men. The style that the men employed in their interactions with her, however, is very noticeable. Considering Mavis had been theoretically "thrown into the lion's den" by her colleagues to deal with a perceived deviant subculture it is particularly interesting that she found patrons who were more agreeable and pleasant than those she would normally deal with. Possibly this is because she could not be considered an object of sexual desire for them but the situation was problematised when her brother came to see her at work:

My brother is quite a good looking chap, big dark brown eyes, dark hair and proper muscles. One came up and he was talking to my brother; thinks he's onto a good thing! So I didn't say anything, I thought 'he'll be alright, he'll be alright'. So this specific gent came up and said, 'The young boy,' he said, 'Do you know who he is?' he said, 'Cos I've seen you talking to him'. So I said 'Yes' I said, 'he's called Eric, and he happens to be my brother.' Oh, the apologies!! 'Oh, I'm ever so sorry! I'm ever so sorry!'<sup>204</sup>

Effectively, Mavis and her brother could be viewed as interlopers into this safe space where a gay man felt comfortable to proposition another man. Interestingly, however, it was the patron who felt he was at fault and apologised to Mavis for behaviour that was actually entirely appropriate within that space.

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<sup>203</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>204</sup> *Ibid.*



Mavis and her brother were not the only people from outside the gay subculture to venture into the Lockyer, however. Ted Whitehead recalled:

Straight people would come in for the evening. Young women, on a night out with the girls. They would come in because they felt safe. They knew they could sit and watch the queers or the gays – no, they didn't call them gays in those days. The straight people would sit around having a laugh, not so much at us but with us, you know. Not being nasty.<sup>205</sup>

The idea that young women would feel safe in this environment is an extension of the way Mavis felt about working there. Here, a safe space had been created for the gay community and that safety was, for the most part, extended to individuals outside of that community who perceived it as unthreatening. The fact visitors “could sit and watch the queers” without any fear of conflict indicates that camp performativity was still perceived as amusing to some general public when visiting this environment. The self-awareness of the performativity with its elements of mimicry and masquerade often were read as humorous showmanship and could therefore appear to confirm, as much as it served to challenge, stereotypes of gay men. These notions are highlighted in an interview with Ted Whitehead when he recalls:

There was a cocktail bar upstairs, which I never really liked but the back bar was buzzing. It was quite different and some of the ladies of the night would use the bar. We just kept to the back bar and mainly the service men would come in and it was just all very friendly and happy and jokey.<sup>206</sup>

The presence of prostitutes both in the Lockyer Tavern, the Mambo cafe and around many of the Union Street bars, frequented by the gay community of the time, highlights the role of both groups as outsiders and, even more so, sexual outsiders who historical discourse has been unable to place into acceptable notions of sexual conduct.

Jeanie Crook who had only recently left the army in 1964 when she began visiting the Lockyer Tavern, recalls there being more tension in the back bar when she visited with other lesbians:

Well, you had the Lockyer, it was the favourite, it was to us, it was our pub, although only one floor level was ours, the rest were for what we called the straights, but the straights use to come up after a few beers at stand at the end of the bar, giving it this, stirring up trouble you know. We were targets really. (*And was this both lesbians and gay men?*) Gay men. More gay men really because although they took the mickey mostly out of women who they saw as substitute men. It's difficult to explain really but a lot of women dressed, I didn't see the point in that never did dressed as guys, you know with the leather jackets and the

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<sup>205</sup> PWDRO, Accession 3901-24

<sup>206</sup> *Ibid.*

haircut and I thought you don't have to dress or act like that to have a relationship or be yourself. Clothes don't really make a difference really, just encouraged straight guys, although half of them were probably into both things, but just use to encourage them to take the Mickey out of the girls or as they called them 'butch women'.<sup>207</sup>

Having just left the army, where she was very accustomed to representing herself in a manner that drew no attention to her sexuality, Jeanie was particularly sensitive to the way many other lesbians at the Lockyer presented themselves as 'masculine'. Referring to the heterosexual men in the bar, she recalls "the more they drank the more they caused upsets and, of course, the more drunk the 'butch girls' got, they got more brave and they tried to take them on".<sup>208</sup> In recreating this scenario in the interview, it was clear that Jeanie still found the behaviour of butch women troubling saw their performativity in this scenario as something that was not truthful and, consequently, that could not create sense of pride in who they were. It seems likely, however, that the women in question would probably have viewed their performance in a very different way.

The adoption of traditionally coded masculine traits to queer their performance in this space was troubling for Jeanie and as she saw the young women as looking for a means to "be themselves". As Case states male culture has "made women's bodies into objects of male desire, converting them into sites of beauty and sexuality for men to gaze upon. Women learned to view their own bodies in the same way, and so were prevented from identifying with their own appearance".<sup>209</sup> Jeanie clearly viewed these women as trying to portray themselves as something other than what they actually were. However, the 'butch girls' in the Lockyer were performatively expressing their queer sexuality while testing the hegemonic limits imposed upon them through the male gaze. However, as Butler reminds us, the gendered body can only act within "a culturally restricted corporeal space" and so "enacts interpretations within the confines of already existing directives".<sup>210</sup> It was because of these confines that Jeanie seemed to feel that portraying a butch performance was not really being oneself and so reflected that:

You knew in the end that you were never going to win because straight people sort of seem to think that, you know, they've got the upper hand but we still went up there it didn't stop us, we loved it. We felt at least we belonged somewhere.<sup>211</sup>

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<sup>207</sup> PWDRO, Accession 3901-35

<sup>208</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>209</sup> S. Case. *Feminism and Theatre*. (Basingstoke: Macmillan, 1988), p.66.

<sup>210</sup> Butler. "Performative Acts and Gender Constitution: An Essay in Phenomenology and Feminist Theory", pp 519-531

<sup>211</sup> PWDRO, Accession 3901-35

The sense of a place to belong, even if on many levels, that belonging was limited by some very traditional notions and expectations was apparent, to one extent or another, in all the interviews that talked about the Lockyer Tavern and a fondness endures for the venue with much of the gay community who experienced it.

## Conclusion

Plymouth's gay subculture in the 1950s and 1960s was created and defined in relation to the ideologies of the time and the specific cultures of the place. Spaces were being rebuilt and reinterpreted following the decimation of World War II which enabled an opportunity for some to be reclaimed, reinscribed and made suitable for queer performance, either for long periods of time, such as the bars and cafes, or for moments in time when the darkness and seclusion of an area allowed for different forms of sexual identity to be explored and negotiated. Many of these were often the more run down environments as they seemed more accessible for those who found themselves on the fringes of more acceptable society. Gay men, lesbians, prostitutes and also the visiting sailors who were often seen as somewhat unsavoury and their time in port best restricted to the more downmarket Union Street area.

Perhaps what would be regarded as unexpected was the ease in which camp was incorporated into that environment and seen as appropriate within a specific subculture. Richard Dyer notes that "there is nothing about gay people's physiognomy that declares them as gay, no equivalents to the biological markers of sex and race. There are signs of gayness, a repertoire of gestures, expressions, stances, clothing and even environments".<sup>212</sup> It was through the creation of various environments in the city where these repertoires could be displayed, negotiated and explored that a unique subculture was formed which was appropriate to all of the groups who accessed it. In these spaces, the gay men of Plymouth were enabled to perform in ways that were different to how they were forced to perform in all the other areas of their lives and the first inklings of pride in those performances can be detected. Although spectators were limited, for the most part, to those who had chosen or been invited to step outside the constraints of mainstream 'straight' society, it became possible for gay individuals to find a degree of pride in both their place and their performance

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<sup>212</sup> R.Dyer. *The Matter of Images*. (London, Routledge, 1993), p.19.

within these environments and so contradict what Dick Hebdige calls the “myth of consensus”<sup>213</sup> through testing the perceived boundaries of sexual behaviour.

Each of the groups that accessed this underground scene were complicit in forming their own rules of engagement, even the matelots who appeared to be able engage with all of the groups on their own terms. To draw on Diana Taylor, the formation of this subculture occurred from the presence of all those who engaged with it. As she explains, “people participate in the production and reproduction of knowledge by ‘being there’, being part of the transmission”.<sup>214</sup> It is through a similar process of participation (that is, the oral history interview process) that an archive could be formed to in part recreate and capture aspects of this often ignored aspect of Plymouth’s past.

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<sup>213</sup> Hebdige. *Subculture The Meaning of Style*, p.18.

<sup>214</sup> Taylor. *The Archive and the Repertoire*, p.20.

## Chapter Three:

# The Historical Development of Collective Representations of LGBT Pride

This chapter will seek to chart the historical development of the public performance of gay pride between 1969 and the remainder of the timeframe of this thesis. In doing this, I will focus on key organisational moments which have had ramifications on the performance of pride on national and international level and so have affected the discourses around LGB and T history. As a result, these incidents have come to be viewed as moments associated with LGBT pride. In this, and subsequent chapters, I shall consider the extent of this impact and how far the narratives which they have provoked have affected the LGB and T communities of Plymouth and their attitudes towards pride.

Weeks identifies three key strands in Altman's work which were of importance to those lesbians and gay men who were beginning to find solidarity in their collective representation. Festivals and parades can provide safe spaces within which to explore these areas with "the emphasis on identity; the relationship between community and social movement; and Altman's still controversial looking forward to the 'end of the homosexual'"<sup>215</sup> which relates to a time when the label no longer is relevant. Altman argued that, "to be a homosexual in our society is to be constantly aware that one bears a stigma"<sup>216</sup> and that responses to that "stigma" could range from persecution to tolerance. Altman also noted that, "most of the Western world has abolished legal restrictions against homosexuality while maintaining social prejudices".<sup>217</sup> These prejudices included a form of "repressive tolerance" which allowed for the existence of the "difference" of homosexuality while still seeing it as other and inferior. Weeks identifies that "this form of liberal pity was as unacceptable, and as damaging to self-pride, as the more overt forms of hatred of homosexuality"<sup>218</sup> and went on to suggest that the dominant response to LGB or T identity could take three different forms:

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<sup>215</sup> J. Weeks. *Making Sexual History*. (Cambridge: Polity Press, 2000), p.76.

<sup>216</sup> D. Altman. *Homosexual Oppression and Liberation*. (New York & London: New York University Press, 1971), p.20.

<sup>217</sup> *Ibid*, p.105.

<sup>218</sup> Weeks *Making Sexual History*, p.79.

“persecution, discrimination or tolerance.”<sup>219</sup> It is possible to see that each of the performances considered in this chapter, have in some way occurred in response to one of these categories of response. In each case, moments of organisation around gay visibility led to the eventual formation of organisations to increase visibility which is, in itself, another effective way of performing LGB or T pride in a manner that seems legitimate to a wider audience. Lyotard believes performance can effect ideas and culture claiming that “power is not only good performativity, but also effective verification and good verdicts. It legitimates science and the law on the basis of their efficiency and legitimates this efficiency on the basis of science and law”.<sup>220</sup> As a result, the move from the private to the public, from performativity to performance can directly inform what is regarded as the norm in societal terms.

The various performances of pride discussed in this chapter “act as a catalyst and a site of actual and symbolic struggle”<sup>221</sup> as gay pride is portrayed, interpreted and reinterpreted. In considering this, I apply theories of camp as well as theories of performance and opposition offered by Kershaw and Schechner. These moments can be viewed as points in time where “the history and materiality of homosexual oppression and resistance rubs against regulated spaces subject to planning controls and state intervention”<sup>222</sup> in a bid to make gay identity visible through performance. When Schechner refers to events such as these as direct theatre he is quick to point out that his use of the term theatre is not metaphoric. Instead he identifies that “the audiences for direct theatre are several, consisting of the participants themselves, journalists, especially TV reporters, the mass spectatorship TV enjoys, and high-level decision-makers watching from their offices or bunkers”<sup>223</sup> and it is with this form of visibility that pride was reinterpreted for watching publics, including the city of Plymouth.

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<sup>219</sup> J. Weeks. Preface to 3<sup>rd</sup> Edition of *Homosexual Oppression and Liberation*. (New York & London: New York University Press, 1993), p.5.

<sup>220</sup> J. Lyotard. *The Postmodern Condition: A Report on Knowledge*. (Minneapolis: University of Minneapolis Press, 1984), p.91.

<sup>221</sup> P. Stallybrass & A. White. *The Politics and Poetics of Transgression*. (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1986), p.14.

<sup>222</sup> L. Johnston, *Queering Tourism: Paradoxical performances at gay pride parades*. (London & New York: Routledge, 2005), p.1.

<sup>223</sup> R. Schechner. *The Future of Ritual: Writings on Culture and Performance*. (London & New York: Routledge, 1993), p.86. With the advancement of new technologies, since the time of this writing, we would also currently have to include the internet, along with various other forms of social media, which enable a far wider audience to view and interpret performances of pride around the world.

## Redefining Camp within Conflict

The Stonewall Inn, despite (or perhaps because of) being a little run down and seedy, was the most popular gay bar in Greenwich Village, New York in 1969 but its patrons up until that time would never have expected it to take on the almost legendary status in gay history that it has achieved. It has been suggested that Stonewall did not seem like a place that would engender myths and storytelling but for many of its patrons it was:

An oasis, a safe retreat from the harassment of everyday life, a place less susceptible to police raids than other gay bars and one that drew a magical mix of patrons ranging from tweedy East Siders to street queens. It was also the only gay male bar in New York where dancing was permitted.<sup>224</sup>

Then on 28<sup>th</sup> June of that year, the New York police raided Stonewall. This was not a particularly unusual occurrence and, in the three weeks prior to this, five other gay bars in New York had been similarly raided. In his account of the riot, entitled *Stonewall*, Martin Duberman cites oral history interviews with six witnesses who saw the raid begin at 1:20 in the morning. Normal practice was for the police to arrest “those without IDs, those dressed in the clothes of the opposite gender and some or all of the employees”.<sup>225</sup> The list of those most likely to be targeted by the police indicates how intrinsic individual’s social performance, particularly of gender, was to their position, when subjected to the reactions of officers of the law.

Such was the Stonewall staff’s relationship with the authorities, in 1969 that it was normal for the bar’s management to be tipped off about impending raids. These raids were “usually staged early enough in the evening to produce minimal commotion and allow for a quick reopening. Indeed, sometimes the “raid” consisted of little more than the police striding arrogantly through the bar”<sup>226</sup> as their weekly payoffs meant it was in everyone’s interests to maintain the status quo. On this occasion, though, there was no prior warning and the raid happened while the party atmosphere was in full swing. The incident was quickly seen as being outside of the norm and a crowd of bystanders formed outside the bar and so provided an audience for those involved in the events happening within the bar. As Duberman notes,

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<sup>224</sup> M. Duberman *Stonewall*. (New York: Open Road, 1993), p.182.

<sup>225</sup> Ibid. p.193.

<sup>226</sup> Ibid.

“some of the campier patrons, emerging one by one from the Stonewall to find an unexpected crowd, took the opportunity to strike instant poses, starlet style”.<sup>227</sup>

Sinfield defined the four facets of camp as being “irony, aestheticism, theatrically and humour”<sup>228</sup> and camp was not a type of performance that law enforcement officials would expect to see in street riot but that unexpectedness made the retaliation of Stonewall’s patrons all the more effective in the challenge to law enforcement officials. Sinfield goes on to note with regards to camp that “gay sensibility is a specific formation we have pieced together in the conflicted histories that we have experienced . . . and from our determination to seize them and make them work for us”<sup>229</sup> and, to make the performance of camp work during the Stonewall riots, participants had to acknowledge and respond to the discrimination which they were experiencing by redeploying the more traditional discourses associated with male homosexuality. As argued by Moe Meyer, “camp is both political and critical”<sup>230</sup> and this approach was extended in the future by groups such as ACT UP and Outrage! who I will return to later in this chapter.

These queer performances provided a direct challenge to the authority’s representation of order. If we consider that queer sexualities are themselves “a series of improvised performances whose threat lies in the denial of any social identity derived from the participation in those performances”<sup>231</sup> then we begin to see how effective this challenge might have been in opposing the police’s actions. Stonewall’s clientele on that night included gay men, lesbian women, drag queens and perhaps more subtle variations (such as closeted men, closeted women, men who had sex with men but who didn’t identify as gay, celibate individuals along with a multitude of sexual practices and orientations). Camp provided a means in that moment for an apparently unified public performance of queer identity to which the crowd outside of the club, comprised of customers who had been asked to leave as well as passers-by, could respond as an audience. As the police brought out the individuals they were arresting, this crowd failed to disperse, as the authorities would normally expect, and boos and cheers began from the onlookers. Sylvia (Ray) Rivera, a street transvestite and fixture on Times Square at the time of the riot, recalled, “You could feel the electricity going through people. You could actually feel it. People were getting really, really pissed and

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<sup>227</sup> Ibid. p.195.

<sup>228</sup> A. Sinfield. *Gay and After*. (London: Serpent’s Tail, 1998), p.149.

<sup>229</sup> Ibid, p.150.

<sup>230</sup> Meyer. *The Politics and Poetics of Camp*, p.1.

<sup>231</sup> Ibid, p.3.



uptight”.<sup>232</sup> A number of incidents are described by witnesses as providing the flashpoint, including a drag queen taking a swing at a police officer and a cross-dressed dyke being slapped on the head with a nightstick. It seems very possible, however, that a number of these type of events within a short space of time, made this night’s scenario different from previous police raids. This occasion provoked a unique “reaction of the drag queens, dykes, street people, and bar boys who confronted the police first with jeers and high camp and then with a hail of coins, paving stones and parking meters”.<sup>233</sup>

The Stonewall Riots’ enduring place in LGBT history can be understood by considering Kershaw’s assertion that, “the longer-term effects of a crisis of authenticating conventions will depend centrally on their success in engaging with the fundamental values of the audience; both outrage and a sense of righteousness can last a long time when the most cherished symbols of belief are desecrated or celebrated.”<sup>234</sup> The customers of the Stonewall Bar had lost one cherished symbol on that day with the funeral of actress Judy Garland, a huge gay icon and “favourite of so many ‘queens’”.<sup>235</sup> As Sylvia Rivera recalls “twenty thousand people had waited up to four hours in the blistering heat to view her body at Frank E.Campbell’s funeral home”.<sup>236</sup> In her recollections to Duberman, she recalled becoming completely hysterical and announcing “It’s the end of an era”.<sup>237</sup> Judy Garland’s symbolism as a gay icon had been associated with the fairy tale iconography of the “Wizard of Oz”<sup>238</sup> in which she starred. The discrimination associated with being gay could be bypassed to a certain degree through incorporating elements of the magical, and indeed camp, into performances of gay in a rundown bar which bore little resemblance to Oz. With Garland’s demise the fairy tale appeared to be over and a new more, violent time was heralded in. While Stonewall itself did not qualify as a symbol at the time of the riot, the events of this night and the mythology later attached to it made a seedy backstreet bar a symbol of pride for an international gay community as being the place where they fought back against a disapproving authority. The heavy handed performance of policing on that night led to a performance of camp that was violent in response. Camp might have been political in the past, but it had never been so publically violent, so this performance was surprising for

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<sup>232</sup> Duberman *Stonewall*, p.196.

<sup>233</sup> B.D.Adam, *The Rise of a Gay and Lesbian Movement, Revised Edition*. (New York: Twayne, 1995), p.81.

<sup>234</sup> B. Kershaw. *The Politics of Performance: Radicaal Theatre as Cultural Intervention*. (London & New York: Routledge, 1992), p.27.

<sup>235</sup> D. Altman. *Homosexual Oppression and Liberation*. (New York & London: New York University Press, 1971), p.27.

<sup>236</sup> Duberman *Stonewall*, p.191.

<sup>237</sup> *Ibid*.

<sup>238</sup> *The Wizard of Oz* (Film), 1939, Metro-Goldwyn-Mayer productions.

participants and spectators. The police retreated back into the bar and left the onlookers in control of the street outside; a group of people, which Duberman tells us, “bellowed in triumph and pent-up rage”.<sup>239</sup> Lighter fluid and matches were thrown into the bar, which now imprisoned the police, and at 2:55am a call went out for the Tactical Patrol Force to come and assist the officers trying to deal with the Stonewall crowd. The rioters retreated but “contrary to police expectations”<sup>240</sup> did not break up and run. The unexpectedness of camp individuals becoming physically violent made it a situation that the police seemed less able to deal with. The drag queens and other Stonewall customers were responding to the advances of the law officials with a spontaneously conceived dramaturgy of protest and Stonewall became a place to be celebrated through its own desecration.

When considering such performances, Kershaw suggests we should ask ourselves:

How do the forms of popular protest embody their historical context through their location in identifiable traditions; and how do these same forms crack open new traditions, disrupt socio-political expectations and produce new kinds of radicalism in an increasingly mediatised and globalised world?<sup>241</sup>

The events of the Stonewall Riot can be considered protest as performance as they measure up to each of these criteria. The performance of camp was in keeping with the historical context against which it sits, in that camp is defined as the “total body of performative practices and strategies used to enact a queer identity, with the enactment defined as the production of social visibility”.<sup>242</sup> The Stonewall Riot was in keeping with the traditional camp performance associated with drag queens and many gay men but was altered to include these individuals in conflict. Camp is a style which favours “exaggeration, artifice and extremity”<sup>243</sup> while existing in tension with popular culture and in affiliation with homosexual culture. It is also important to consider that, especially at that time, “the person who can recognise camp, who sees things as campy, or can camp is a person outside the cultural mainstream”<sup>244</sup> and this describes many of the patrons of the Stonewall bar. Camp has been compared to a jewel as it is inscribed with preciousness and luxury “and draws its significance when, and as, culturally constructed”<sup>245</sup> in direct relation to a normative hegemonic culture. Stonewall’s customers accepted their place in this cultural paradigm until,

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<sup>239</sup> Duberman *Stonewall*, p.193.

<sup>240</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>241</sup> Kershaw. *The Radical in Performance*. (London & New York: Routledge, 1999), p.92.

<sup>242</sup> Meyer. *The Politics and Poetics of Camp*, p.5.

<sup>243</sup> F. Cleto. *Camp: Queer Aesthetics and the Performing Subject*. (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 1999), p.4.

<sup>244</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>245</sup> *Ibid.*, p.1.

on that night, they felt pushed too far. Their response was surprising because they retained the elements of camp in their performance while responding with violence, unlike any performance of communal gay identity up to that point. The notion of pride being a quiet dignity in response to stigma had been escalated in this scenario. That stigma had been translated into direct action and the response was, unexpectedly, equally as forceful.

As a result, the events became ‘news’, providing the first internationally recognised public performance of gay opposition and liberation to be circulated in the press. As the *Village Voice* reported: “The sudden specter of gay power erected its brazen head and spat out a fairy tale the likes of which the area had never seen” and the conflict with the police caused those involved to “assert presence, possibility, and pride until the early hours of Monday morning”.<sup>246</sup>

At one stage, the police found themselves face to face with a mocking chorus line of queens singing:

*We are the Stonewall girls*

*We wear our hair in curls*

*We wear no underwear*

*We show our pubic hair ...*

*We wear our dungarees*

*Above our nelly knees!*<sup>247</sup>

Duberman describes the scene as “a deliciously witty, contemptuous counterpoint to the tactical police forces’ brute force, a tactic that transformed an otherwise traditionally macho eye-for-an-eye combat and that provided at least the glimpse of a different and revelatory kind of consciousness.”<sup>248</sup> This different form of consciousness drew its performative impact from the adoption of camp in a scenario where it appeared shockingly out of place. Meyer identifies a number of interpretations which identify ‘camping it up’ as “apolitical, aestheticized and frivolous” and a traditional form of assertion of identity “common in homosexual gatherings”.<sup>249</sup> In contrast, Meyer applies Judith Butler’s assertion that gender roles do not portray a specific inner reality but rather, they are achieved through consistent and repeated performativity of traditionally accepted roles relating to gender which are

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<sup>246</sup> L. Truscott IV, “Gay Power Comes to Sheridan Square” *Village Voice*, 3<sup>rd</sup> July 1969

<sup>247</sup> Duberman *Stonewall*, p.200.

<sup>248</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>249</sup> Altman. *Homosexual Oppression and Liberation*, p.38.

performed and re-performed for spectators who understand the hegemonic discourses that are being created. He points out that maintaining or disrupting hegemonic norms ultimately “comes down to the fact that, at some time, the actor must *do* something in order to produce the social visibility by which identity is manifested”.<sup>250</sup> Inside the “safe” space of the Stonewall bar these social performances had been understood and accepted while outside in the streets, in direct opposition to the forces of the law, the performance of camp created a different meaning.

Dennis Altman’s *Homosexual Oppression and Liberation*, written in the year following the riots, was hailed as one of the earliest works of the gay liberation movement to consider the diversities within that movement. Altman could see at that time that “gays have for a long time acted out their expected stereotypes” and this had led to a “conversion of apathy/abjection to affirmation/pride”.<sup>251</sup> Up to Altman’s consideration of homosexual liberation and beyond, camp had been an accepted signifier of a homosexual identity. It has been argued that, “camp was deemed flippant and demeaning”<sup>252</sup> for the homosexual because it provided a performance for straight spectators that made sexual difference safe. In the scene of a battle, pride in a queer identity was reclaimed and this spurred on the Stonewall patrons whilst confronting the police. They were united in their anger and their difference, which in turn made them an ideological threat.

Kershaw highlights how a whole community can come to respond to the symbolism of a possible world and, in this protest, that world was seen to be a place where the Stonewall patrons took pride in their difference rather than being ashamed and oppressed by the forces of authority. This has led to many romantic notions surrounding this night for the benefit of secondary audiences who have been told the story. Altman refers to it as “the Boston Tea Party, as it were, of the movement”<sup>253</sup> and quotes a character in an Edmund White novel who refers to it as “our Bastille day . . . the turning point in our lives”.<sup>254</sup> However, what is clear today is “the Stonewall queens instigated Gay Liberation not because they were camp or wore drag – there was nothing new about that; but because they fought the police”.<sup>255</sup> Camp had been traditionally linked to hegemonic notions of the feminine as being weak or passive

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<sup>250</sup> Meyer. *The Politics and Poetics of Camp*, p.4.

<sup>251</sup> Altman. *Homosexual Oppression and Liberation*, p.150.

<sup>252</sup> Meyer. *The Politics and Poetics of Camp*, p.6.

<sup>253</sup> Altman. *Homosexual Oppression and Liberation*, p.126.

<sup>254</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>255</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>255</sup> Sinfield. *Gay and After*, p.33.

so the fact the participants fought back while retaining the camp elements of their performance reinvented camp in that moment as a performance of protest in which individuals could be seen as taking pride in their queer identities and would inspire future performances of pride.

## Gay Liberation and the Parade

The effects of Stonewall reverberated and two meetings took place in July 1969 in New York, organised by the Mattachine Action Committee and principally attended by young gay radicals who had participated in, or been inspired by the Stonewall Riots. While some of the committee claimed “rocks through windows don’t open doors,”<sup>256</sup> there was also the sense that there was an opportunity for an alliance between gay rights campaigners and those other groups already fighting for civil rights such as the Black Panthers, feminist campaigners and antiwar activists. At the second meeting, the suggestion of the formation of a Gay Liberation Front (GLF) received almost unanimous support with the name being described as a way of “paying homage to the liberation struggles in Algeria and Vietnam”.<sup>257</sup> The word gay was chosen based upon the belief that homosexual was a word informed by medical discourse, with connotations of illness and the kind of passive weakness traditionally associated with camp performance. ‘Gay’, on the other hand, was how homosexuals chose to refer to one another as the “word symbolized self-definition and, as such, was a recognition of internal power”.<sup>258</sup> A series of open meetings followed and in the first issue of the GLF’s paper, *Come Out!*, the claim was made that “we are going to transform the society at large through the open realization of our own consciousness”.<sup>259</sup> The Gay Liberation Front took no stand on civil rights or legislation but instead called for individuals to free themselves from the restrictions associated with gender and sexuality claiming:

That complete sexual liberation for all people cannot come about unless existing social institutions are abolished. We reject society’s attempt to impose sexual roles and definitions on our nature.<sup>260</sup>

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<sup>256</sup> Duberman. *Stonewall*, p.205.

<sup>257</sup> Duberman. *Stonewall*, p.207.

<sup>258</sup> S.M.Engel. *The Unfinished Revolution: Social Movement Theory and the Gay and Lesbian Movement*. (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2001), p.43.

<sup>259</sup> Duberman. *Stonewall*, p.207.

<sup>260</sup> *Ibid.*

In this way, the GLF's call for revolution allowed for the beginnings of queer theory <sup>261</sup> and this challenge to the dominant thinking of the time intrinsically served to support the challenges being tackled by the civil rights movements of other oppressed minorities.

When the events at the Stonewall bar were commemorated twelve months later on 28<sup>th</sup> June 1970, the Christopher Street Liberation Day March was referred to as a pride march by activist, Brenda Howard. She was to become known as "The Mother of Pride"<sup>262</sup> due to her work in organising this march but also due to her idea for an annual pride day, which has grown into a global phenomenon. Fred Sargeant, a retired lieutenant from the Stamford, Connecticut police service, who participated in this first event, recalls that "we had no idea how it would turn out. We weren't even certain we'd be granted a permit".<sup>263</sup> Up until the very beginnings of the march, Sargeant feared the event would fail to happen and even when the procession began he was surprised to look back and see the number of people participating:

We stretched out as far as I could see, thousands of us. There were no floats, no music, no boys in briefs. The cops turned their backs on us to convey their disdain, but the masses of people kept carrying signs and banners, chanting and waving to surprised onlookers.<sup>264</sup>

Gay identity was being performed and reinterpreted within this quote. The idea of "boys in briefs" providing a traditionally camp performance would be the type of spectacle that onlookers would be expecting to see in such a march. Indeed, over time the march would be incorporated into a multitude of pride events where it would become a parade and the boys in briefs would be welcomed back as part of the flamboyant spectacle of celebration but, in this march at this time the performance was simply a show of numbers. Of people who onlookers may not interpret as gay or lesbian in day to day encounters but who had chosen to gather here, on mass, to demonstrate that they were part of these communities. The sense that there was a need at this time for more performance of gay identity was very clear. At a previous Mattachine-organised event, one of the organisers had reprimanded two women for holding hands in public saying there should be none of that. If members of the gay community are prepared to censor their public performance, possibly due to the dangers such performance

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<sup>261</sup> As discussed in Chapter One.

<sup>262</sup> *Brenda Howard Homepage* – online at <<http://www.brendahoward.org/>> [Accessed 10<sup>th</sup> March 2013]

<sup>263</sup> F. Sargeant. '1970: A First-Person Account of the First Gay Pride March'. *Village Voice*. June 22<sup>nd</sup> 2010, <<http://www.villagevoice.com/news/1970-a-first-person-account-of-the-first-gay-pride-march-6429338>> [Accessed June 25 2013]

<sup>264</sup> *Ibid*.

opened them up to, then pride has little value in lived experience. This parade was a direct provocation for tolerance by actively courting persecution and discrimination. The onlookers may have been surprised and the police may have turned their backs to them, but the simple act of this many people being prepared to endure this treatment created a spectacle for the larger public which challenged some of their preconceived ideas around what it meant to be gay.

Schechner considers the “scenography and choreography” of “public direct theatre”, which he identifies as occasions where large public spaces are transformed into theatres and “collective reflexivity is performed”.<sup>265</sup> This reflexivity relates to “self-awareness, and the awareness of the awareness”<sup>266</sup>; in short, the performer is aware of his or her performance and potential effects or challenges that it might provide for the spectator or audience. If the culture in which they exist has convinced them to be ashamed of being gay then a choice to perform as gay is an attempt to assume pride and to display it to others. Similarly, Baz Kershaw considers performance to be an “ideological transaction between a company of performers and a community of their audience. Ideology is the source of the collective ability of performers and audience to make more or less common sense of the signs used in performance”<sup>267</sup> within a specific context and space. The relationship and exchange of meaning between performers/protesters and spectators varies according to whether “official culture or rebellious, even revolutionary, counterforces are on the move”<sup>268</sup> as their narratives are not the same. “Those taking to the streets in a classic or modern festival know beforehand they have only too short a time to enjoy extraordinary liberties. The idea is to squeeze as much pleasure as possible from a brief time and a well-defined space”.<sup>269</sup> The pride march or pride parade are their two different performances geared specifically to differing public with differing messages. “Oppositely, the pleasures of the revolutionary carnival derive from its existence as an antiofficial event, and the illusionary but very strong desire to extend, into as long a time and as big a space as possible, liberties taken”.<sup>270</sup>

With this performance being a march, designed to show support, solidarity and strength amongst the gay community, the chant “Say it clear, say it loud. Gay is good, gay is

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<sup>265</sup> Schechner. *The Future of Ritual: Writings on Culture and Performance*, p.30.

<sup>266</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>267</sup> Kershaw. *The Politics of Performance: Radical Theatre as Cultural Intervention*, p.16.

<sup>268</sup> Schechner. *The Future of Ritual: Writings on Culture and Performance*, p.82.

<sup>269</sup> *Ibid.*, p.86.

<sup>270</sup> *Ibid.*

proud”<sup>271</sup> was selected. This was the message that marchers sought to convey to an audience that was witnessing something that was then outside ordinary experience. Despite its somewhat unconfident beginnings, this manifestation of direct theatre could be understood “at certain key moments”, as Schechner claims it should, to be “an exposure of what is wrong with the way things are and an acting out of the desired hoped-for new social relations”.<sup>272</sup> In a similar way to the Stonewall Riots, the march provided “raw material, for a near-universally displayed secondary theatre”<sup>273</sup> when the event was reported and subsequently interpreted by a wider public via television broadcasts and the newspaper media. Gay identities performed in this manner became visible. As a result, similar marches took place in Los Angeles and Chicago and, the following year, marches such as these began to spring up around the world.

The British branch of Gay Liberation Front was founded in London in October 1970. It presented public symbols of protest as a means to challenge “the use of ‘pretty policemen’ agents provocateurs to entrap gay men into attempting acts of gross indecency”.<sup>274</sup> In particular, this practice targeted men who visited public places, such as public toilets or parks, for the purpose of meeting people for same sex sexual encounters. This became known as ‘cruising’ and was seen as a solitary, private endeavour associated specifically with gay men and the perceived unsavoury way in which they met other men to who they might have sex. This practice was maintained, however, through the laws in place at the time and then again, over thirty years later, when the Sexual Offences Act 2003 continued to actively prohibit sexual activity in a public toilet while failing to make mention of sex in any other public places. For public protests to be staged for the eyes of the media, with a direct aim to draw attention to this situation in the 1970s was a bold example of performance beginning to be used as protest in the United Kingdom at that time.

In the early 1970s, the gay rights movement in England was divided between “assimilationist and liberationist groups”.<sup>275</sup> The principal cause of the assimilationists was the campaign for parliamentary law reform in the 1960s, which had been driven by the Homosexual Law Reform Society, and was then superseded by the Manchester-based North Western Homosexual Law Reform Committee. This, in turn, evolved into CHE (the Committee for Homosexual Equality) in 1969 which became a national organisation and

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<sup>271</sup> Sargeant. ‘1970: A First-Person Account of the First Gay Pride March’, Online

<sup>272</sup> Schechner. *The Future of Ritual: Writings on Culture and Performance*, p.88.

<sup>273</sup> *Ibid*, p.87.

<sup>274</sup> C. Summerskill. *Gateway to Heaven*. (London: Tollington Press, 2012), p.97.

<sup>275</sup> R. Howes. *Gay West*. (Bristol: Silverwood, 2011), p.25.



attracted support from many well-known public figures. Then, in 1971, CHE renamed itself again as the Campaign for Homosexual Equality. The CHE was more of a social network than a political movement but provided “the nearest thing to a mass political organisation which the LGBT community in Britain has experienced”<sup>276</sup> up until this period in time. Over this same period of time, the Gay Liberation Front adopted a more revolutionary and performative approach to CHE, employing slogans, in a similar way as feminist movements who had adopted such terms as “The personal is the political”. The GLF appropriated slogans of this nature with an “emphasis on coming out, or assuming one’s homosexuality openly and proudly”.<sup>277</sup> Although conflicts within the organisation meant the UK branch was relatively short lived, and it splintered apart in 1974, the effect it had on attitudes of LGBT people in the UK seems to have been incredibly galvanizing. One anonymous participant in a London LGBT oral history project shared that, “for me, getting involved with Gay Liberation transformed everything”. He goes on to recall his first meeting as something completely outside his experience up until that point:

Different ages, sizes, degrees of prettiness, ugliness or whatever and we were all there together and that was tremendously liberating, amazingly liberating. But it did more than that because Gay Liberation was also a political movement, so politically it radicalised me . . . So it was like a personal transformation, a political transformation, a cultural transformation, all at once.<sup>278</sup>

Writing, just prior to this time, Altman suggested that “the best social analysis grows out of personal experience”<sup>279</sup> and his text was on hand to consolidate much of the thinking taking place around gay politics of the time. Jeffrey Weeks notes that “some fortunate books anticipate change, capturing a moment and pushing it forward into a hitherto unimagined future.”<sup>280</sup> He attributes the book’s impact, both in America where it first appeared and further afield, to conceptualising a notion that had not been considered by the gay communities during the 1960s: “The idea that homosexual people were oppressed, not only individually but as a group or category of human beings”.<sup>281</sup> Taking a step forward, however, was Altman’s additional assertion that “homosexuals acting collectively could

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<sup>276</sup> *Ibid*, p.26.

<sup>277</sup> *Ibid*.

<sup>278</sup> Summerskill *Gateway to Heaven*, p.105.

<sup>279</sup> Altman. *Homosexual Oppression and Liberation.*, p.16.

<sup>280</sup> Weeks. *Making Sexual History*, p.75.

<sup>281</sup> *Ibid*, p.76.

transform the conditions of their individual and social lives that we could be ‘liberated’, was transformative; in the language of the time, ‘revolutionary’”.<sup>282</sup>

The idea of acting collectively can be seen in the adoption of the march or parade where the minority could come together to re-author themselves as a majority in that context, and so effect revolution in that moment. Kershaw tells us that carnival or parade “undermines the distinction between observer and participant; it takes place outside existing social and cultural distinctions, occupying real space-time in streets and open spaces”.<sup>283</sup> While a carnival or a parade are not necessarily the same thing both involve a step away from regular day to day experience. A parade can tap into notions of the carnival and create a space where regular boundaries in culture can be tested and explored. At the same time, however, parades can also involve a performance of the strictest forms of social convention such as a military parade. Manifestations of the carnival can “correspond privately and publically respectively, to the ‘staging’ of the normally repressed roles of certain binary structures”<sup>284</sup> and so enables an opportunity for “the society involved to mediate into periodic ritual the culturally structured ‘otherness’ of governing categories”.<sup>285</sup> In this way the parade can provide the gay community with a platform and a means of “challenging the hierarchies of normality in a counterhegemonic, satirical and sartorial parody of power”<sup>286</sup> by creating a temporary visibility of alternative discourses that are normally excluded from day to day life. If the festival or carnival is defined in terms of “spatially and temporally limited events, usually held annually where theatre and/or performance is staged and celebrated” then we can see how some specific festivals or parades can provide a recurring safe time or place to challenge boundaries and continue to “foster diverse community identities”.<sup>287</sup>

The parade therefore becomes a performance of a political stance which Altman saw occurring between collective action of like-minded individuals, which, in turn enabled political movements and stances which could challenge and change mainstream perceptions of homosexuality. Thirty years later, Weeks argued that this unity served to vastly expand the lesbian and gay world instead of changing the public perception of gay communities. In

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<sup>282</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>283</sup> Kershaw. *The Politics of Performance: Radical Theatre as Cultural Intervention*, p73

<sup>284</sup> Stallybrass & White. *The Politics & Poetics of Transgression*, p.189.

<sup>285</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>286</sup> B. Kershaw. *The Politics of Performance: Radical Theatre as Cultural Intervention*. (London & New York: Routledge, 1992), p.72.

<sup>287</sup> P. Allain, & J. Harvie, *The Routledge Companion to Theatre and Performance*. (London & New York: Routledge, 2006), p.156.

many ways this could be seen as a revolution in its own right but, as increased representation served to affect attitudes and perceptions. Weeks proposes that:

The relationship between ‘movement’ and ‘community’ has shifted. No longer is it possible or desirable to counterpose one to the other. On the contrary, a sense of community is what makes possible a movement or movements, though each is necessarily challenged and changed by the other. But community does more than simply affirm a collective existence, crucial as that is. It also makes possible a greater sense of individuality.<sup>288</sup>

Representation of otherness becomes possible in these collective performances and, in this space, shared causes and meanings are communicated through certain conventions of symbols and language. As a community (or communities) of interest, collectives of LGBT individuals share “networks of association that are predominantly characterised by their commitment to a common interest”.<sup>289</sup> A willingness to publicly perform in ways that highlight these links to non LGB or T communities can challenge unconsidered assumptions. In this way, individuals can draw strength and solidarity from their peers while acknowledging and taking pride in diversity although it can potentially lead to a response of “repressive tolerance” from the mainstream. While this may not be the revolution that Altman anticipated the possibility does exist to provoke changes in attitude towards the gay communities.

## The Call for Direct Action in the United States

In the United States and beyond, the 1970s and the beginning of the 1980s was seeing increasing public representation of LGB and T communities and this brought more people together with what Weeks identified an “ease of sexual interaction”<sup>290</sup> which was to make possible both the tragically rapid spread of HIV and AIDS in the male gay community after 1980, *and* the extraordinary gay response to it, with its massive mobilization of activism, care, fund raising and safer sex”.<sup>291</sup> This response was characterised strongly in the formation in the US of a group called ACT UP, which stood for AIDS Coalition to Unleash Power. The organisation was formed in March 1987 following a speech by author and

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<sup>288</sup> Weeks. *Making Sexual History*, p.82.

<sup>289</sup> B. Kershaw, *The Politics of Performance: Radical Theatre as Cultural Intervention*. (London & New York: Routledge, 1992), p.31.

<sup>290</sup> Weeks, *Making Sexual History*, p.82.

<sup>291</sup> *Ibid.* Italics in the original text.

playwright Larry Kramer, who was frustrated with lack of concern on the part of medical practitioners and politicians in response to the AIDS epidemic. Kramer challenged the gay community in attendance to engage in political action to highlight the epidemic and their response was a resounding yes. Two days later three hundred people attended the first meeting instigated by Kramer in New York.

Reflecting on this meeting for the ACT UP oral history project, which is a collection of over one hundred interviews with surviving members of the group, carried out by Jim Hubbard and Sarah Schulman, former member Ann Philbin recalls:

They were just the most impressive people I ever saw . . . You wanted to sit in that room because first of all, you had no place else to go with your anger, but also, it was incredibly entertaining. They were gorgeous, you know, they were sexy, they were angry.<sup>292</sup>

The pride which Philbin associates with this group is clear in this statement. She sees them as impressive and making bold statements at a time when these actions were needed. She was proud to be among them then and have the opportunity to perform that pride for herself and her community of peers. She recalls the time in the interview with very similar feelings of pride. The anger of the group seemed to take its lead from Kramer's own, which had been made manifest in another way, prior to this rally, in his play *The Normal Heart* (1985). In this theatrical manifesto, designed to attract media attention to the medical crisis, he included a number of autobiographical elements. The lead character Ned, a writer, gives a voice to many of Kramer's concerns:

Until I die I will never forgive this newspaper and this Mayor for ignoring this epidemic which is killing so many of my friends . . . and every gay man who is unable to come forward now and fight to save his own life is truly helping kill the rest of us.<sup>293</sup>

The New York production of the play<sup>294</sup> used a very simple set consisting of very little furniture and whitewashed plywood walls. These walls, and the other walls of the theatre, were inscribed with facts and figures such as the total number of AIDS cases nationally and the words "and counting". Kramer points out in the stage directions that for the New York production "as the Centers for Disease Control revise all figures regularly, so did we,

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<sup>292</sup> A. Philbin – Interview 011 *ACT UP Oral History Project*. Online - <<http://www.actuporalhistory.org/interviews>> [Accessed 12 March 2013]

<sup>293</sup> L. Kramer. *The Normal Heart*. (London: Nick Hern Books, 1985), p.34.

<sup>294</sup> *Ibid*, p.2.

crossing out old numbers and placing the new figure beneath it”.<sup>295</sup> This action served to keep the reality of the situation at the heart of the fiction of the play. Other facts and figures included the number of cases in children, the official number of cases in gay and straight individuals and vast expanses of wall were covered with names of those who had died, in a similar fashion to a war memorial. This visual but unspoken aspect of the play could be seen as a didactic exchange between the performers and their audience and a means by which that ideology, intrinsically attached to this piece of political theatre could be conveyed. It provided a “means by which the aims and intentions of theatre companies connect with the responses interpretations of their audience.”<sup>296</sup> The reality of the AIDS crisis was being conveyed to the audience by drawing attention to hard facts.

The play, like the actions of ACT UP, which will be discussed later in the chapter, was a call to arms which portrayed the AIDS crisis as a battle or as a war that must be fought. Within the New York’s gay community, “a new generation 20 years younger than gay liberation joined marches to call for a response from the governments of the time”.<sup>297</sup> They began to identify with aspects of its history and to take a stand against a new wave of prejudice as the effects of the AIDS epidemic on them was not seen as a priority by politicians and health services. This is acknowledged in the play when another character says to Ned that, “after years of liberation, you have helped make sex dirty again for us – terrible and forbidden”.<sup>298</sup> In response to this accusation, Kramer has Ned argue that gay culture is more than simply sex and instead offers names such as Marlowe, Whitman, Da Vinci and Turing as exemplary of a gay genealogy:

The only way we’ll have real pride is when we demand recognition of a culture that isn’t just sexual. It’s all there – all through history we’ve been there; but we have to claim, and identify who was in it, and articulate what’s in our minds and hearts and all the creative contributions to this earth.<sup>299</sup>

This desire to articulate what was in the gay community’s hearts and minds would indicate a very deliberate need to take pride in who they are and a willingness to embody that pride for all to see, in a challenge to the exclusion and shame that has been associated with being gay. Kramer was keen to present a sense of community which was based more than just some sexual practices that some find uncomfortable. This willingness to stand up and be counted

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<sup>295</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>296</sup> Kershaw. *The Politics of Performance: Radical Theatre as Cultural Intervention*, p.16.

<sup>297</sup> B.D. Adam, *The Rise of a Gay and Lesbian Movement, Revised Edition*. (New York: Twayne, 1995), p.162.

<sup>298</sup> Kramer. *The Normal Heart*, p.65.

<sup>299</sup> *Ibid.*

was made even more urgent by the need to rally against the AIDS epidemic which was perceived as a direct threat to much of the gay community both in terms of the effects of the disease itself and also fear and increased prejudice that it engendered in wider society. In the preface to an edition of the play in 1993, Kramer reflects on how remarkable the years since the onset of AIDS had been, calling them “hideous, heartbreaking, inspirational, and filled with love and hate. There was nothing else I could write about and nothing else I want to write about until I too, am dead”.<sup>300</sup> For him, ACT UP was the response to this remarkable time and a means by which people could respond.

ACT UP provided individuals with a means to embrace the performance of the protest outside of the theatres in order to reflect their dissatisfaction with the world around them through collective solidarity. Ann Northrop, a journalist interviewed about her activism with ACT UP recalls her time with the group and her participation in the Wall Street II protest. The latter took place one year after the formation of the group and its initial Wall Street protest condemning the business community for profiting from AIDS medication. “ACT UP was willing to confront all these things directly, to go out in the street and scream and yell. It made complete sense to me”.<sup>301</sup> Wall Street II took place, in March 1988, at a busy location on the street during rush hour and split into smaller groups.

One group would take to the street and sit down and all be arrested. Then as soon as they were cleared up, the next group would go in. About one hundred people were arrested. I was one of them. That was my first arrest ever. It was fabulous. At one time, getting arrested seemed like the scariest thing in the world to me. But somehow, during the Wall Street II protest, sitting in the street just seemed to me to be a perfectly sensible thing to do.<sup>302</sup>

This passion and willingness to publicly speak out about AIDS was due to individuals identifying with a cause and a societal danger that was bigger than they were. It took priority over any reluctance they may have had in the public performance of their sexuality and encouraged them to make a visible stand against the government’s reluctance to engage with the AIDS epidemic.

ACT UP’s rallies, speak-outs, spray-painting, placard-painting, and leaflet-distribution both represented a wide range of opportunities for participation and were all

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<sup>300</sup> *Ibid*, pvii

<sup>301</sup> E. Marcus *Making Gay History: The Half-Century fight for Lesbian and Gay Equal Rights*. (New York: Perennial, 2002), p.307.

<sup>302</sup> *Ibid*.

oriented to attract media coverage.<sup>303</sup> Many of the group's participants worked in the media industry and could innovate activism in ways other members had never before experienced. A lime green picture of Ronald Reagan with the word "AIDSGATE" scrawled across it was one image created by the group (drawing on iconography around political Watergate scandal of the 1970s) to gain the attention of the American mass media and subsequently a wider secondary audience outside of the gay community.

This publically performed response was instrumental in shaping future responses from the gay community worldwide. Australian-born Peter Tatchell, who is arguably the UK's most recognised campaigner for LGBT rights, was part of the London chapter of the organisation in the late 1980s and notes that ACT UP's protests were "a classic example of the power of direct action ... these daring, defiant protests were a massive morale booster for many in the queer community. Instead of seeing themselves as passive victims of prejudice, many fags and dykes were inspired to expect nothing less than total acceptance and full citizenship."<sup>304</sup> These performances of direct action were to be at the forefront of his thinking when subsequently forming the Outrage! group which would use similar actions and engagements to highlight problems and unfair approaches to social issues surrounding the LGBT communities.

## Campaigning and Direct Action in the United Kingdom

In 1987, the British Prime Minister (and close political ally of President Reagan), Margaret Thatcher, used her third election victory speech to call into question "those who claim an inalienable right to be gay".<sup>305</sup> Her government followed this up by the implementation of Section 28<sup>306</sup> of the Local Government Act 1988 which made it illegal for a local authority to "'intentionally promote homosexuality' or to promote teaching in schools of 'the acceptability of homosexuality as a pretended family relationship'".<sup>307</sup> Looking back on its results in 1992, Peter Tatchell noted that Section 28 encouraged at least thirty five instances of self-censorship by local authorities fearful of prosecution, including the refusal

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<sup>303</sup> Engel *The Unfinished Revolution: Social Movement Theory and the Gay and Lesbian Movement*, p49

<sup>304</sup> P.Tatchell. *The Cathartic, Catalytic Power of Direct Action*.

<[http://www.peteratchell.net/direct\\_action/shocktactics.htm](http://www.peteratchell.net/direct_action/shocktactics.htm)> [Accessed 18th March 2013]

<sup>305</sup> M. Cook. *A Gay History of Britain*. (Oxford: Greenwood, 2007), p.204.

<sup>306</sup> Also known as Clause 28 before being ratified in Parliament.

<sup>307</sup> P. Tatchell, *Europe in the Pink*. (London: Gay Men's Press, 1992), p.99.

of a local council to fund a lesbian community newsletter; the cancellation of a school performance a gay-themed play, *Trapped in Time*; the attempts to ban student lesbian and gay societies from meeting on college premises; and the rejection of a grant application from a Scottish Homosexual Action Group towards the cost of a poetry and music festival.<sup>308</sup>

Although no prosecution ever occurred under this piece of legislation, the damaging effects of local authorities' self-censorship supported strongly the stigmatization that Altman had identified almost twenty years prior. Uncertainty on the part of local authorities led to the removal of any engagement with content which could be seen as in breach of the clause. In this way, the act sought to remove any pride being attached to the signification of LGBT identity and culture which involved local authorities. The wider implication of this was that any display of homosexuality was being inscribed, by association, as being less valid than heterosexual lifestyles. The implementation of the clause has been described as a means to "reflect a broader hardening of attitudes"<sup>309</sup> with regards to gay individuals in the United Kingdom. The 1980s produced "a cultural ethos mainly characterised by polarised attitudes: between the rich and poor, between black and white, between north and south" and so served to encourage "the theatricalisation of protest and resistance"<sup>310</sup> which was employed in response to the clause on stage as well in day to day life.

It was as a response to this legislation that the Stonewall organisation was formed in 1989, taking its name from the Stonewall riots over twenty years earlier, and including Ian McKellen and Michael Cashman amongst its founders. Both men were well known actors and felt they had to come out publically as gay men to combat the potential removal of positive portrayals of homosexuality from the media. They also felt it important to draw attention to the detrimental effect it would have on the arts to remove representations of homosexuality from the cultural sphere. Their involvement made the formation of the organisation a very public affair and so responses to Section 28 garnered greater publicity than the legislation itself, visibly challenging the negative attitudes it fostered and reinforced. Through such direct representation, public figures such as McKellen were given the opportunity to affect the hearts and minds of the population of the United Kingdom. In an interview with *The Independent* in July 2000, he confirmed the only good thing about the legislation was it had caused him to come out. As he put it, "A bit late in the day but it

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<sup>308</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>309</sup> Cook. *A Gay History of Britain*, p.205.

<sup>310</sup> Kershaw. *The Politics of Performance: Radical Theatre as Cultural Intervention*, p.16.



remains the best thing I ever did". He also went on to reflect that the legislation represented the "homosexual fallacy", explaining that "homosexuality is bad (or sad or mad if you prefer), therefore all lesbians and gay men are bad, sad or mad. This fallacy coexists with another. Homosexuality is catching. Without the most punitive laws and restrictions, ordinary men and women will abandon their families and strike out for a homosexual lifestyle".<sup>311</sup> With popular public figures signifying that their lives ran contrary to these widely accepted misconceptions, the publically portrayed identities of gay men and women could be reconsidered. Indeed, much of the performance of gay identity in the 1990s took place in direct opposition to the ideas behind the Section 28 legislation.

In the years that followed, as an organization, Stonewall evolved into a lobbying group with no interest in public displays of Lesbian, Gay and Bisexual protest,<sup>312</sup> It worked towards the equalising of the age of consent for gay men, recognition of hate crimes, civil partnership legislation, lifting the ban on gay personnel in the armed forces, equality for LGB parents and equality in the workplace for LGB employees. It was a perceived indifference on Stonewall's part in the 1990s to an increasingly violent and homophobic time which eventually led to the formation of Outrage! during May 1990 in response to the murder of gay actor Michael Boothe.

Colin Richardson, writing in *The Guardian* in 2002, referred to this time as an era of "violent homophobia inspired by the advent of AIDS in the early 80s, inflamed by the tabloids and indulged by Thatcherism, [which] had fostered in gay Britain a siege mentality. And if we may have seemed paranoid, we had good reason: they really were out to get us".<sup>313</sup> Six men outside a public toilet in Elthorne Park attacked Boothe and he gave descriptions of his attackers before succumbing to the effects of internal injuries and dying six hours later. In July 1990, hundreds of people marched from the park where Michael Boothe had been murdered to Ealing town hall to hold a candlelit vigil. The vigil was selected as the most appropriate response to this situation being both respectful to the deceased and as such an appropriate ritual to perform. However, by combining a vigil with the march which is traditionally coded as a ritual or performance of protest (particularly in terms of the gay

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<sup>311</sup> "Ian Mckellen: Section 28 had one good result – it made me come out". *The Independent*. 24<sup>th</sup> October 2000. <<http://www.independent.co.uk/voices/commentators/ian-mckellen-section-28-had-one-good-result--it-made-me-come-out-709529.html>> [Accessed 10 October 2014]

<sup>312</sup> Until February 2015, Stonewall in the United Kingdom did not directly campaign on issues surrounding transgender individuals but instead claimed to work with transgender charities. Following extensive consultation, they currently campaign for Transgender rights also.

<sup>313</sup> C. Richardson. "The Worst of Times". *The Guardian*. 14th August 2002 <<http://www.theguardian.com/world/2002/aug/14/gayrights.comment>> [Accessed 13 July 2014].

community) served to provide a degree of performance in protest in direct response to these tragic events. From the group's published oral history it is recalled that:

It was from this gathering that Outrage! formed. Many members of the now defunct Gay Liberation Front, which had only continued for a few years in the United Kingdom, were involved and felt a time of direct action was again required. The group adopted a statement of aims which clearly indicated its commitment to visible defiance and performance as protest: Outrage! is a broad based group of lesbians and gay men committed to radical nonviolent direct action and civil disobedience to: Assert dignity, pride and human rights of lesbians and gay men. Fight homophobia, discrimination and violence against lesbians and gay men. Affirms the right of lesbian and gay men to sexual freedom, choice and self-determination.<sup>314</sup>

Among those attending was Peter Tatchell, advocating a similar approach to that employed by ACT UP both in the United States and also by the London chapter which had formed in 1989. In an oral history interview for the book *Outrage!*, Tatchell explains that the group “partly came into existence to fill a gap created by all things that Stonewall wasn’t,” in that “Stonewall has always had an assimilationist agenda, it doesn’t question the parameters of heterosexual society. It seeks equality within the status quo”.<sup>315</sup>

Tatchell noted that:

Many of us had been involved in London ACT UP, and saw how direct action could be effective in putting AIDS on the public agenda. We felt it was time to use similar tactics to raise the profile of and visibility of lesbian and gay issues.<sup>316</sup>

It was a time during which many believed that homophobia had not only been allowed to flourish but it had also been legislated for. Although consenting same sex sexual encounters were decriminalized, the age of consent remained 21 so men who transgressed this line or had sex in public cottaging areas were breaking the law. In 1991, the laws which prohibited soliciting were extended and prosecutions for indecency between men were at the highest they had been since the 1950s. Public order breaches could also be applied and “on these counts a couple kissing goodbye in a London street and a man dressed in women’s clothes in Aberdeen were fined £40 and £50 respectively in 1988 and 1989”.<sup>317</sup>

While Stonewall did not oppose direct action, they were “acutely aware that none of the existing organisations were talking directly to government on Clause 28, the age of

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<sup>314</sup> I. Lucas *Outrage! An Oral History* (London & New York: Cassell, 1998), p.17.

<sup>315</sup> *Ibid*, p.84.

<sup>316</sup> *Ibid*, p.8.

<sup>317</sup> Cook. *A Gay History of Britain*, p.206.

consent, immigration, adoption and parenting, housing rights and partnership recognition”<sup>318</sup> and believed this was an area where they could intervene to effect change. Rather than engaging in public performances of pride, however, one participant recalls:

It was much more like a small company, talking to Parliamentarians, which nobody had done before. It had been greeted with a huge amount of resentment by existing right-on professional activists, who were horrified by the straightening of gay activism which it represented.<sup>319</sup>

Outrage! very deliberately defined themselves and their membership as ‘queer’ and felt this queerness could be best expressed through direct action that was prepared to step outside of the normal conventions of society to challenge the status quo. The word gay, as it had been employed in the Gay Liberation Front, carried less impact at this time and it was being argued that “developing the lesbian and gay community as a focus of counter-culture and counter-power . . . [was] more difficult for straights to ignore”.<sup>320</sup> As a result, use of the word queer by activists in the United States, including those involved with ACT UP, was empowering Outrage! and other direct action groups, through radical political positioning and reclamation of a stigmatised word.

This was aligned to its use in academic debate “around the conventional divisions between ‘gay’ and ‘straight’. If gay defined medical and legal definition, queer defied the idea that the desire for the same sex placed the individual into a rigid identity category”.<sup>321</sup> Indeed the term queer came to represent a position where all identity categories were viewed as negotiable and performative as were, in fact, all representations of identity. Such a definition aligns direct action with notions of queering as stepping outside of perceived boundaries to gain understanding can be seen as a method by which to test generally accepted boundaries of the society in which we exist. In this way, Tatchell has explained Outrage!’s direct actions in terms of “‘art of activism’ campaigning [which] seeks to profile lesbian and gay emancipation in a way that is both educative and entertaining” whilst “claiming for the queer community public spaces and agendas that have been hitherto off limits. Our bid for justice often involves intruding – usually uninvited! – into previously all-

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<sup>318</sup> *Ibid.* p.208.

<sup>319</sup> Lucas. *Outrage! An Oral History*, p.10.

<sup>320</sup> Tatchell, P. ‘Staying out in the cold is the best way to keep warm’. *The Observer*. 19 June 1994  
<[http://www.petertatchell.net/lgbt\\_rights/gay\\_community/queers\\_doing\\_it.htm](http://www.petertatchell.net/lgbt_rights/gay_community/queers_doing_it.htm)> [Accessed 12 April 2015]

<sup>321</sup> Lucas. *Outrage! An Oral History*, p.17.

heterosexual domains where we stage symbolic spectacles that question the orthodoxy and presumptions of straight morality and culture”.<sup>322</sup>

Tatchell’s belief that emancipation could occur through performances which are both educative and entertaining recalls the ‘Efficacy-Entertainment Braid’ proposed by Richard Schechner. He sees the two hyphenated outcomes as poles of a continuum and that the affective and effective outcomes of a performance are intrinsically linked to context and function. He explains that “purpose is the most important factor in determining whether a performance is ritual or not”.<sup>323</sup> In Schechner’s identification and consideration of forms of performance, he notes that ritual plays a part in each of them via gestures and sounds. He refers to rituals as “collective memories encoded into actions. Rituals also help people (and animals) deal with difficult transitions, ambivalent relationships, hierarches, and desires that trouble, exceed or violate the norms of daily life”.<sup>324</sup> Because this is also aligned with a form of play that “gives people a chance to temporarily experience the taboo, the excessive, and the risky,”<sup>325</sup> rituals can provide stability by providing an acceptable way of performing but can also enable individuals to change and challenge aspects of their lives by affecting their own performance.<sup>326</sup> Rituals can be encouraged and maintained by official culture and Schechner notes how their own legitimacy can be propagated as “one slight of hand of official culture is to make relatively new rituals and the traditions they embody appear old and stable”.<sup>327</sup> In this way, the pride march became synonymous with expressions of gay pride by drawing upon the more traditional notions attached to marches in terms of solidarity and comradeship.

Similarly, Peter Tatchell, reflecting back on Outrage!’s performances in 2006, recalls that apparently stable traditions could be disrupted through queer direct action performances in three ways:

First, they shocked and shamed homophobes, often prompting a change of policy. Second, they secured heaps of media coverage, which raised public awareness of discrimination and added new momentum to the battle for gay civil rights. Third, these daring, defiant protests were a massive morale booster for many in the queer community. Instead of seeing themselves as

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<sup>322</sup> H. Rogers & D. Burrows. *Making a Scene* (London: Article Press, 2000), p.73.

<sup>323</sup> Schechner. *Performance Studies: An Introduction. 2<sup>nd</sup> Edition*, p.52.

<sup>324</sup> Schechner. *Performance Studies: An Introduction. 2<sup>nd</sup> Edition*, p.52.

<sup>325</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>326</sup> Two potential types of ritual being the festival or parade, as discussed earlier in this chapter, which allow for such ‘alternative’ types of performance.

<sup>327</sup> Schechner. *Performance Studies: An Introduction. 2<sup>nd</sup> Edition*, p.81.

passive victims of prejudice, many fags and dykes were inspired to expect nothing less than total acceptance and full citizenship.<sup>328</sup>

The aims to get attention from a wider audience and generate debate ties in closely with the concepts of direct theatre and direct action and also Schechner's efficacy of performance. Queer performances drawing upon often unconsidered rituals and traditions can provide raw materials to be broadcast to a far larger audience with an increased capacity to affect attitudes. All this had come into play when Outrage! had initially considered their first public performance which centred on Michael Boothe's murder. Interestingly, Tatchell is named as one of the protestors who initially favoured a more traditional march while, in more recent years, his website contains articles advocating the power of direct action.

Tatchell has outlined themes which he feels characterised the Outrage! genre of direct action:

- (i) a fusion of art with activism thought provoking imagery cause spectators to consider queer ideas,
- (ii) re-inventing the queer tradition of camp and theatricality where the self oppressive connotations often associated with these forms of performance and renegotiated with pride,
- (iii) acting out protest as a form of performance which will often lead to larger numbers of spectators and media attention,
- (iv) the politics of pleasure and the pleasuring of politics so to understand that protests should be enjoyable for those who participate in them and those who witness them. Serious messages can often be transmitted more effectively in this way,
- (v) claiming queer space by performing queer direct actions to "manifest queer identities and desires in public places from which we are normally excluded. There are still many public domains wholly or partially cordoned off to homosexuals"<sup>329</sup>

Through actions such as the pride march those limited can be tested and renegotiated and

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<sup>328</sup> Tatchell. *The Cathartic, Catalytic Power of Direct Action*. Online.

<sup>329</sup> Rogers & Burrows. *Making a Scene*, p.73.

(vi) challenging homophobic institutions and laws through performing them in a queer manner and creating questions regarding their assumed validity.<sup>330</sup>

Vigils and protest marches were quickly put aside because, as Dave Hurlbert recalls saying at the time, “we’re not going to get any media if we do that, we’ve got to do something unusual (‘outrage-ous’) in order to get any coverage. Why don’t we demonstrate where the murder occurred? Right there at the toilet!”<sup>331</sup> This set the tone for the performance on this occasion and for much of Outrage!’s subsequent demonstrations. Toby Hopkins recalls “There must have been 20 or 30 people outside with placards, walking around, doing mock cruising, generally making a noise. The group felt tremendously empowered, people were really pleased to be out there on the streets doing an action”.<sup>332</sup> This sense of pride extended beyond the individuals taking part in the performance and gave the members of Outrage! as a campaigning group a sense of what they could achieve when they combined their efforts in direct action: “It was symbolic and terribly important that Outrage! began with a controversial public action around policing and sexuality and public space and private space”.<sup>333</sup> The negative connotations of sex in public toilets was being reinterpreted and symbolised in a new manner, with pride replacing shame for the performers and their spectators.

Thus, from the outset, direct action was a cornerstone of Outrage!’s work. In 1999, Peter Tatchell suggested that “Direct action is the highest form of participatory democracy. People represent themselves. They get involved in political decision-making, and through their own efforts bring about social change”.<sup>334</sup> This approach echoes Baz Kershaw’s observation that “protest is performance wrestling successfully with the entropic resistance of histories shaped by dominant socio-political forces”.<sup>335</sup> Instead of considering the political in a theatre context, he looks for examples of performance in the political. However, he suggests that, as we have seen previously, often when we consider the relationship between the protest event and its socio-political context, “this may turn out to be by no means as transparent as protestors might wish”.<sup>336</sup> Kershaw also notes that we must consider any intended script or pre-considered scenario and how this affects the performance in the moment. This seems

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<sup>330</sup> P. Tatchell. *Protest as Performance*. <[http://www.petertatchell.net/lgbt\\_rights/outrage/protestasperformance.htm](http://www.petertatchell.net/lgbt_rights/outrage/protestasperformance.htm)> [Accessed 5th March 2013]

<sup>331</sup> Lucas. *Outrage! An Oral History*, p.19.

<sup>332</sup> Lucas *Outrage! An Oral History*, p.20.

<sup>333</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>334</sup> P. Tatchell. *Direct Action – Take Power*. <[http://www.petertatchell.net/direct\\_action/direct\\_action.htm](http://www.petertatchell.net/direct_action/direct_action.htm)> [Accessed 15th June 2013]

<sup>335</sup> Kershaw *The Radical in Performance*, p.98.

<sup>336</sup> *Ibid.*

particularly important with direct action performances as they are defined by performative considerations designed to increase their efficacy and propel them into the mass media. Also, we must remain mindful that we are usually analysing “mediations of those events rather than the events themselves”.<sup>337</sup> Often their success in being reported in the wider media and even within historical discourse is what brings them to our attention in the first place. Despite their often pre-planned nature, protests tend to include large groups of people so a degree of individuality and spontaneity is only to be expected. In short, Kershaw suggests that dramaturgy of protests tends to stress “qualities such as multiplicity, discontinuity, abrupt eruptions of dramatic intensity, sudden shifts and changes of direction, tempo or focus.”<sup>338</sup> In analysing the historical significance of these performances, we “must draw upon tradition to produce a recognisably ordered cultural performance, while never foreclosing on unpredictability, on the potential of disorder. It is that dynamic that may articulate protest to history in ways that are often unprecedented, thus making it a potent augury of change, perhaps especially when paradigms are shifting.”<sup>339</sup>

This description aptly describes one of the most enduring forms of direct action employed by Outrage!. The idea of a “Kiss-in” arose from legislation which was being used to enforce the stigmatization of public displays of affection by gay couples. At the time of the initial Kiss-in, on 5<sup>th</sup> September 1990, laws surrounding public order and indecency were being incorrectly interpreted by law enforcement official to prevent public expressions of same sex relationships such as kissing, hand holding and cuddling. Two men kissing in the street could be fined for a breach of the peace, particularly after the implementation of Section 5 of the Public Order Act 1986. This had actually been brought into law to give the police powers to deal with football hooligans but was used also in this manner. Outrage! considered the most effective way to make this unfairness public was with a display of those actions that were being coded as taboo. The legacy of the 1967 Sexual Offences Act’s decriminalisation of male homosexuality in a private space resulted in a situation whereby any performance relating to such a lifestyle tended to remain behind closed doors.

Outrage! challenged this situation with a mass exaggerated performance of kissing. Kissing a simple tradition or ritual as well as an expression of human connection. However, it a tradition that has become synonymous with a heterosexual discourse. A male and a female

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<sup>337</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>338</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>339</sup> Kershaw *The Radical in Performance*, p.99.

are the unconsidered expected participants in a kiss and, through direct action, Outrage! sought to challenge this. As those arrested for same sex kissing had often been charged with breaching the peace, placards had been made saying “Lesbians & Gays aren’t breaching your peace! We’re just kissing”.<sup>340</sup> Each aspect of the protest was carefully constructed to raise awareness of Outrage!’s agenda and, through performance, produce notions of pride among a wider audience.

The location chosen was at the statue of Eros, the God of Love, at Piccadilly Circus in London to add a degree of camp irony to the spectacle with Eros being the ancient god of love it was felt the performative nature of the event would be increased and so draw a larger audience to witness the protest. Each one of these deliberate and public displays of affection during the Outrage! Kiss-in was designed to both challenge one group of people and empower another. In this way, participation in these public performances could provide the kind of “morale booster” referred to by Tatchell while the form of reflexivity being encouraged can also be seen to be fanning the flames of pride. One participant, Lynne Sutcliffe recalling her participation in the event for the Outrage! oral history project shared, “I’d never kissed my girlfriend in the street before and it was so exciting to be able to do that, people cheering and clapping. I suppose, because I work in the theatre, I liked the way they were using theatrical devices”.<sup>341</sup> For Lynne, the use of the theatrical provided a means for her to explore her own performativity and relate this to her identity as lesbian woman.

Outrage! arranged for two hundred queer lovers to attend the event and very deliberately kiss someone of the same sex. Dave Burnett another participant recalls the process as being very simple: “you produce a leaflet, you hand it around, you’ve got 50 or 60 people at a meeting, most of those are going to go along, most of them will bring friends ... It couldn’t fail”.<sup>342</sup> It was not sufficient, at this stage, for the members of the group to have their own sense of pride and perform it publically with a view to changing the hearts and minds of the masses. Instead, they needed to combine their individual performativities to actively produce pride as a visible spectacle for a wider audience. As with the first pride march, there was a sense of strength in numbers and also the perception of a temporary disruption in the status quo that created a queer space in which to perform. Participants agreed that:

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<sup>340</sup> P. Tatchell, *The Art of Activism*, 16 May 1997 <[http://www.petertatchell.net/direct\\_action/art\\_of\\_activism.htm](http://www.petertatchell.net/direct_action/art_of_activism.htm)> [accessed 12 March 2013]

<sup>341</sup> Lucas. *Outrage! An Oral History*, p.33.

<sup>342</sup> *Ibid.*



They would not disperse if asked by the police, they would not refrain from kissing, but that legal observers and stewards would be on hand with cameras to protect participants from police action, possible homophobic attacks, and to prevent provocative or inappropriate demonstrations of affection.<sup>343</sup>

In this way, the deliberate performance of queer identity could raise a consideration of the issues in question with those who witnessed the performance or those who came to be made aware of it afterwards through the media.

The following day, *The Guardian* ran a picture of the event under the headline “Kiss of Death?” while the reporter for *The Independent* was keen to point out that “unless homosexuals wish to alienate the public they should conduct themselves with restraint”.<sup>344</sup> As Kershaw has shown, although one of the aims of direct action is for that action to be transmitted further through the media, the participants cannot control the reaction and so alienation remains a potential problem in all forms of direct action and can extend to the potential participants. John Beeson, who arrived to take part in the demonstration recalls the event as “people shouting things with banners, placards, arguing with people, arguing with the police. I thought, ‘I don’t want to be involved in that, thank you!’”.<sup>345</sup> For others, including Keith Alcorn who shared his account in an oral history interview, the performance inspired in just the manner that Tatchell had hoped for:

We knew at this point we’d cracked it. We knew we’d discovered a formula for actions that would bring large numbers of people out, get people very excited, get huge amounts of press coverage and generate a debate about the issues we were campaigning on, not just making a spectacle of ourselves. It did also have an impact on people’s confidence about being openly gay in the West End.<sup>346</sup>

The combination of direct action performances being carried out as visible expressions of queer sensibilities were providing a direct challenge to hegemonic notions of what it meant to be in a same sex relationship. For the majority of participants, it allowed for both an internalisation and an expression of pride in aspects of their identity that had quite possibly been restricted from public expression; for the spectators, it could both inform and possibly challenge their unconsidered assumptions. The outcome of this performance was an

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<sup>343</sup> *Ibid.* p.32.

<sup>344</sup> *Ibid.* p.34.

<sup>345</sup> *Ibid.* p.33.

<sup>346</sup> *Ibid.*

agreement from the police to reconsider if same sex kissing really constituted a breach of the peace.

## Conclusion

We can see from the examples in this chapter that the performance of pride is variable and nuanced, depending upon a large number of contextual factors. In the wider public eye during the latter half of the twentieth century, performing pride came to be represented overwhelmingly in the public imagination as a march or procession designed to raise the visibility of lesbian, gay, bisexual and transgendered communities. This is certainly an important and powerful signifier for those communities, allowing them to represent themselves and enter into those traditional social, political, historical and cultural discourses, from which they had previously been either entirely excluded or made to feel inappropriate. When Jeffrey Weeks categorised the three different forms of response to LGBT identities, he was reconsidering Altman's work from over twenty years prior and it is possible to see each one of the performances discussed here being a response to either persecution, discrimination or tolerance. The patrons at the Stonewall Bar in 1969 responded to persecution and discrimination, very unexpectedly, with anger and violence. Each of the direct action events which have been undertaken by either ACT UP or Outrage! have been coordinated and choreographed to draw attention to often unconsidered and institutional discrimination which impacts on the lives of LGB or T individuals. Very often without those individuals, or indeed much of the general public around them, actually realising that this is occurring because hegemonic culture has taught everyone from a very early age to view lesbians, gay men, bisexuals and transgendered people as different. For example, through the performance of same sex Kiss-ins, the wider public are able to notice that such public displays of affection do not occur more regularly or organically as part of day to day life. They require a specific public performance to draw attention to the unspoken hegemonies that maintained the stigma around LGBT identities. All three factors therefore serve to reinforce that sense of being different for the LGB or T communities and, in turn, indicate to an individual who is lesbian, gay, bisexual or transgender that they should not be attaching shame to any performance of that identity.

Pride therefore can be attached to any action in which those individuals perform in a manner that refuses to acknowledge that implied shame, It can come in the form of an inner dignity and performativity of an individual who refuses to accept the stigma which has been traditionally attached to an a LGBT lifestyle and instead creates for themselves a sense of pride. That pride can be felt outside of performance but it is expressed and maintain through continued actions. There are also occasions where pride can be deliberately constituted through considered public displays. Following on from the spontaneous eruption of frustration at the Stonewall Bar the pride event and associated parades have allowed the LGBT communities to put aside the established world order for a moment, to be liberated to live differently for a time. This distance draws to light the unfairness and contradictions which exist in ‘normal time’ and also provide a means to bring them to the attention of others through intervention in the public realm. The performances of pride discussed in this chapter, on a national level, would indicate a shift in the trajectory from stigma towards acceptance but for the most part, as we shall see in the subsequent chapters, they went unnoticed in Plymouth – a city where its LGB or T inhabitants did not feel the need for any form of pride event in the city until 2009. Instead, they took more pride in the maintenance of an underground existence, which did not rock the proverbial boat, but this was all about to change for them as some of these national discourses were about to impact upon their communities.

## Chapter Four:

### Disciplinary Power and the Policing of Pride

This chapter examines how national changes in legislation between 1968 and 1992 impacted, in varying ways, upon the lives of lesbian, gay, bisexual and transgendered communities across the United Kingdom, while maintaining a particular focus on the interpretation of and responses to those changes in Plymouth. In considering the disciplinary power being employed, both through legislation and by local authorities, I will draw upon methodologies proposed, principally, by philosopher Michel Foucault and will also again draw upon the work of Denis Altman (introduced in Chapter Three).

In particular, the chapter will consider how far two pieces of legislation “policed” the performance of gay pride within the city of Plymouth. While the first, the *Sexual Offences Act 1967*, could be seen to provide the possibility for gay men to more publicly display aspects of their sexual identity, I will show how interpretation by the police of laws surrounding the practice of “cruising” (seeking sexual encounters with other men in public places as introduced in Chapter Two) prevented the proud performance of gay identity for many men. I will also demonstrate how, conversely, the direct implementation of the Section 28 legislation (introduced in the previous chapter), which aimed to reduce the visibility of gay identity, came to have the opposite effect when gay communities made a public response to counter the discourse of power intended by the Conservative government of time. Although the Section 28 legislation was not actually repealed until 2003, it tended to go unnoticed during much of the 1990s.

The *Sexual Offences Act 1967* decriminalised, in England and Wales, private homosexual acts between two men aged over 21 years of age. The cultural effects of this change in legislation were felt by communities of gay men in the decades which followed, particularly as similar changes in law were not implemented in Scotland and Northern Ireland until the 1980s. While the change in law was immediately applicable to the community of gay men in Plymouth, the extent to which it affected their performance of gay identity, and the responses from other communities provide some insight into presentation and representation of gay pride in the city. The second legislative change to be discussed in this chapter is the implementation of Section 28 of the *Local Government Act 1988*. While only

apparently legislating upon the actions of local authorities, this chapter will begin to demonstrate how far it impacted upon the local community of Plymouth. The use of the term “homosexuality” extended this legislation beyond gay men (as most legislation previously had be focused on the practice of cruising).

In *Discipline and Punish* (1975), Foucault was concerned with how knowledge and power could be joined to become “disciplinary technology”.<sup>347</sup> He identified examples of ‘accepted knowledge’ such as capitalism being perceived as the ‘correct’ means of economic distribution, and heterosexuality being the ‘normal’ form sexual identity. In this way, he suggested the means by which certain discourses, surrounding doing and thinking, led to the structures which provide certain individuals and communities with power. In considering the conscious and unconscious ways in which sexual identity is often enforced or policed, I will metaphorically draw upon his example of the panopticon and its potential for individuals and communities to police themselves through an invisible power which can “qualify, measure, appraise, and hierarchize, rather than display itself”.<sup>348</sup>

## Foucault and “Illegitimate Sexualities”

In the first volume of his consideration of *The History of Sexuality* (1976), Foucault looks back in time, particular to the Victorian era, to propose that “illegitimate sexualities” had historically retained their illegitimacy through a “triple edict of taboo, nonexistence and silence”<sup>349</sup> which, in turn, prevented them from accessing any form of power and, consequently, legitimacy. Sex and sexuality became the purview of the state and various social and cultural constructs came into place to police sexualities by viewing them as being performed correctly, for example as part of the institution of marriage or incorrectly if they appeared to be placed outside of such discourses. As a result, Victorian unmarried women, nymphomaniacs, prostitutes and homosexuals were rendered illegitimate and therefore invisible. Almost simultaneously though, in 1980, Altman suggested that “the most striking change in the position of (male) homosexuals over the last decade is their visibility,”<sup>350</sup>

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<sup>347</sup> M. Foucault. *Discipline and Punish*. (London & New York: Penguin, 1977), p.264.

<sup>348</sup> M. Foucault. *History of Sexuality Vol I*. (New York: Penguin, 1976), p.144.

<sup>349</sup> *Ibid.* pp. 4-5.

<sup>350</sup> D. Altman. ‘What Changed in the Seventies?’ in Gay Left Collective (ed), *Homosexuality: Power & Politics*. (London & New York: Allison and Busby, 1980), p.52.

considering the preceding decade as a period in time where “the social regulation of homosexuality has changed faster than at any other time in history”.<sup>351</sup> He felt this allowed for “the emergence of a new style of homosexual, one far less willing to accept the sort of furtiveness and self-hatred traditionally associated with gay life”.<sup>352</sup> This chapter considers how far the shift described by Altman occurred in Plymouth by analysing the local response to specific changes in the law in this extended historical moment. Of particular interest, in terms of the aims of this thesis, is how far the public performance of pride was affected by these changes and whether those performances were the anticipated outcomes of legislative activity. I am also seeking to draw some conclusions about how far the Plymouth experience either mirrored, or contrasted, with events taking place at this time on national and international platforms.

When originally writing *Discipline and Punish*, during 1975, Foucault sought to highlight and analyse the use of disciplinary power. He identified the effective employment of this power to arise “from the use of simple instruments; hierarchical observation, normalizing judgement and their combination”.<sup>353</sup> He explained hierarchical observation in terms of a mechanism or structure which can affect behaviour through this observation by those in a position of power. Their power is effectively displayed and maintained through such means as “the administrative functions of management, the policing functions of surveillance, the economic functions of control and checking [and] the religious functions of encouraging obedience and work”.<sup>354</sup> The unspoken assumption that the individual is constantly being viewed, assessed and ultimately judged against these criteria serves to maintain a level of behaviour that the individual feels will not be transgressive. The issue of whether the individual is actually being observed and assessed in this manner becomes less important than their assumption that they are. Foucault offers that surveillance leads to disciplinary power becoming not unlike “a piece of machinery”<sup>355</sup> which is perceived as being “everywhere and always alert”.<sup>356</sup> He develops this further with reference to the concept of the panopticon which was conceived as an architectural structure for prisons in which the inmates could all be viewed in their individual cells by one guardian or supervisor. As a result, those existing within the panopticon are induced into a “state of conscious and

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<sup>351</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>352</sup> *Ibid.* p.60.

<sup>353</sup> M. Foucault. *Discipline and Punish*, p. 170.

<sup>354</sup> *Ibid.* p. 173.

<sup>355</sup> *Ibid.* p. 177.

<sup>356</sup> *Ibid.*

permanent visibility that assures the automatic functioning of power”.<sup>357</sup> Those within the panopticon begin to regulate their own behaviour based upon criteria that they perceive is expected of them by a viewer who may or may not be looking at them.

Normalizing judgement refers to Foucault’s identification of the norm as a concept which is enforced through judgement and penalty, creating a situation where “the whole indefinite domain of the non-conforming is punishable.”<sup>358</sup> Perhaps most importantly, the intention and selection of these punishments is based on their corrective function so to support the machinery of disciplinary power. Discipline is maintained through the threat of punishment for being in transgression of the gaze of an all seeing hierarchy. Foucault suggests that an individual’s acceptance of hierarchies and the status quo is achieved through disciplines such as “the Law, the Word (parole) and the Text, Tradition – imposing new delimitations upon them”.<sup>359</sup> These delimitations enable the hierarchical machinery to continue to run and in this way Foucault warns that “visibility is a trap”.<sup>360</sup> This is a very serious warning for communities of people who, in the 1970s, were beginning to emerge from their hidden subcultures into the public gaze.

## Gay men and the practice of Cruising

For gay men in the United Kingdom, the passing of the Sexual Offences Act in 1967 appeared to be a significant step forward in terms of their place in society. The act decriminalised the act of sexual encounters between two men aged 21 or above. While the law changed, however, normalizing judgements seemed not to, and much of the behaviour around men having sex with other men was maintained through the continued conventions which surrounded sexuality. According to Peter Tatchell:

If this was a victory it was a severely limited one. It soon became clear that the change in law was unpopular with the police, for indecency and importuning offences increased. Clubs where men danced together were raided and fined for gross indecency. Plain-clothes policemen were still used as decoys in public lavatories, public parks and open spaces.<sup>361</sup>

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<sup>357</sup> *Ibid.* p. 201.

<sup>358</sup> *Ibid.* p. 178.

<sup>359</sup> *Ibid.* p. 184.

<sup>360</sup> *Ibid.* p. 200.

<sup>361</sup> C. Spencer. *Homosexuality: A History*. (London: Fourth Estate, 1996), p. 367.

Tatchell has suggested that this amendment to law was little more than “narrow liberalisation [which] prompted the police to enforce the remaining prohibitions with even greater harshness”.<sup>362</sup> The prohibitions they seized upon were those relating to sex in public spaces, defined as acts of gross indecency. The laws were applied specifically to cruising which allowed the continued policing of the practice beyond the change in the law. As Altman noted, “all cities have their ‘beats,’ areas of streets, beaches, parks where men “cruise””.<sup>363</sup>

As discussed in Chapter Two, cruising (or cottaging when this behaviour is restricted to public toilets) relates to the practice of gay men deliberately attending these public sites with a view to meeting other men for sexual encounters. “Anyone who has cruised in such areas knows the heightened apprehension and self-awareness that danger produces, and the sexual excitement that such danger enhances. For many, one suspects, it is this, rather than the sexual act itself, that is the real purpose of the game.”<sup>364</sup> Yet Altman notes that “the out gay community in particular has a vexed relationship with the illicit practice of cottaging”.<sup>365</sup> On the one hand, these “public manifestations of such sexuality were both a respite from the abjection of homosexuality and a reformatting of that very abjection”.<sup>366</sup> Jeffrey Weeks notes that “what is striking is not so much the breakdown of differences between heterosexuality and homosexuality as the confirmation of their separateness, while, simultaneously, their values begin to overlap”.<sup>367</sup> In other words, gay men could meet other gay men in clubs and bars, in the same way as their heterosexual neighbours, however, the prospect of them actively seeking anonymous sex in public with a stranger remained taboo. According to Weeks, “Homosexuality was increasingly acceptable, but as long as it did not cross certain unmarked frontiers”.<sup>368</sup>

Transgression of these unmarked frontiers often happened when sex encounters took place in public spaces and so were potentially visible and subject to the disciplinary power of normalizing judgement. As noted by Conrad, “Surveillance is a potentially charged

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<sup>362</sup> P. Tatchell. *Equalising the age of consent will not end discrimination against gay men in criminal law. It is time to repeal all the victimless gay offences.* <[http://www.petertatchell.net/lgbt\\_rights/criminalisation\\_of\\_gays/still\\_criminal.htm](http://www.petertatchell.net/lgbt_rights/criminalisation_of_gays/still_criminal.htm)> [Accessed 25 November 2014].

<sup>363</sup> Altman. *Homosexual Oppression and Liberation*, p. 31.

<sup>364</sup> *Ibid.* p.32.

<sup>365</sup> K. Conrad. ‘‘Nothing to hide . . . Nothing to Fear’’: Discriminatory Surveillance and Queer Visibility in Great Britain and Northern Ireland’ in M.O’ Rourke & J. Giffney (ed), *The Ashgate Research Companion to Queer Theory*. (Padstow: Ashgate, 2009), p.338.

<sup>366</sup> Altman. *Homosexual Oppression and Liberation*, p.34.

<sup>367</sup> Weeks. *Coming Out*, p.46.

<sup>368</sup> *Ibid.*



issue in the gay community. Violence remains a risk as the gay community becomes more visible both through sanctioned channels (eg pride parades ...) and illicit channels (eg 'public' space ...).<sup>369</sup> At the time of the change in law in 1967, cruising was a significant practice within the gay male experience and, despite the increased surveillance by the police, was to remain so. This was prior to the AIDS/HIV crisis, which will be discussed further in Chapter Five, and the practice of cruising was seen as an expression of the sexual freedom two men could experience. With the increased focus on policing this activity, following the change in the law, we can now see the act of cruising functioning in two contradictory, yet aligned, ways. On the one hand, it could be seen as an aspect of the culture or inheritance for gay men. This was a practice which was unique to them which took the reality of their situation and embraced it but in a normally furtive, if semi-public, type of performance. It was a performance that was defined and which embraced the stigma associated with their sexual encounters and served to keep them on the outskirts of society.

By applying Foucault's tools of analysis, it is possible to detect a prohibition taking place around sexuality which maintained a sense of secrecy around such practices. He claimed that:

One can speak of the formation of a disciplinary society in this movement that stretches from the enclosed disciplines, a sort of social "quarantine", to an indefinitely generalizable mechanism of "panopticism". Not because the disciplinary modality of power has replaced all others; but because it has infiltrated the others, sometimes undermining them, but serving as an intermediary between them, linking them together, extending them, and, above all, making it possible to bring the effects of power to the most minute and distant elements.<sup>370</sup>

In this way, Foucault is acknowledging that disciplinary power is all around us or, more accurately, that we, as individuals, perceive it to be all around us and so discipline ourselves. We perform in ways that we perceive to be correct and those performances in turn provide a validation to those performances. The gay men of Plymouth were endeavouring to appear to conform to acceptable norms in places where it was appropriate to do so. Other spaces though, as we have seen in Chapter Two, had been perceived to be 'out of sight' since the 1950s. In Plymouth the cruising grounds have tended to be the spaces by the sea. Plymouth

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<sup>369</sup> K. Conrad. "Nothing to hide . . . Nothing to Fear": Discriminatory Surveillance and Queer Visibility in Great Britain and Northern Ireland' in M.O' Rourke & J. Giffney (ed), *The Ashgate Research Companion to Queer Theory*. (Padstow: Ashgate, 2009), p.338.

<sup>370</sup> M. Foucault. 'Disciplines and Sciences of the Individual' in P. Rabinow (ed), *The Foucault Reader*. (New York & Toronto: Penguin, 1984), p.206.

Hoe is in very close proximity to the city centre and the Union Street area so gay men have traditionally taken advantage of these dark somewhat secluded areas at night to meet other men for sexual encounters where they could feel safe in the knowledge that they were out of view of the perceived gaze of authority. This led to the gay men of the time performing their sexual identity in multiple and complex ways with some apparently contradicting each other depending upon the spaces they were inhabiting. When Kevin Kelland first visited the Lockyer Tavern, in 1974 (several years after Peter Buckley's first visit), he recalls feeling that he was "fighting being gay, or in those days being queer, very much".<sup>371</sup> The use of the word queer for Kevin and his peers was prior to the word's reclamation so was used to transmit shame rather than pride. Kevin saw how by modifying his own performance he could become part of the subculture that existed within this space:

I thought 'Ooh, this is the world'. You know, I felt fully accepted. It was like a duck to water. You would open the door and all the gay men would look around. And once I figured everything out. I remembered I would wear the more bizarre and, sort of, flamboyant things to attract men. Like a peacock. You were on show in there, yes, and you wanted to catch men's eye.<sup>372</sup>

The notion of capturing men's eyes, however, moves the performance of sexual identity into areas that could be perceived as "crude and vulgar" as mentioned above and indeed into practices such as cruising which are focused on sexual encounters and it was this aspect that Kevin had found missing up until he incorporated cruising into his repertoire of gay performance. The act of cruising became a considered mode of performance which allowed Kevin to take pride in performance that was part of gay culture and discourse. In the same way as wearing more flamboyant clothing allowed him to performatively construct a sense of pride he found cruising a practice which enabled him to enact that pride. While reluctant to discuss it on record, Kevin shared after the interview that his comments surrounding 'figuring things out' related to him becoming aware of the discourses that surrounded Plymouth's gay scene and who he might become more fully integrated into it through a deliberate performativity designed to capture the attention of other men and signify his own pride in his sexuality.

Munoz would regard his involvement in this process and his recollections of this time as "a testimony to a queer lifeworld in which the transformative potential of queer sex and public manifestations of such sexuality were both a respite from the abjection of

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<sup>371</sup> PWDRO Accession 3901-27.

<sup>372</sup> *Ibid.*

homosexuality and a reformatting of that very rejection”.<sup>373</sup> Queer, according to Munoz, is “manifestation in and of ecstatic time”<sup>374</sup> which are those moments of ecstasy when one can forget, perhaps just for a moment, the effects of normalising judgement and revel in a difference that exists, contrary to the prevailing hierarchies. Cruising could provide just such a moment but, paradoxically, as the police drew increased attention to the practice, it served to implicitly stigmatize gay men even further.

While no specific figures are available for arrests at this time, national figures for men convicted for gross indecency more than trebled between 1966 and 1971. The effects of this crackdown are recalled on a local level by Kevin Kelland:

The police wanted the names of all the gay men that used to go into the Lockyer Tavern. And there was a couple in there, a barman and his wife. And they were supposed to have been very friendly with the gays, but were also telling the police who were gay. And the police were regarded as hostile and also there were rumours about if men cruised the local toilets; there were people who were warning. I think there were some people who worked for the police saying ‘this certain toilet will be raided tonight - be careful’.<sup>375</sup>

The process of simply asking for the names of men who used the bar and so potentially could be the same men who went cruising was means by which the disciplinary technology could restrict the practice due to exposure. In the years that followed the change in the law, police focus remained intent on “gay men involved in age of consent violations, cruising and meeting in public places, and sexual acts in toilets and parks”<sup>376</sup>. So, as a result, “convictions for these forms of consenting homosexual behaviour soared.”<sup>377</sup> To return to the means by which Foucault sees “illegitimate” sexualities being publicly illegitimatised so to made silent and non-existence, this was no longer an option due to a public change in the law so the option of making gay male practices taboo was the only course of action remaining. The normalising judgement attached to the world of cruising was of stigma and shame and this, combined with the threat of discovery and exposure, served to intensify the notion that encounters between two men could only happen in such a furtive and secretive manner.

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<sup>373</sup> Munoz. *Cruising Utopia – The Then and There of Queer Futurity*, P.34.

<sup>374</sup> *Ibid.* P.32.

<sup>375</sup> PWDRO Accession 3901-27.

<sup>376</sup> P. Tatchell, ‘Equalising the age of consent will not end discrimination against gay men in criminal law. It is time to repeal all the victimless gay offences’. <[http://www.petertatchell.net/lgbt\\_rights/criminalisation\\_of\\_gays/still\\_criminal.htm](http://www.petertatchell.net/lgbt_rights/criminalisation_of_gays/still_criminal.htm)> [Accessed 25 November 2014]

<sup>377</sup> *Ibid.*

Significantly, however, this caused many gay men to acknowledge a sense of excitement attached to their hunt for potential sexual partners. Peter Buckley, who was still an active member of the Plymouth gay scene at this time recalled, “To be absolutely truthful I liked it like that because there was a sense that there was something illegal about it, it kinda had a ‘frisson’ to cruising that made it much more exciting”.<sup>378</sup> In much the same way as Act Up! had deliberately staged provocative performances as protests to challenge the discourses of stigma attached to gay lifestyles and create a sense of pride, cruising for Peter had become a means by which to deliberately adopt a form of performativity which was seen as contrary to the mainstream and, in that way, constitute his own sense of pride in his sexual identity. A pride that he clearly still felt at the time of the interview.

## The In/Visibility of Role Models

Despite Kevin Kelland’s embracing of flamboyance to draw attention to himself at the Lockyer, he was uncomfortable with identifying too strongly with camp: “We had like John Inman and Larry Grayson which were sort of figureheads of being gay, but they were more to be laughed with or laughed at, to have funny camp acting, antics”.<sup>379</sup> In his obituary in *The Guardian* newspaper, Grayson was complimented on how “his camp, deliciously naughty humour was never crude or vulgar. The gentle ambivalence of his humour made him attractive to an extraordinarily diverse range of people”<sup>380</sup> and so, in this way, his camp humour was used to win acceptance by a wider public, including audiences who did not realise what they were witnessing was necessarily associated with homosexuality. In the case of John Inman, when members of the Campaign for Homosexual Equality picketed one of his shows feeling that his “Mr Humphries” television character did not help the cause for equality he responded that “an enormous number of viewers like Mr. Humphries and don’t really care whether he’s camp or not. So far from doing harm to the homosexual image, I feel I might be doing some good”.<sup>381</sup>

Nevertheless, when Steve Pearce joined the Plymouth police force in 1968 after the decriminalisation of gay men, camp behaviour was something that was ridiculed by those

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<sup>378</sup> PWDRO Accession 3901-41.

<sup>379</sup> PWDRO Accession 3901-27.

<sup>380</sup> Larry Grayson Obituary. *The Guardian* – cited at <[http://h2g2.com/edited\\_entry/A760772](http://h2g2.com/edited_entry/A760772)> [Accessed 29th June 2015].

<sup>381</sup> R. Shann. “His Biggest Fans are Adoring Women”. *TV Week Magazine*. (27 January 1980), p.13.

with disciplinary power. He recalls “they were the butt of jokes, gay people, all the time. And it wasn’t challenged [...] I think that reflected society too. I think, you know, comedians came on TV and made jokes. Jokes in pubs, so the police were no better or worse, I don’t think”.<sup>382</sup> By ensuring that gay men are the subject of jokes and laughter, heteronormative discourses retain power as gay men are made reluctant to out themselves for fear of being objects of ridicule or else their threat is neutralised as this ridicule prevents them from becoming symbols of pride.

The situation was somewhat different for lesbians who had been rendered almost non-existent in public perception by the manner in which they had traditionally been excluded from mainstream cultural representation. One interviewee for the Plymouth LGBT Archive, Jo Pine, recalls how she was seeking to reconcile herself with her sexuality. This was a struggle due to a lack of opportunity to represent and perform her identity as a lesbian, in the 1970s, and also a lack of language through which to adequately constitute this identity. She recalled in the interview that “I knew that I knew that I was gay though I had no concepts of language or description, from five but I had no real verbiage for it, I didn’t understand it”.<sup>383</sup> This served to limit her perception of what it might mean for her to be a lesbian and how she might seek to adopt that identity and perform it in a manner that felt authentic to her. While gay men could at least be portrayed to be figures of fun she felt lesbians received little or no visibility in the media or in Plymouth. “There were no role models, there was nothing to focus on. There was nothing that you could read about or see, nobody to talk to. I knew it was different from others so I knew that there was a difference in me but I couldn’t actually sort of give any concept of it”.<sup>384</sup>

In this instance, for Jo, the normalising judgement was taking place before its target – that is, lesbianism – was even brought into sight. Historical discourse had provided less representation of lesbians than it had for gay men. Jo did not have access to words to represent her lesbian identity because, for Foucault, “what is inexistent has no right to show itself, even in the order of speech”.<sup>385</sup> Gay and Lesbian Studies have traditionally had “a preoccupation with rendering visible heretofore ‘invisible lesbians’ of the past, documenting the basis upon which women have come to engage in behaviour that may be identified as homosexual by themselves or by others, and describing the multitude of ways

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<sup>382</sup> Interview with Steve Pearce, 62 year old from Plymouth. Recorded 6th December 2011. PWDRO. Accession 3901-34.

<sup>383</sup> PWDRO. Accession 3901-25.

<sup>384</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>385</sup> Foucault. *History of Sexuality Vol I*, p84.

in which women come to identify themselves as lesbians”.<sup>386</sup> Pride in a lesbian identity cannot be signified and created by the individual if lesbianism cannot be talked about. With the onset of the 1980s, this situation was about to be exacerbated with new legislation.

## Plymouth’s Limited Reaction to Section 28

On Tuesday 24 May 1988, the *Evening Herald* reported an incident that had occurred on the national news the previous night. The article discussed the invasion of the BBC’s studio as the *Six O’Clock News* was being broadcast live across the nation. Readers who had not witnessed the broadcast were told how “four lesbian protestors breached security to try and disrupt a live news broadcast”<sup>387</sup> and how the newsreaders, Sue Lawley and Nicholas Witchell, were “praised for their cool handling of the studio invasion”. As Lawley commented live on air during the incident, “We have been rather invaded”.<sup>388</sup>

The *Herald* did not comment extensively on the four women’s motivation for the incursion, simply stating that they were “protesting about the controversial ‘Clause 28’<sup>389</sup> of the Local Government Finance Bill banning local authorities from promoting homosexuality”.<sup>390</sup> The paper made no attempt to report or discuss the change in legislation further than this article despite the fact that it came into effect on this date. Also, no reaction was forthcoming from the people of Plymouth in the letters pages over the days and weeks that followed.

It could very well be argued that this was because the city’s population was more concerned with their employment. Within three weeks of the report of the *Six O’Clock News* incursion, on June 10<sup>th</sup>, the *Evening Herald* led with the headline “New blow for Dockyard workers now 3300 jobs to go”.<sup>391</sup> Contradicting an announcement in August 1987 that 1900 jobs would need to be lost, this increased number shocked the city and its elected representatives. Devonport MP, David Owen, said that he was appalled and the

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<sup>386</sup> V. Jones. ‘Coming Out Lesbian Identities and the Categorization Problem’ in K. Plummer (ed), *Modern Homosexuality: Fragments of Lesbian and Gay Experiences*. (New York & London: Taylor & Francis, 2002), p.65.

<sup>387</sup> *Evening Herald*, 24 May 1988.

<sup>388</sup> *Ibid*.

<sup>389</sup> Clause 28 was the proposal until the amendment was accepted into law, at which point it became Section 28 of the Local Government Act. At the time of this *Herald* report the two terms were used interchangeably but conversations and controversy subsequently tended to centre on Section 28.

<sup>390</sup> *Evening Herald*, 24 May 1988.

<sup>391</sup> *Evening Herald*, 10 June 1988.

announcement was “absolutely devastating.”<sup>392</sup> The only course of action that he felt could save the city from economic disaster was for the government to immediately grant it ‘enterprise zone status’ and so define the city as a place requiring special intervention to grow business in the city other than that directly related to its dockyard. All of which served to make the people of Plymouth feel very uncertain regarding the city’s future.

Despite other concerns, however, Plymouth was one of the local authorities effected by the legislation which led to uncertainty around what was permissible and what was not. While little used, the legislation’s attempt to form and consolidate a widespread normalizing judgement around individuals’ sexuality was far reaching: “At one level, Clause 28 can be read as an attempt to cling onto supposed moral certainties in a changing culture, at another it seemed to reflect a broader hardening of attitudes towards homosexuality”.<sup>393</sup> In Plymouth, there was little resistance to the perceived ban on the “promotion” of homosexuality and attention remained focused on local issues such as the building of an ornamental sundial in the middle of the city centre or concerns around outbreaks of violence amongst late night drinkers on Union Street. When homosexuality was referenced to in the paper, the reporting centred around the HIV/AIDS epidemic or in relation to the armed forces.

An article, published in the *Evening Herald* five days before the change in legislation, reported how a naval officer had resigned as the result of a “gay probe” inquiry: “the investigation was launched after it was alleged a crew member barged into a cabin and thought he had stumbled across what looked like homosexual behaviour”.<sup>394</sup> While not implying that this was the most conclusive evidence, the report quoted a Ministry of Defence spokesman that naval investigations had provided “no evidence to justify disciplinary action”.<sup>395</sup> Yet, despite this, it was considered entirely unremarkable that “one Naval Officer had been permitted to resign and one naval rating had been administratively discharged”.<sup>396</sup> In this naval port, just the suspicion of homosexuality was sufficient to end careers and reputations. There clearly exists a paradox here (perhaps linked to the “Don’t ask, Don’t tell” ethos) when compared to the matelots’ very flexible approach to queer performance of sexuality, if involved drinks being bought for them by

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<sup>392</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>393</sup> M. Cook, R. Mills, R. Trumbach & H.G. Cocks. *A Gay History of Britain*. (Oxford: Greenwood World Publishing, 2007), p.204.

<sup>394</sup> *Evening Herald*, 19 May 1988.

<sup>395</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>396</sup> *Ibid.*

gay men, and also the popularity of places like the Lockyer Tavern, at that time, where most patrons knew that it was frequented by members of the gay community.

Section 28 was a single policy which specifically frustrated the LGB communities within the city. However, a range of ideological positions which defined Tory policies were causing various sectors of the Plymouth population to be visible in their opposition. Uncertainties and frustrations often manifested themselves in the city's nightspots and there were frequent reports of trouble on Union Street. Reflecting on one outbreak of violence in June 1988, PC David Griffen recalled when he and his colleagues were surrounded by three hundred people and someone shouted "Let's get the bastards – there's only six of them".<sup>397</sup> According to Griffen, "some were acting like Zulus, some were singing football songs, some were dancing and some were throwing stones at us".<sup>398</sup> The *Evening Herald* condemned another Union Street mob but without considering who made up the participants in that interaction and what their frustrations may have been. The episode highlighted the implicit racism of the local police (the use of the word 'zulus' leads to a reading of the police regarding themselves as some form of colonising force) and indicates that normalizing judgements were being applied to groups of people throughout the city. This establishes and ensures "accepted knowledge" where those in power are enabled to maintain that power by ascribing any other individuals or groups as other and potentially problematic.

### In Other Words: The "Counter Archive"

One of the few public displays of opposition to the Section 28 legislation took place in the shop window of In Other Words Bookshop on Mutley Plain. The two proprietors displayed newspaper coverage with slogans which highlighted its oppressive nature while also displaying books that would be regarded as inappropriate to be used in schools as a result of the change in the law. Such protests were not uncommon for the shop which had opened in 1982. It was owned and run by Prudence de Villiers and her partner Gay Jones and, since its opening, had broken new ground for Plymouth by selling a wide range of literature including anti-war, environmental and gay and lesbian titles. For the next twenty

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<sup>397</sup> *Evening Herald*, June 11 1988.

<sup>398</sup> *Evening Herald*, June 11 1988.



five years, it was a meeting place for Plymouth's small but determined radical activists. In a feature in 1982, *Evening Herald* reporter Jill Blight wrote that

There is none of the hushed 'library' in this warm and friendly emporium. The joint owners Prudence de Villiers, 34, and Gay Jones, 33, have cleverly created the right conditions for study and perusal where customers may have a cup of tea or coffee while browsing or just chatting.<sup>399</sup>

Blight defined the shop's "alternative" nature as "not conforming to stereotypes and Gay explained in the last 20 years people have been exploring different ways of living – alternative medicine, alternative sources of energy and so on, not to mention "alternative ways of living".<sup>400</sup> Prudence added "We are not trying to threaten anyone. We're just making certain material available. There's no question of evangelising".<sup>401</sup> The book shop became something of an archive itself for those seeking access to somewhat alternative materials that were not always readily available in Plymouth. Gay reflects on Plymouth at the time (and beyond) as being very much "a military city. And, as we know, for the military to be able to come out, was, oh, twenty five years off. It was one of the last bastions of prejudice, basically. And about the last place where you could still be sacked for being gay. So that whole ethos made it very difficult."<sup>402</sup>

Although primarily a book shop, the shop became a haven for many people who were part of Plymouth's LGB and T communities and also those individuals who considered themselves to be activists, radicals or who generally held "alternative" attitudes or interests for mainstream Plymouth and would be, in turn, more likely to support Plymouth's LGB and T communities. People were able to pursue and explore alternative viewpoints and narratives and the shop became something of a queer space in a very visible and public position on a high street. This led to it being a non-threatening space for those looking to come into contact with the gay community in the city. As a result, In Other Words established itself as a safe space where people of all sexualities could interact openly.

The two proprietors were activists who presented themselves to their client base as supportive, particularly with younger LGB or T customers. Gay recalls becoming something of a counsellor: "We'd find ourselves talking to mostly younger people who were worried about their sexuality and wanted reassurance and wanted to be able to discuss

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<sup>399</sup> Interview with Gay Jones. Plymouth and West Devon Record Office (PWDRO). Accession 3901-33

<sup>400</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>401</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>402</sup> *Ibid.*

it”.<sup>403</sup> She believes the most important aspect of the shop was the fact that it provided “somewhere where they could come and have a safe haven and know that they’re accepted and they could talk about things and they could buy books in which gay people were normal – you know, it was hugely important”.<sup>404</sup> This was especially significant during a decade in which prevailing discourse ensured that representations of homosexuality centred on HIV and AIDS. Gay reflects that

It wasn’t a safe time. I mean the 80s were a particularly bad time to be gay because of HIV, AIDS and because a number of newspapers would have headlines about, you know, sending all gay people to camps and so on. You know there were outbursts like that and, you know, you could feel horribly insecure. And, no, it was very, very unpleasant. It was a very difficult time to be openly gay.<sup>405</sup>

In a conversation prior to her oral history interview, Gay did admit she thought there was a degree of cruising going on there as well but it certainly was not something they actively encouraged.



Figure 4.1

The Young Conservatives Protest outside In Other Words Bookshop in Feb 1985.

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<sup>403</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>404</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>405</sup> *Ibid.*



Figure 4.2

The Counter Protest which took place outside the Bookshop.

Reaction was not always positive though. In February 1985, for instance, Plymouth's Young Conservatives held a demonstration outside the shop. The Young Conservative chair, Vaughan Harris, was unhappy with a large number of materials in the shop but focused his outrage on a CND leaflet which he felt encouraged civil disobedience and so organised a protest to take place outside the shop. This protest was intended to draw attention to the fact that the shop carried materials that seemed to be contrary to both the Plymouth ethos and the city's main source of employment. The Young Conservatives met with unexpected opposition in the form of a second group of protestors, who had gathered to defend the shop along with their right to live an alternative lifestyle, by playing folk music. (See Figure 4.2). This incident provided protestors on both sides to construct and display a very deliberate performativity in relation to the shop's place in Plymouth culture and discourse and *In Other Words*' role as a counter-archive came strongly into focus with this incident. The young conservatives had decided that a protest was the most appropriate means by which to challenge the bookshop's role as place of knowledge and learning which served to give the alternative viewpoints a level of status. The fact that the response to this protest was another protest by a cross section of the city's inhabitants was a much more expected role for that group of people. The actions of the young conservatives, Gay recalls, caused Prudence to brand them as being "just a bunch of hotheads"<sup>406</sup> and let it be known to customers in the shop that she was annoyed they did not come in and talk to them about things they did not like, pointing out that the shop contained books related to

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<sup>406</sup> *Ibid.*

both sides of the nuclear issue. Gay later admitted to me, however, in an informal conversation that this was not the case.

One book, stocked by the shop, which was used to fuel some of the attitudes leading up to the passing of the Section 28 debate nationally, was entitled *Jenny lives with Martin and Eric* (1983). First published in Danish in 1981, the book was a black and white picture book which told the story of a five year old girl who lived with her father and his same sex lover. In line with the prevailing normative judgements around homosexuality, *The Sun* newspaper's headline in May 1986 spoke of a "Vile Book in School". It went on to elaborate that "Pupils see pictures of gay lovers"<sup>407</sup> and referred to such depictions as being "perverted". When the *Daily Mail* discussed the book in September of that year, things seemed only to have escalated with the Education Secretary, Kenneth Baker, demanding the book's immediate withdrawal from schools in the Inner London Education Authority. According to Mr Baker:

The cartoons are blatantly homosexual propaganda and totally unsuitable for use in classroom teaching or school libraries. Unfortunately, I cannot order an education authority to stop circulating such a book. But I can make the strength of my views known to them and ensure that the public are also aware of my thinking. The apparent aim of making such book available in schools is to promote the idea that homosexuality is as acceptable as heterosexuality.<sup>408</sup>

Mr Baker was unafraid to go on public record saying that he strongly disagreed that homosexuality should be accepted and acceptable in Britain, as he felt sure that many people of this time would agree with him. Clearly, he felt his position was in line with accepted knowledge of the time and thus validated and enabled through the use of disciplinary technology.

At this time in Plymouth, Prudence de Villiers was working for GMP Publishing Ltd as a South West representative (in addition to co-running In Other Words). Through this link, she was able to arrange for the author of *Jenny lives with Martin and Eric*, Susanne Bösche, to visit the bookshop in the later part of 1986. Bösche was bemused at the reaction the book had caused in the United Kingdom, as similar responses had not occurred in the other European countries where the book had been published. She provided de Villiers with a letter from the publishers dated 23 September 1986 in which GMP Publishers Ltd Director, Aubrey Walter, writes:

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<sup>407</sup> *The Sun*, 6 May 1986.

<sup>408</sup> *Daily Mail*, 16 September 1986.

In terms of all this media attention resulting in extra sales – I have just asked GMP’s Sales Manager, Jim Sprague, and his reply was that J M Dent, our UK distributors, sold 3 copies last month. So you see, sales do not always reflect media attention. If the group of North London parents do actually have a public book-burning we will let you know, but from their point of view it would really put them in the wrong. After all it was the Nazis stormtroopers who set fire to Magnus Hirschfeld’s library in 1933 – another burning of gay books.<sup>409</sup>

Despite its very limited circulation, however, the content of the book became firmly entrenched in the arguments that surrounded the Section 28 legislation and, when debate was taking place at the end of the 1990s as to whether the legislation should finally be removed, it was referred to again to provide evidence that “our schools, particularly those in London and other big cities were the target of an organised campaign of gay propaganda”.<sup>410</sup> This example demonstrates how provincial cities can be significantly involved, sometimes in surprising and unexpected ways, in national issues as connections with *In Other Words* served to include the city’s gay population in national discourse.

## Free Speech in the Colleges

While the Clause 28 legislation entered into law, there were other examples in Plymouth that illustrate the extent to which individuals could oppose the prevailing local status quo. For instance, at the Plymouth College of Further Education, a left wing activist candidate, Nina Hajjiyanni, had been barred from standing in the student elections when it was decided by the existing student president that if she were to succeed him “it would not be beneficial to the students”.<sup>411</sup> This statement was validated in the eyes of the college’s governors through, what was being referred to at the time as, a ‘free speech ban’. In an article on 28<sup>th</sup> May 1988, the *Evening Herald* pointed out how students were “not allowed to form political organisations, distribute political leaflets nor put up political posters at the campus”.<sup>412</sup> At this time, the culture of Plymouth seemed to be doing little to encourage activism or activists. At the college, those students who opposed the ‘no politics’ ban were branded a “tiny minority”<sup>413</sup> and Conservative Councillor and Chair of the College

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<sup>409</sup> Letter from Aubrey Walter, GMP Publishers Ltd. Dated 23 September 1986. Plymouth and West Devon Records Office. Accession 3901-19.

<sup>410</sup> *Daily Mail*, 3 November 1999.

<sup>411</sup> *Evening Herald*, May 26 1988.

<sup>412</sup> *Evening Herald*, May 28 1988.

<sup>413</sup> *Ibid.*

Governors, Ralph Morrell argued that “students go to college to get an education and train for work – not to engage in politics”.<sup>414</sup>

It is difficult to know how political some of these students would have been if the authorities had allowed more activism but local press accounts such as this one from the time make it clear that there was a general acceptance in Plymouth that one should not be ‘causing a scene’ around political stances. Indeed, it could be argued that Plymouth’s historical dependency on Devonport Dockyard, and subsequently contracts for refit work on nuclear submarines meant any form of activism was viewed as anti-military, which was seen as directly sabotaging the city’s main source of income and so economic viability in the future. In turn, it ran against an individual’s civic responsibilities to question the presence of nuclear submarines in the city. This was mirrored in the expectation that LGB and T communities in Plymouth should not seek visibility in terms of their sexuality or gender identities. This situation highlighted again the tendency in Plymouth to dismiss any groups or individuals who were seen as different but, as we have seen from the counter protest outside the In Other Words bookshop, this could have positive results in creating a sense of solidarity between these ‘radical’ outsiders.

## Dayspace: An attack on Equal Opportunities

In June 1991, under the headline “Cash for Gay Groups Storm”,<sup>415</sup> the *Evening Herald* ran a story about a local project called Dayspace. This was a Devon County Council scheme which began in September 1986 and had an annual budget of around £64000 to “make money and resources available for young unemployed and unwaged adults to set up and run their own community projects”.<sup>416</sup> Dayspace funded between seven and eight projects a month with grants ranging from around £50 to £600. The judging criteria stated that “to qualify for grants, projects must be thought up, developed and run by the young adults themselves.”<sup>417</sup> Dayspace was described in the following manner:

A nationally respected project which offers unemployed young people the opportunity to realise their potential by doing voluntary work for themselves and

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<sup>414</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>415</sup> *Evening Herald*, June 26 1991.

<sup>416</sup> *A Record of the Attack on Dayspace by Devon County Council*. Dated August 1991. Plymouth and West Devon Records Office. Accession 3901-17.

<sup>417</sup> PWDRO Accession 3901-17.

their communities, in line with the County Council's policy guidelines for Community Education. These guidelines talk about the need for relevant and accessible opportunities to be available to all young people, about providing young people with opportunities for personal and social development, and about enabling young people to identify and realise their responsibilities and rights.<sup>418</sup>

Public indignation, reported in the same newspaper article, arose from the fact that this funding stream was providing support to two gay groups based upon these criteria. The first was the Plymouth Lesbian Network and the second was a project called Shouting Stage, which was an advice network for gay men and lesbians. This scenario provides stark picture of discursive and cultural thinking around LGBT matters in Plymouth at this time.

The media coverage had stemmed from Plymouth Councillor Connie Pascoe, who had questioned the allocation of funds. She was quoted in the paper as saying "in other parts of Devon the Dayspace funds were going to things like guitar workshops, day centres for the unemployed and homeless action groups – nothing wrong with any of those".<sup>419</sup> She went on, however, to single out the choice of recipients in Plymouth: "We find £608 was given to the Plymouth Lesbian Network and £300 to Shouting Stage. This is not gay-bashing but they are getting more than their fair share of the cake compared with other things that we could be spending the money on".<sup>420</sup> Foucault's concept of accepted knowledge can be seen coming into force here, hierarchically implying that some recipients of the award are more worthy than others based upon how well they match up to the ideological discourses of those in power at the time.

The following month, £40000 was removed from the Dayspace scheme and allocated to facilitate more effective cleaning for the county's community colleges. One woman from the Plymouth Lesbian Network, who refused to give her name in the paper at the time for fear of reprisals, pointed out how much harder it would be for her to look for work without the Dayspace support. Reflecting on a more personal level, she stated "It makes us feel as if we are perverted, isolated and vulnerable. It hardly builds our confidence".<sup>421</sup> In a city such as Plymouth, where the gay population had learned to keep a low profile, the reallocation of funding could be seen as another validation of the gay community's lack of worth. While the media made no mention of the Section 28 legislation in reporting on

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<sup>418</sup> PWDRO Accession 3901-17.

<sup>419</sup> *Evening Herald*, 1 July 1991.

<sup>420</sup> *Evening Herald*, 26 June 1991.

<sup>421</sup> *Ibid.*

Dayspace, the thinking and attitudes that informed it were clearly at the forefront of much of the outrage expressed via comments to the media.

Some opposition was mobilised, however, when the directors of Dayspace encouraged those individuals involved with the project to lobby their local councillors. They suggested raising the point that:

As part of its work with groups of disadvantaged people, the West Devon Dayspace forum last year supported two projects which provide advice and information for, among others, young gay and lesbian people. Devon County Council has a policy statement for work with young people which stresses that opportunities should be available to all young people, and be both relevant and accessible.<sup>422</sup>

This situation highlighted that certain contradictions came to the fore when homosexuality was made publicly visible; particularly when local authorities were reluctant to be seen to supporting gay groups but still had to adhere to their responsibilities to LGB and T individuals while maintaining a “right” position in terms of Section 28 legislation.

There was also some support in the media for continued investment in Dayspace. Alan Ruttley wrote to the *Evening Herald*'s letters page to share an encounter he had been involved in with Councillor Connie Pascoe. He recalls “a ridiculous campaign in the mid-eighties against the alleged influence of CND,”<sup>423</sup> linking the gay community again with this movement and with the city's ‘alternative’ scene. As further education teacher and founder member of anti-nuclear movement, Ruttley wore the anti-nuclear symbol on a badge which Mrs Pascoe complained about, alleging that it had been a complaint from a member of the public. Mr Ruttley refused at that time to stop wearing his badge and pointed out that:

A high proportion of the money I pay in taxes to local and central government supports activities to which I have the strongest personal and moral objections. Nevertheless, I have no alternative except to pay. I resent, therefore, bigoted and mean-spirited councillors seeking to impose their prejudices over the funding of organisations and groups whose aims and activities I am quite comfortable with and happy to support financially.<sup>424</sup>

Another letter further supported his point that day, coming from an anonymous writer stating “Mrs Pascoe said on local radio that poll tax payers would not like their money spent that way! Does she dare presume that gays and other minority groups do not pay poll tax? Of course most do, so why should not some cash be spent on them?”<sup>425</sup>

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<sup>422</sup> *Evening Herald*, 1 July 1991.

<sup>423</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>424</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>425</sup> *Ibid.*



We are thus beginning to encounter direct challenges to the view that Plymouth's gay community should be considered less than full citizens. Unfortunately, in respect of the Dayspace project, the damage had already been done, and on 30 April 1992, Jonathan Hyams, Community Curriculum Development Worker for the project, wrote to all involved to share that "the County Council has confirmed that Dayspace's budget has been abolished and the project has effectively finished".<sup>426</sup> He also responded to the challenges the project had faced by offering that "the last two and a half years have seen a series of decisions which have undermined the basis of the work – a major attack on equal opportunities, funding cuts, budget freezing and investigations which have not taken account of Dayspace's aims and objectives".<sup>427</sup> Effectively, despite being just a small aspect of the work that had been undertaken, the Dayspace project's support for the gay community had been sufficient to bring the project to an end.

In this example, it is possible to see the technology identified by Foucault working to full effect to discipline those who supported non-hegemonic identity positions. Despite Section 28's limited deployment in law, it is important to acknowledge its impact on gay visibility and pride. Reflecting on the time years later, Sir Ian McKellen stated that "if Section 28 and the attitudes behind it had remained, then society would still believe that gay people are second class citizens and that it is right that they should be treated as second class citizens."<sup>428</sup> The intention behind this legislation was to employ the type of disciplinary machinery, identified by Foucault, to make gay identity visible but then to restrict or repress positive representation and dialogic forms of debate and discussion.

## Conclusion

As Foucault had acknowledged in the 1970s, in the 1960s through to the early 1990s, stepping into the light as a queer individual usually involved the need to "renounce yourself or suffer the penalty of being suppressed; do not appear if you do not want to disappear. Your existence will be maintained only at the cost of your nullification. Power

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<sup>426</sup> PWDRO Accession 3901-17.

<sup>427</sup> PWDRO Accession 3901-17.

<sup>428</sup> Quoted on the Stonewall Website. <[https://www.stonewall.org.uk/at\\_school/what\\_the\\_law\\_says/8800.asp](https://www.stonewall.org.uk/at_school/what_the_law_says/8800.asp)> [Accessed 19/10/2014].

constrains sex only through a taboo that plays on the alternative between two non-existences”<sup>429</sup>.

Taboos do not necessarily relate to changes in legislation also. The decriminalisation of homosexuality for gay men led to an increased policing of their sexual encounter while opposition to Section 28 legislation caused a strengthening of solidarity between LGB and T individuals and conversely lead to an increase of out gay role models in the media.

We have seen that the underground gay scene in Plymouth embraced and often enjoyed their signification of being other and alternative and this led to a sense of unity with other groups seen to be on the outskirts of regular society. Over the passing of these years, groups in Plymouth, such as CND, were deliberately assuming positions, both personal and political, which caused them to be viewed as other and individuals from the LGB and T communities came to be regarded as part of that collective. Pride at this stage was developing and changing as the stigmatisation that had always been associated with any form of LGB or T identity was clearly still apparent but individuals were beginning to challenge those notions and not just within the perceived safe environments of the pubs and clubs. Instead, challenges were taking place in the media and on the streets of Plymouth and if the LGB and T communities did not yet feel ready to perform pride in the same kind of public manner that individuals in New York and London were, they were becoming more willing to express these aspects of their identity with pride in their own individual performativity and, at times, these individual performances came together to begin to challenge the status quo of stigmatisation.

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<sup>429</sup> Foucault. *History of Sexuality Vol I*, p.84.

## Chapter Five:

# Stigmatisation, Counterpublics and Queer Spaces in Plymouth

In a response to the stigmatisation that had been historically attached to their sexual or gender identities, the Plymouth LGB and T communities in the later part of the 1980s and through the 1990s were beginning, in what seems to have been a very unconsidered fashion, to embrace a sense of being queer although, in the interviews conducted, nobody from these communities has tended to use that word to describe themselves. Communities may not even be the correct terminology as they did not see themselves as one homogenous group or even as four communities with similar goals and subjectivities. Instead, they were simply beginning to be more comfortable as individuals being outside of the heteronormative norms and reflecting this, to one extent or another, in their performative practices. Any sense of community was achieved instead in common spaces. Halberstam, in an attempt to locate queer identity, begins with the thought that, “the notion of a body-centred identity gives way to a model that locates sexual subjectivities within and between embodiment, place and practice.”<sup>430</sup> Individuals, and the spaces in which they interacted with each other, were becoming less hidden and more open to the view of the mainstream. For Halberstam, queer time can be viewed “once one leaves the temporal frames of bourgeois reproduction and family, longevity, risk/safety, and inheritance”.<sup>431</sup> Halberstam offers a reading of queer therefore that relates to “nonnormative logics and organizations of community, sexual identity, embodiment, and activity in space and time”.<sup>432</sup> He also acknowledges that non-normative behaviours have “clear but not essential relations to gay and lesbian subjects”.<sup>433</sup> Plymouth’s LGB and T individuals were becoming less coy about their queer identities and more willing to come out in public view.

Coming out is perceived to be a life defining moment in which an LGB or T person publicly acknowledges this aspect of their identity and is assumed to publicly embody this for

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<sup>430</sup> J.Halberstam. *In a Queer Time & Place*. (New York and London: New York University Press, 2005), p.5.

<sup>431</sup> *Ibid*, p.6.

<sup>432</sup> *Ibid*.

<sup>433</sup> *Ibid*.

the rest of their lives. In fact, LGBT people come out again and again after assessing each situation and particularly considering the specific space they are inhabiting. There can also be limits on how far queer individuals are able to distance themselves from the unconsidered heteronormative frames of reference that are so ingrained in contemporary culture. For example, people will tend to assume that the mention of a partner relates to an opposite sex partner unless made aware of a situation to the contrary either verbally or through some other form of signification by the individual. As a result, queer individuals may perform a range of non-normative sexual identities with varying degrees of stigma and also pride, which again is dependent upon space and time. For Halberstam, this means that queer people must engage with “the place making practices” that allow for “new understandings of space enabled by the production of queer counterpublics”.<sup>434</sup>

## A Queer Counterpublic

To understand what constitutes a queer counterpublic, we begin by considering queer as the opportunity to look at the world through a homosexual lens. This does not predispose a reality that is automatically and, in an unconsidered manner, constructed through a heteronormative series of systems and signifiers. Stepping outside of unconsidered and unchallenged norms provides the opportunity to consider not only the means of address but also who makes up our audience in differing spaces and settings, along with their reception of what they witness. Michael Warner describes ‘a public’ as a “space of discourse organized by nothing other than the discourse itself”.<sup>435</sup> Publics exist and are part of the social spaces which are formed through the very discourses which they convey. For Warner, a public comes to exist “by virtue of being addressed”.<sup>436</sup>

When the message being conveyed to a wider audience appears to fit comfortably with largely held hegemonic assumptions, then “a public, in practice, appears as *the* public. It is easy to be misled by this appearance. Even in the blurred usage of the public sphere, a public is never just a congeries of people, never just the sum people who happen to exist”. Since Warner notes that a public “must first of all have some way of organizing itself as a body and

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<sup>434</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>435</sup> Warner. *Public and Counterpublics*, p.67.

<sup>436</sup> *Ibid.*

of being addressed in discourse,”<sup>437</sup> and then must be “mediated by cultural forms” as “publics do not exist apart from the discourse that addresses them”.<sup>438</sup>

Warner draws our attention to a specific type of public which comprises those who have been excluded, or have chosen to exclude themselves, from hegemonic norms. As a consequence their “members are understood to be not merely a subset of the public but constituted through a conflictual relation to the dominant public”.<sup>439</sup> As we saw in the previous chapter, sometimes the dominant public actively legislates against a group or community which is seen to exist outside of accepted and acceptable behaviour. Consequently, some groups might positively embrace difference with pride while others might accept the reasons for their stigmatization. There are many types of acceptance and groups can be aware of their stigmatization in many different ways. As a result, pride can be viewed as a deliberate performative response to stigmatization where an individual takes deliberate action to produce pride through their actions.

Warner refers to this type of public as a “counterpublic” and he believes that this group maintains “at some level, conscious or not, an awareness of its own subordinate status”.<sup>440</sup> When looking specifically at a queer counterpublic, he offers that ‘No one is in the closet: the presumptive heterosexuality that constitutes the closet for individuals in ordinary speech.’ Rather, spaces become marked by that very suspension and inhabitants can circulate within “protected venues” until one meets resistance as a result of the expanding nature of public address. Perceived boundaries continue to expand until the “the individual struggle with stigma is transposed, as it were, to the conflict between modes of publicness”.<sup>441</sup> These means of an individual or group representing themselves publicly vary according to whether these performance take place in a space which they would consider queer.

Matthew Gandy uses the term ‘queering space’, which relates more to the appropriation of public space for limited times and practices (such as cruising for sex, as discussed in Chapter Four) as opposed to spaces that support a more consistent performance of queer identity. He offers that “queer theory must remain alive to the persistence not only of sexual difference but also of the complexity of the human subject. Cruising provokes anxiety or even violence precisely because it threatens the stability of the heterosexual male subject

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<sup>437</sup> *Ibid*, P.68. Emphasis in original.

<sup>438</sup> *Ibid*. P.72.

<sup>439</sup> *Ibid*, P.118.

<sup>440</sup> *Ibid*, p.119.

<sup>441</sup> *Ibid*, P.120.

within the modern city”.<sup>442</sup> In the practice of cruising, as we shall see later in the chapter, when queer space and practice is extended outside of perceived acceptable boundaries it can lead to strong reaction.

### Mr Harry’s Nightclub and the Conflicting Recollections of a Queer Space

Accepted spaces for the performance of queer sexual subjectivities were becoming more and more limited in the 1980s. In 1982, The Lockyer Tavern, which had become a fading star in its final years, was demolished, and new spaces housed Plymouth gay scene. Various venues became temporary spaces to socialise, such as The Gypsy Moth, Club 91 and The Grand Duchess, although they often changed hands and with a change of management there often came a change in support for a gay clientele base. One space that was particularly open to alternative sexual subjectivities was Mr Harry’s nightclub.

Mr Harry’s was a ramshackle edifice on Plymouth Hoe. Peter Buckley recalls it as “a really seedy place . . . you know that sort of place, the water came through the ceiling, the toilets didn’t work, all a bit run down”.<sup>443</sup> Yet, despite this, the place was incredibly important for much of Plymouth’s gay community and became a far more visible queer space in city than had been seen before. Jo Pine looked back on this period of time and shared that “we had Harry’s which was like – legendary! The place to go and we loved it. Harry’s was a great place and we always felt very looked after there”.<sup>444</sup>

It was a different type of queer space than those established earlier in the city, such as The Lockyer Tavern and The Mambo. This was partly because it was known far more publically as a queer space and so attracted a wider clientele who felt more part of the club’s ethos; as opposed to some visitors to the Locker Tavern in years before who had come to spectate. While previous bars had more readily accepted the stigma that came attached to their patrons performance of nonnormative sexual practices that did not seem to be necessary in Harry’s. In part, this change came about because the club was both owned and run by an openly gay man, Harry Greenslade, who was prepared to very publicly embody both these

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<sup>442</sup> “Queer ecology: nature, sexuality, and heterotopic Alliances” in *Environment and Planning D: Society and Space* (Society and Space Website: <<http://www.envplan.com/D.html>> Published online 10<sup>th</sup> May 2012) Volume 30, P.741. [Accessed 1 June 2015]

<sup>443</sup> PWDRO. Accession 3901-41.

<sup>444</sup> PWDRO. Accession 3901-25.

aspects of his identity and, as a result, ascribed his space as being visibly queer. According to his clientele, his public persona ranged, often very swiftly, from flamboyant to violent. His performativity in this space operated against the cultural and discursive norms that existed in Plymouth at that time so this in turn enabled (or perhaps challenged?) others from the community to adapt their own performance within that space. “Harry looked after us,” recalls one straight woman who used to attend the club in the 1980s with her female friends. “It could become quite raunchy later in the night but you always felt at home there”.<sup>445</sup> Peter Buckley, however, recalls both the man and the bar with a sense of negativity: “People kept going on about how wonderful Harry was running a gay bar, but he wasn’t a wonderful person at all. He exploited gay people ... OK, but ....he was himself, but he wasn’t a nice character”.<sup>446</sup> He recalls Harry taking “a knife out of his boot once and holding it to somebody’s throat, a big knife. He was a funny person, if you accepted the fact that he wasn’t a good person”.<sup>447</sup>

Peter’s recollections are interesting when compared to his memories of The Lockyer Tavern where he found it refreshing to meet men who were “very butch and very in your face and slightly aggressive”.<sup>448</sup> Harry Greenslade’s embodiment in this space was a multilayered challenge to traditional portrayals of sexual identity but also to the accepted discourses that surrounded homosexuality. Harry was not embodying an identity that was in anyway camp, instead, he was combining his identity as a gay man with his role a club owner who could maintain and defend that business if challenged. His elevated position in the club challenged some of the traditional stigma that had been previously attached to gay identity in the city. It was a place that resonated with the people of Plymouth on a number of levels, in that it was run down in a way that Plymouth as a city was often perceived to be and had a proprietor who was not afraid to use violence to maintain the smooth running of the place. This sense of violence, or being able to withstand and deal with violence, chimed with the scenes being enacted on a weekly basis around the pubs on Union Street<sup>449</sup> and situated the city’s gay community in a position that was simultaneously like and unlike the wider Plymouth night time scene.

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<sup>445</sup> Conversations with Sheila Snellgrove, director of the Barbican Theatre, at the “Pride in Our Past” launch event. Barbican Theatre, Plymouth. July 2011.

<sup>446</sup> PWDRO. Accession 3901-41.

<sup>447</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>448</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>449</sup> As referred to in Newspaper articles in the previous chapter.

Paradoxically, through being a more openly queer space, the bar came to be accessed by a larger, more mixed public than had been possible in previous venues. Jo Pine remembers “it was straight and gay. A lot of matelots back in those days with the girls. And the trouble would tend to start more or less between them and then it would spill over. But it was fun”.<sup>450</sup> The matelots, as we have seen, had long been part of queer culture in Plymouth and so considered themselves as belonging in this space as much as they had in previous gay bars. Harry’s, however, was a counterpublic space that accommodated both gay and straight Plymothians who were negotiating their own performances and responses to queer culture in the city.

Lynne Roberts, a Plymothian lesbian, recalls the place with a similar sense of affection as Jo: “It was very busy. It was amazing in those days. Harry’s was amazing and I kept meeting people. It was packed, you couldn’t move”.<sup>451</sup> Still, she also shares some of Paul’s concerns about the club and its clientele: “We used to say that we didn’t like it when young girls used to come just to dabble...we would all say that they were dabbling and these bisexual women we always had a downer on them”.<sup>452</sup>

That bisexual women were being viewed as interlopers highlights a form of homonormativity taking place in spaces which aimed to disrupt such frames of reference. Their performative practices in that space were seen as not being authentic. The fact that Lynne considers bisexual women as outsiders rather than another part of her community reinforces perceived distinctions between sexual subjectivities. In her reflections she views them as straight women acting out of character and thus not as members of the queer counterpublic within this space.

Indeed, heterosexual women (or people of any sexual subjectivity) could equally consider themselves part of this counterpublic particularly as the Plymouth LGB and T communities were so often aligned with others who considered themselves outsiders for reasons other than sexuality but Lynne’s attitude seems to arise from the perceived motivations of these groups which could be seen to reinforce broader insider/outsider status within dominant culture: “We found that Harry’s was very much a voyeuristic place where straight people used to go especially on ‘Hen Nights’ and ‘Stag Nights’ to see what gay people were up to and my friend Sandy was what was called ‘gay bashed’ a few times”.<sup>453</sup>

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<sup>450</sup> PWDRO. Accession 3901-25.

<sup>451</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>452</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>453</sup> *Ibid.*



Warner claims that “much of the texture of modern social life lies in the invisible presence of publics that flit around us.”<sup>454</sup> These publics are “a concrete audience, a crowd witnessing itself in visible space, as with a theatrical public, by the shared physical space. A performer on stage knows where her public is, how big it is, where the boundaries are, and what the time of its common existence is”.<sup>455</sup>

The threat of violence is certainly a significant aspect in determining how far an individual feels empowered to display a queer public performance; while the idea of being watched, tapped again into notions of stigma. Harry’s willingness to employ violence to defend his authority in that space made the club subject to multiple readings for the queer counterpublic of Plymouth in the 1980s, not unlike the mythologising of The Stonewall Bar over a decade before but on a local level where a run down, somewhat seedy bar was elevated in the hearts and minds of its patrons and onlookers because queer patrons were willing to challenge prejudice and stigma which had been traditionally associated with them

### Plymouth’s Response to HIV/AIDS in the 1980s

Globally, as we have seen in Chapter Three, the performance of gay identity was significantly affected by the onset of the AIDS epidemic throughout much of the 1980s. As noted by Weeks “although never the ‘gay plague’ that the gutter press had invented, and although on a world-wide scale AIDS was overwhelmingly a heterosexual phenomenon, it was undoubtedly the case throughout the 1980s that in Britain the vast majority of people with AIDS or living with HIV were gay men”.<sup>456</sup> As the virus entered public perception, the national media mobilised and spoke of ‘gay cancer’ or ‘GRID’ which stood for Gay-Related Immune Disease and a discourse of fear created a public to heed that message. In Plymouth, Kevin Kelland recalls seeing a television programme in 1983 discussing the subject. “*Horizon* had this programme on about a plague in the village<sup>457</sup> and it was this mysterious illness of gay men dying of pneumonia and cancerous blotches on them - Kaposi’s Sarcoma.... I thought ‘I hope it never comes here’”.<sup>458</sup> At this time, the virus was still outside the experience of the Plymouth community and so the stigma that was beginning to be

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<sup>454</sup> M. Warner. *Publics and Counterpublics* (New York: Zone Books, 2005), p.7.

<sup>455</sup> *Ibid*, p.66.

<sup>456</sup> Weeks. *Coming Out: Homosexual Politics in Britain from the Ninetieth Century to the Present*, p244

<sup>457</sup> Greenwich Village in New York, USA. The full programme can be viewed here:  
<http://www.bbc.co.uk/iplayer/episode/p01z2lbp/horizon-19821983-killer-in-the-village>

<sup>458</sup> PWDRO Accession 3901-27.

attached to those who had contracted the disease had not yet affected the local gay community. Soon, AIDS would be perceived as a disease that affected the “marginal and marginalized, those who a remoralized society wished to exclude and forget: gays clearly, but also drug-users, prostitutes, those who came from Third World countries who might be at risk.”<sup>459</sup>

At this time, In Other Words bookshop was maintaining its progressive role as an information repository for alternative lifestyles and some of that information was questioned in light of the AIDS epidemic. Gay Jones recalls: “I think it was *The Sun*, they carried a piece about a pamphlet that was about how lesbian women could self-inseminate and become parents. And they said it was on open sale in a bookshop in the south west. And it was fairly clear that that was us”.<sup>460</sup> In Other Words’ unique status, as both a bookshop and a place for queer discourse, identified them in the local and the national press. “They also picked up on the fact that the booklet suggested that you could talk to gay men who might be friends to donate sperm for the process of self-insemination. And by the time that this was picked up of course, AIDS was on the agenda although it was written before the era of AIDS”.<sup>461</sup> This is an example of Halberstam’s observation that queer time is accessed when one moves away from frames of reference such as traditional forms of family and reproduction. This pamphlet was clearly espousing alternative practices which would be seen as challenging for a normative audience and HIV and AIDS enabled stigma to be attached to this potential practice. With the perceived danger of infection, medical discourse seemed to be supporting the requirement to stay within the traditional boundaries of reproductive agency.

Over time, the effects of negative media representation became more and more pervasive. Lynne Roberts recalls the impact of the British government’s HIV/AIDS awareness television and leaflet campaign entitled “Don’t Die of Ignorance” in 1987, in the shoe factory in which she worked, when it aired in 1987. “It was terrible in Clarks,<sup>462</sup> absolutely terrible”.<sup>463</sup> Her role as union rep led to her becoming directly involved with the stigmatisation of gay members of staff, including herself. “I had this problem with one of the mechanics who had reported that he was not using any of the toilets if that Michael A.... has been in there and I just went absolutely ‘apeshit’. I just went oh my god that’s awful, that

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<sup>459</sup> Weeks. *Coming Out: Homosexual Politics in Britain from the Ninetieth Century to the Present*, p244

<sup>460</sup> PWDRO Accession 3901-33

<sup>461</sup> PWDRO Accession 3901-33

<sup>462</sup> Clarks Shoe Factory which was based in Plymouth until its closure in 1996.

<sup>463</sup> Interview with Lynne Roberts, 67 years old from Plymouth. Recorded 24<sup>th</sup> February 2012. PWDRO. Accession 3901-44.

poor boy. It was terrible he was really kind of hounded about it.<sup>464</sup> From this account, it would seem Michael was being stigmatised for any display of identity as a gay man and Clarks shoe factory provided an audience which seemed to support this. Lynne attempted to challenge this but was unsuccessful in changing hearts and minds in that environment.

Such attitudes were not uncommon and not limited to Plymouth. For example, a telephone survey in the United States found that “55 percent of respondents agreed with the statement that “most people with AIDS are responsible for having the illness” and more than four in ten people believed “a man could contract AIDS through sex with an uninfected man.”<sup>465</sup> In short, so great was the associated stigmatisation of both HIV/AIDS and homosexuality that many people were able to believe that homosexuality caused the condition as opposed to it being transmitted through the infection of a virus. Warner reminds us that “like most ideologies, normal intimacy may never have been an accurate description of how people actually live”.<sup>466</sup> Yet the perception that an ‘incorrect’ or ‘illegitimate’ embodiment makes one a willing participant in their own stigmatisation maintains a structure which is “no less normative for being imperfect in practice.”<sup>467</sup> This impacts upon the publics and their discourses that form our worlds, including those within the workplace. In this particular space, at Clarks factory, Lynne encountered similar fear and stigmatisation directed at her. When talking to a colleague about going swimming during a break, she suggested they go together and received a reply that surprised her. “She said I wouldn’t want to go swimming with you, babe, and I said what are you talking about and she said some of your stuff might come away and go into me and I might get HIV”.<sup>468</sup> Despite the warnings of the British government’s campaign that AIDS and HIV could be contracted by everyone, the moral panic still seemed directed at the gay community.

On 18<sup>th</sup> March 1987, the *Evening Herald* published a double page spread asking “Will it be Life or Death in the Southwest’s Homosexual Capital?”<sup>469</sup> That Plymouth might be considered a ‘homosexual capital’ is interesting considering the low key approach the gay population of the city had traditionally taken, although possibly in comparison with smaller towns and cities on the South West peninsula the claim was not entirely unreasonable. The

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<sup>464</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>465</sup> J.Hippe. “Performance, Power, and Resistance: Theorizing the Links among Stigma, Sexuality and HIV/AIDS in Cuba” in *Cuban Studies*. (University of Pittsburgh Press, 2011).

<sup>466</sup> Warner. *Public and Counterpublics*. P.201.

<sup>467</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>468</sup> PWDRO. Accession 3901-44.

<sup>469</sup> “Will it be Life or Death in the South West’s Homosexual Capital?” *Evening Herald*, Plymouth, 18<sup>th</sup> March 1987.

article suggested that calls to “Neuter Gays” were justified on the basis that society’s attitudes have helped spread the disease. The *Western Morning News* followed up on this panic on 29<sup>th</sup> May 1987 with an article entitled “The Unknown Factor in the Struggle against AIDS”. While the terminology was not as extreme as in the other article, the author Jack Holman stated “the subject of AIDS is unpleasant. It offends many people that the disease and the means of its control should be discussed in public. Yet the Government was in no doubt of the need to publicise its dangers. Nor are we”.<sup>470</sup> Holman then goes on to present a questionnaire compiled by “Westcountry Health Chiefs” which contained the following statements:

(1) AIDS is likely to become a relatively common heterosexual disease, (2) AIDS patients present such a threat to society that they should be compulsorily detained in hospital as soon as they are diagnosed, (3) Patients who have contracted AIDS through homosexual activity do not deserve medical care, (4) Giving needles and syringes to intravenous drug users will only increase the number of drug users and (5) Fear of infection with AIDS will reduce people’s willingness to help and care for homosexuals and drug users.

For each statement the respondent was asked to confirm if they: strongly disagree, disagree, don’t know, agree or strongly agree and the article urged the reader to send the completed form to the city’s “Community Health Department” and provided the address.

The effective stigmatisation of perceived “at risk” groups can be seen in each of the questions. Newspapers traditionally present a specific discourse for a public that expects to be informed and educated with facts and valid information. Despite the fact that these statements are being presented as questions seeking opinion, their tone and intent is clear. There is no consideration of searching for effective treatment or even passing on useful information that may assist readers in taking appropriate precautions to prevent them from contracting the disease. Instead, the questions seek to measure public perception surrounding the illness and attitudes towards homosexuals and drug users. Statement three’s enquiry into whether homosexuals deserve medical care can only reinforce disdain and outright hatred for the homosexual community, labelling them as less worthy and less deserving of medical care than the remainder of society.

Kevin Kelland had just begun to contend with this stigmatisation on a personal scale following a relationship with an Italian student called Marco. Despite having been part of the fearful public watching the unfolding discourse around HIV and AIDS for several years, he

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<sup>470</sup> J.Holman. “The Unknown Factor in the Struggle against AIDS”, *Western Morning News*, Plymouth. 29<sup>th</sup> May 1987.

reflected that “you just think it could never happen to you”.<sup>471</sup> Eventually though he was forced to face up to the possibility and went for a test. In the period that followed, as he waited for the results, he considered the implications of a positive diagnosis:

I nearly went out of my mind and could hardly sleep. I was turning off the television because AIDS was always on, some scare stories. And eventually they confirmed it, just before Christmas. I think it was the 6<sup>th</sup> of December or the 5<sup>th</sup> of December 1986. Well I was absolutely ... I didn't know what to do with myself. Um, people in work knew that something was wrong. And I wandered round the streets, I couldn't really eat ... or sleep very well”.<sup>472</sup>

Receiving the news of his status from medical professionals was clearly a very traumatic experience for Kevin but he has shared in conversations that, on reflection, although such conversations contained degrees of fear and uncertainty around HIV and AIDS, it did bring same sex sexuality to the foreground of people's thinking. Practices which had been considered too unsavoury to be discussed in the mainstream were now being discussed openly as people looked for the truth around HIV transmission. Kevin found this to be incredibly significant as “this brought sexuality really into our front rooms with our televisions. Yes, it did. They had to talk about sex”.<sup>473</sup> Preconceived fears and notions had to be addressed, in a bid to protect everyone against the epidemic.

As Weeks notes, on a national level, the gay community had “developed a sufficient maturity to generate its own forms of knowledge and propagate them”.<sup>474</sup> Within two years of his diagnosis, Kevin decided to tackle the stigma he had associated with his status and began training as an “HIV buddy” with the Plymouth AIDS support group which was run by the Plymouth Health Authority. He recalls, “It was like a crusade to me, it became my life. We were fighting like a war. It was like being in a warzone, not that I know what a warzone's like. But it was like that”.<sup>475</sup> In the course of his training, he came to see how “gay lifestyles were now going to be much more empowered”<sup>476</sup> because they were challenging for first time “things like how did a nurse react when there were two men holding hands or kissing, when one of them were dying, or very ill in bed. These were things which were challenging”.<sup>477</sup> His willingness to share these recollections in the interview scenario, along the obvious passion he has for supporting those others affected by the

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<sup>471</sup> PWDRO Accession 3901-27.

<sup>472</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>473</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>474</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>475</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>476</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>477</sup> *Ibid.*

condition, make clear the pride he used to counteract the stigma that he was so acutely aware of at the onset of his diagnosis.

## Localised Performativity.

Another man about to embark on a crusade was Jono Madeley, an openly gay man who had moved to Plymouth from London in 1988. He had been struck by the great differences, in both terms of representation and attitudes, between the two cities. He recalls initially being fascinated by its location “close to the sea, fantastic moorland around me, it was absolutely fantastic. I loved the idea of living in Plymouth”.<sup>478</sup> However, he found examples of LGBT performance and performativity in short supply which did not match his experiences of living on the capital. He felt that London had “found a political voice, HIV and AIDS – that whole notion – had kind of galvanised the community together.”<sup>479</sup> Despite the best efforts of spaces such as In Other Words bookshop, this had simply not occurred in the same way in Plymouth.

Indeed, Jono felt that at this time “the focus of the scene was very much one pub and one club,”<sup>480</sup> principally The Swallow in the role of the pub and Mr Harry’s as the club. He felt that it was extraordinarily difficult to describe what Plymouth gay community looked like because its focus had always been about the people who accessed those spaces: “there was never a sense of people who, you know, may not use those facilities, who also identified themselves as being lesbian, gay, bi-sexual, trans-gender. And where was *their* voice?”<sup>481</sup> For Jono all LGBT performativity was taking place in these spaces and, while he knew that there must be other members of the LGBT communities in the city, they were not providing visible performances which he could access. The problem was further compounded by “a sense of, that as long as you keep it underground and as long as you don’t put your head above the parapet and make too much noise, then we’ll be OK”.<sup>482</sup> Jono attributed this also to Plymouth’s historical links with the armed forces and the fact he perceived the city as a space to be “still very much dominated by the military, you know the Dockyard was kind of at its

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<sup>478</sup> Interview with Jono Madeley, 49 year old gay man from Shropshire and subsequently Plymouth. Recorded 17th November 2011. Plymouth and West Devon Record Office (PWDRO). Accession 3901-26.

<sup>479</sup> PWDRO Accession 3901-26.

<sup>480</sup> PWDRO Accession 3901-26.

<sup>481</sup> PWDRO Accession 3901-26.

<sup>482</sup> PWDRO Accession 3901-26.

peak, the Navy were growing, and we had the army down here. So it felt as though attitudes and behaviours were very much geared towards what the military might expect”.<sup>483</sup> Local day to day performativity of LGBT pride was in short supply and principally confined to those spaces where it was deemed to be safe. Limited performativity therefore maintained the status quo and encourages limited performativity in the city despite different discourses being developed and maintained in London and beyond.

Unlike Jono, Paul Cooke had grown up as a gay man in Plymouth during the 1980s and agreed that representations of homosexuality during that time were either missing or else seemed very stereotypical. He recalled that as a child in the 1980s (much as Peter Buckley and Kevin Kelland had in years previously) you would “put on the telly and there’s no representation. Or the only representation is a camp gay man . . . and there’s nothing wrong with being a camp gay man at all but that’s how society viewed me and that’s how they viewed gay people”.<sup>484</sup> At this stage in his life, Paul was seeking to embody his sexual identity and perform it in a manner that seemed authentic to him. The paradox in his, and many young LGB and T individual’s experience, is the queer practices they need to witness to help inform their own performativities were not visible unless they realised their place within the counterpublic they sought to engage with.

The nature of specific places is also a factor when seeking visible queer performances in smaller towns or cities and provincial locations. Normally LGB and T individuals tended to be more unwilling to come out in their home towns where family and childhood friends resided. This could be a factor in why Jono Madeley was more prepared to embody a queer identity for a public to which he had no familiar attachment. Similarly, Gay Jones and Prudence de Villers had opened *In Other Words* in a city in which neither had a prior emotional attachment. Perhaps it was to be expected that when Paul met someone who embodied the type of proud, queer subjectivity he had been seeking through his childhood, that person was not native to Plymouth. Paul met Kieran McGovern in the early 1990s when he volunteered for a gay men’s health project which the older man was managing. He recalls, that “I started doing voluntary work with him and I think Kieran was probably . . . because again he was from Ireland, he was a cantankerous old bastard (I don’t know if you should put

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<sup>483</sup> PWDRO Accession 3901-26.

<sup>484</sup> Interview with Paul Cooke, 35 year gay man from Plymouth. Recorded 1<sup>st</sup> March 2012. Plymouth and West Devon Record Office (PWDRO). Accession 3901-43.

that in) but he was an amazing man because he was angry, he was HIV positive but he was really challenging Plymouth”.<sup>485</sup>

Paul’s portrait is of a man whose performativity was designed to constitute and share a sense of pride in his sexual identity as challenge any stigma society felt he should endure because of his sexuality or his HIV status. His performance embodied a lack of shame and so, consequently pride, and that pride was made apparent for any audience which he came into contact with. As Paul recalls “he was challenging both people . . . not gay and gay. Colin hated him from the Swallow<sup>486</sup> because he would wear leather waistcoats, Levi jeans, Doc Martens, pink triangles. He was very out when he met you he would give you kiss and at the time that was pretty out there”.<sup>487</sup>

Paul’s principal consideration in giving this interview for the archive was the fact that he wanted Kieran to be remembered as part of the city’s LGBT history. As Paul, recreated conversations and encounters with Kieran as is clear the impact that the older man had on Paul’s own sense of pride and also on his own performativity. Paul very deliberately greets other gay men in public with a kiss and did so at the time of this interview.

By adopting some of the known iconography which a knowledgeable publics or members of the subculture would recognise as inscribing his performance as that of a gay man, Kieran was providing a model of self-presentation that Paul had found lacking up until this time. Kieran consistently embodied his own sexuality in all areas of his life. The work he did, the clothes he wore and the manner in which he greeted another gay man in the street with a kiss, identified him as an unapologetic gay man. The fact that he did not alter his performativity regardless of the space he occupied meant he constantly challenged notions of stigma attached to his identity. As Warner points out “Homosexuals can exist in isolation; but gay people or queers exist by virtue of the world they elaborate together, and gay or queer identity is always fundamentally inflected by the nature of that world”.<sup>488</sup> In this way, Kieran’s public performance drew upon many of the recognised subcultural symbols employed in gay culture to create visibility through a deliberately constructed performativity of pride.

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<sup>485</sup> PWDRO Accession 3901-43.

<sup>486</sup> Colin Damp was the landlord of “The Swallow” public house from the time it opened as a Gay Venue in 1989 until it closed in 2012.

<sup>487</sup> PWDRO Accession 3901-43.

<sup>488</sup> Warner. *Public and Counterpublics*, p57.



Discourses of shame and stigma continued to endure within the city, however, particularly around the practice of gay men cruising public spaces in the city looking for sexual encounters with other men. Jono recalls his work with the Youth Service brought him into contact with local police in this regard, “There had been quite a crusade amongst the police nationally in kind of tackling people having sex in public places and the consequence of that had been highlighted by a couple of cases across the country where men who were having sex with men. They’d been caught having sex in a public place with another man and had actually committed suicide”.<sup>489</sup> Paul Cooke, when recalling his own initiation into the Plymouth gay scene, shared that “there was Club 91<sup>490</sup> and Harry’s club, and obviously the Swallow, and there was cruising on the Hoe and Central Park. I have to say, before the murder, I went to Central Park a lot. I think that’s a great advantage in being gay. You can get sex on tap. It may not be good sex but it is sex. There’s a negative and positive for cruising”.<sup>491</sup> As discussed previously, cruising provides a recognised form of scenario to display and explore a performativity that moves outside discursive and cultural notions that surround alternative sexual practices. As Warner suggests, “queer culture constitutes itself in many ways other than through the official publics of opinion culture and the state or through the privatized forms normally associated with sexuality”.<sup>492</sup>

### *‘We Didn’t Realise Until Then That They Hated Us’: Murder in Plymouth’s Central Park*

The murder to which Paul refers came to light when, after midnight, on Tuesday 7th November 1995, the bodies of two men were found lying two hundred yards apart in the city’s Central Park. One of the men, Terry Sweet, aged 64, died shortly after the police arrived. Sweet lived alone and was well known within Plymouth’s gay community. His attackers had slashed his genitalia and face and hit him around the head. The other man, Bernard Hawken, survived the attack, but had similar injuries which left him brain damaged and in a wheelchair for the remainder of his life.

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<sup>489</sup> PWDRO Accession 3901-26.

<sup>490</sup> Another Gay venue operating for a time in 1990s in the Portland Villas, Plymouth location.

<sup>491</sup> PWDRO Accession 3901-43.

<sup>492</sup> Warner. *Public and Counterpublics*, p199.

Reflecting on the incident two years later, the *Guardian* newspaper painted a picture of the three assailants entering the park “on a hunting expedition. Armed with knives, their fists and boots, the men were hunting queers”.<sup>493</sup> Their stigmatisation of the two gay men was sufficient to consider their lives to be of no worth. Members of the gay community were horrified to find such hatred in the city directed against them. It shook an implied assumption that their quiet existence was tolerated, if not accepted, up until this point. Reflecting back on this time, one man in an interview told me that, “We didn’t realise until then that they hated us”.

*The Guardian* pointed out that all three of the assailants were from “good” backgrounds: Richard Bownes was the son of a Plymouth City Council solicitor, Stuart Smith was the son of a golf club steward and was starting a butler course at the local college at the time and Roberto Pace’s parents ran a historical sea front café. He had a previous conviction for blinding a gay man in the same park when he was fourteen. At their trial, all three said they had taken a combination of alcohol, valium and butane gas and their defence was that it was just to be a fun night out and they hadn’t intended to kill anyone. Things just got a bit out of hand.



Figure 5.1

<sup>493</sup> K. Toolis. 'Licence to Hate.' *The Guardian Weekend*. 30 August 1997.

The scene of the attack in the weeks that followed the incident.

*(The Guardian Weekend. 30 August 1997)*

After the three men's conviction, their friends and followers desecrated Terry Sweet's killing ground with graffiti: "Kill all faggots, Pace-style! No Queers Here!" (See Figure 5.1). Far from feeling shame, their friends boasted about the deed. One was recalled as saying "I'm not saying Roberto did not deserve to be punished, but they did the world a favour, know what I mean".<sup>494</sup> On the path close to where Sweet was found, someone spray-painted the outline of a body and wrote: "Please step over spilt AIDS!"<sup>495</sup> The killers reportedly received fan mail while in jail indicating that many of the attitudes previously displayed in the local press still had meaning for a section of the Plymouth community.

On the morning after the murder, Jono recalls a telephone call at work from an inspector, and being invited to the police station. "I was asked if I could set up a helpline which would bridge the gap between the local police and also the local gay community because the police felt at that time that there may be members of the community who were either witnesses to what happened in Central Park, or had heard some news, that kind of stuff".<sup>496</sup> Jono agreed to assist in this and recollects being surprised at the time by the "strong groundswell of support" received from local pubs and clubs. Volunteers began to staff a helpline and Jono recalls feeling as if he had been "thrown into the middle of a media circus and it was really a case of looking serene on the top and paddling like crazy underneath".<sup>497</sup> The terrible circumstances of the murder provided the gay communities of Plymouth with new practices and roles to participate in, and so, a means to challenge this extreme and persistent manifestations of the stigmatisation of gay men and their sexual practices. They could show solidarity and pride in their community through being seen to volunteer or simply to be opposed to this groundswell of intolerance.

In a national newspaper report two days after the incident, reporter Jason Bennetto wrote that this unwillingness to talk about its gay community was strange as "Plymouth is not particularly squeamish about sex - it has a notorious red light district and a history of sex connected with its status as a garrison town for the Royal Navy, Royal Marines, and Army. Added to a population of about 270,000 it appears doubly strange that the gay community

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<sup>494</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>495</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>496</sup> PWDRO. Accession 3901-26.

<sup>497</sup> *Ibid.*

appears so timid”.<sup>498</sup> Timid may not have been the correct word to use but, as we have seen in previous chapters, the gay community had traditionally been keen to avoid the public gaze. Policeman Steve Pearce noted that “the press were always looking for an angle: How many other attacks have there been? Is Plymouth a dreadful place for gay people? Is it out of control?”<sup>499</sup>

The attack in the park put Plymouth’s gay community under the spotlight nationally for the first time. In a city where the gay community had prided itself by limiting its audience and had avoided drawing attention to itself, outside of the spaces it considered appropriate, suddenly an aspect of their lifestyle that was still regarded as shameful to much of the population had been responded to with violence and hatred. Individuals’ performance, relating to pride had come under the spotlight, and people were reconsidering how they should be perceived in the city. The queer community’s initial response (outside of working with the police to gather information to capture the killers) proved to be somewhat restricted due to the limited and fragmented nature of queer space and the performativity that could be seen within Plymouth. When recalling his involvement with the murder investigation, Jono expressed his surprise at how quickly he became a spokesperson for the LGBT communities once the attention of the local media turned towards them:

I wanted to give the general public a sense of what is normality in terms of a lesbian, gay, bi-sexual, trans-gender relationship.... And the stereotypes they may be wanting to hold onto, for example, that all gay men go cottaging, I was determined at that stage to challenge many of those stereotypes. But not only with the general public, I have to say, but also with the media, and I just kind of felt that it was a good opportunity to educate – I mean it gave me a platform.<sup>500</sup>

The eyes of the larger public were now upon Plymouth’s LGB and T communities following this attack on the gay community and they had been effectively forced out of the closet through displays of stigmatisation and violence.

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<sup>498</sup> J.Bennetto. ‘Stigma creates fear of Reporting Attacks’. The Independent. 9 November 1995.

<sup>499</sup> Interview with Steve Pearce, 62 year old from Plymouth. Recorded 6th December 2011. PWDRO. Accession 3901-34.

<sup>500</sup> PWDRO Accession 3901-26.

## Public Representation and the Formation of LGBT Groups in Plymouth

Warner suggests that maybe “because contemporary life without the idea of a public is so unthinkable, the idea itself tends to be taken for granted, and thus little understood.”<sup>501</sup> He also notes that publics must act historically and for a text or performance to have a public it must “continue to circulate through time” and so all publics “are intertextual, even intergeneric”.<sup>502</sup> Prior to the murder in central park, Plymouth’s gay community had sought to remain private and limit their public displays of gay identity to specific places and practices. With the very public discourses formed nationally around gay identity as a result of HIV and AIDS and the subsequent media attention which the murder brought to Plymouth’s cruising scene it was becoming more and more difficult for the LGB and T communities to avoid wider public attention. As a result, for the first time LGB and T communities in the city considered consolidating themselves into groups and subsequently adopting a more combined expression of the performativity of pride which they intended would challenge stigma in the city. Gay Jones recalled that, “For years people had said there was no way we could have a Gay Pride march in Plymouth. You know people would just be too worried about being seen by employers and neighbours and all sorts”.<sup>503</sup> As a result, the ‘need’ for a pride parade in Plymouth took on an increased significance in terms of all the LGBT Plymothians with a view to exploring the potential effects that their collective performance could have on the culture and discourse of the city of Plymouth and on the hearts and minds of the wider population.

Paul also recalls the effect on his own performance of identity when Kieran invited him to his first Gay Pride event in London: “I think Pride was a real turning point because it was like - Whoah! It’s in my face and quite scary and really exciting!”<sup>504</sup> However, immediately upon returning to Plymouth, Paul found himself reverting to his stigmatized performativity:

I do remember getting back and, this is really embarrassing, but I’d bought a tartan dj bag which I thought was very cool and I’d covered it with red ribbons and pride flags and I had a pink whistle. So I’m mincing into town, Plymouth City Centre and kind of “la la la la la” and then I bumped into one of my Mum’s friends and just put the bag back and, at the time I didn’t think about it, but I

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<sup>501</sup> Warner. *Public and Counterpublics*, p.8.

<sup>502</sup> Warner. *Public and Counterpublics*, p.97.

<sup>503</sup> PWDRO Accession 3901-33.

<sup>504</sup> PWDRO Accession 3901-43.

look back now and think wow and I think now that sparked off I need to get out of this fucking city. But I didn't want to because it was home.<sup>505</sup>

At London Pride, Paul had inhabited a queer space as a member of a defined counterpublic as a gay man but with enough geographical distance from Plymouth to allow him to explore the possibilities of his sexual subjectivity and his performance of pride. Upon returning to the city, however, familiarity with his spectatorship caused him to renegotiate and limit his performance of pride, despite still having a sense of the pride he had been exposed to outside of the city. For Paul, and for many Plymothians, the city still felt like a space where the display of queer sensibilities were restricted. Others were beginning to feel though that the way to contest this as a community was through more public manifestations of queer identity.

The first move in this direction was the formation of the Plymouth Pride Forum (PPF) in 1999. The group was brought together with a mission “to make Plymouth a place where Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual and Transgendered people can live and work with prejudice and without fear”.<sup>506</sup> This aim fully acknowledged the stigmatized assumptions for LGB and T people in the city and set about trying to directly challenge that series of assumptions with a deliberately constructed public performance. That of a group of LGBT individual's brought together and encouraged to be proud in their own individual LGBT performativity during day to day life. Adopting a format of regular monthly meetings and monthly newsletter, PPF pledged “to be a collective voice for LGBT communities, to provide environments where LGBT individuals can meet for support and for social activities and to establish Plymouth Pride Forum as an organisation which will ensure effective communication, information and publicity for members and wider LGBT communities.”<sup>507</sup>

In this way, the group sought to provide queer spaces where members could perform and embody the aspects of their sexuality or gender role which perhaps they did not feel comfortable expressing elsewhere. The group was formed and co-chaired by Prudence de Villiers and her colleague, Rob Manning, who both felt that representation of LGB and T identities in the city were still very limited. The same year also saw the formation of The Eddystone Trust which, at this time, was known as the Plymouth Eddystone Trust, before later changing its name in August 2003 when its remit extended across Torbay, Cornwall, Devon, Somerset and Plymouth City following a merger with Positive Action South West. From its creation, Eddystone concentrated on the advancement of health through targeted

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<sup>505</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>506</sup> Plymouth Pride Forum “Pink Saturday” Flyer. 2001.

<sup>507</sup> *Ibid.*

community HIV prevention, including campaigns and training; Hepatitis C information and support; and community prevention through newsletters, stalls and displays. The organisation provided an active response to the stigma associated with a HIV positive status and their work put sexual health and discourses around HIV and AIDS squarely on the agenda in Plymouth by working with the council and local health authority.

One of the fledgling Plymouth Pride Forum's most ambitious events was the "Pink Saturday" conference which took place on 31<sup>st</sup> March 2001 and was referred to by the group as "a bold step forward."<sup>508</sup> It was entitled "What will the neighbours think?" playing on those traditional notions of stigma, and included workshops, speakers, debates, stalls and information stands. The intention was for the event to be opened by John Inman arriving in a 28 foot white stretch limousine, but although he "arrived in good time for the preceding Friday evening for the event ... unfortunately a very serious family illness forced him almost immediately to have to cancel and dash back to London".<sup>509</sup> This would have been a significant performance of LGBT pride for Plymouth at this time and it was disappointing that the spectacle did not occur. The account of the day in the PPF newsletter recalls that when the doors were opened:

Nobody could really be sure whether the event would be a success or failure. It wasn't even known for sure if anyone would actually turn up ... but show up they did ... in excess of 100 people came through the doors over the course of the day.<sup>510</sup>

The event included an open forum attended by a panel which consisted of "solicitor Bridget Garood, financial expert Phil Carvosso and artist/sculptor/writer and self-confessed 'retired' gay rights activist Malcolm Libury". The panel was chaired by Prudence de Villiers and the theme was Passion and What Next? Each participant was asked to stand up and speak about what they were passionate about. Life, love and chocolate all featured but despite an intention to repeat the event, and also invite representatives from statutory bodies, there were no further Pink Saturdays. The day did, however, provide a significant representation of LGBT individuals and communities in the city and sent a far more positive representation of those lives to the wider community of Plymouth than had conveyed through the Central Park murder some years before.

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<sup>508</sup> Sounding Out: The Journal of the Plymouth Pride Forum. Vol. 1 Issue 1. April 2001. Printed version held in PWDRO accession 3901

<sup>509</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>510</sup> *Ibid.*

The forum maintained a presence in the city, regularly bringing together members of the LGB and T communities. One enthusiastic supporter was Jo Monk, who had come to Plymouth in 1951 having been born and raised in London in 1917. Jo proclaimed herself the “oldest living dyke in Plymouth” and gave talks about her life for LGBT History Month each February in the early to mid-2000s. During these talks Jo would share “From the age of ten to fourteen, I didn’t know myself. I thought I was the only one. I was worried, I wasn’t happy and I was lonely”.<sup>511</sup> Things changed for her at fourteen following a conversation with an older girl: “She made me talk to her and tell her what I was worried about. One day, one of the girls at school said ‘You know what we are? We’re lesbians’. I never knew there was such a thing. I thought, ‘I’m a person; I’ve got a title – I’m not just a misfit’. I was so proud I wanted to go and tell everyone”.<sup>512</sup> That sense of pride from being part of a community was particularly important to Jo and her willingness to share her story and her history with wider audiences created a sense of community with people who came to hear her. The fact that so much of her life had been lived in Plymouth as part of its gay community provided a sense of both place and pride for those who she spoke to.

The sense that public displays of pride were necessary in the city to enable queer individuals to explore and display their identities was becoming more noticeable. On 11<sup>th</sup> October 2005 a meeting was called among various interested people in Plymouth to discuss organising “some sort of LGBT pride event in the city.”<sup>513</sup> This meeting and the subsequent group that formed arranged for a float, representing the LGBT communities to be part of the Lord Mayor parade in May 2006 and followed this up with a week of events between 27<sup>th</sup> May and 4<sup>th</sup> June 2006. These events included darts and pool competitions, five-a-side football matches at the College of St Mark and St John (where it specified that all teams must have at least three women), line dancing, an LGBT film series at Plymouth Arts Centre, and a walk organised jointly by Plymouth Pride Forum and Cornwall’s Gay Outdoor Club at Shaun Prior. The poster promoting the event discretely asked those attending to “Please look for the rainbow ball on the car ariel [sic] at the meeting point.”<sup>514</sup> A picnic on the Hoe included a balloon release with messages attached “in memory of someone, to celebrate an occasion or to welcome pride in Plymouth.”<sup>515</sup>

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<sup>511</sup> “I thought I was the only Lesbian” First published on the *Evening Herald* website, 8<sup>th</sup> February 2009. Printed version held in PWDRO accession 3901.

<sup>512</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>513</sup> Plymouth Pride Event Introduction pack – held in PWDRO accession 3901.

<sup>514</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>515</sup> *Ibid.*



Plymouth Pride Event constituted itself as a charity in 2007 with the aims:

To promote equality and diversity for the public benefit in the UK and in particular but not exclusively the elimination of discrimination on the ground of sexual orientation and gender identity by raising awareness in issues affecting said persons in particular by promoting and staging an annual LGBT festival.<sup>516</sup>

It was Plymouth Pride Event that took forward the idea of the public performances of pride in the city over the next two years. They staged two pride events to take place in the Plymouth Guildhall and the 2009 event incorporated the quasi-pride parade which was discussed during the introduction to this thesis. While Pink Saturday and these two pride events raised the profile of LGBT individuals in the city, each public performance was rather specifically aimed at the LGBT communities themselves for limited periods. LGBT individuals were provided with the opportunity of moments when they could publicly perform with a sense of pride, for example whilst marching in the parade. What was to become more significant was how far those feelings of pride could be translated to their day to day lives and performativity and also in terms of the impact the spectacle had on the wider community of Plymouth who had witnessed these events taking place in their city.

## Conclusion

These examples each indicate how LGBT pride is created and understood alongside and in response to stigma. The Plymouth underground scene from the 1950s into the 60s thrived on subcultural connotations and took pride in the manner in which they could perform alternative identities in ways that apparently went unnoticed by mainstream society. Although indications were that a public existed who were not too troubled by a gay scene as long as that scene kept within parameters that were considered acceptable. The LGB and T communities chose not to come out publicly, or at least not to come out in all areas of their lives and so gay identity was performed and celebrated in areas where it was seen as appropriate to do so.

With the circumstances described in this chapter, these communities found themselves being outed into mainstream view and more so outed with full acknowledgement of the stigma which was still being attached to these aspects of their identity. Cultural shifts on an

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<sup>516</sup> Plymouth Pride Event Constitution 2007 – held in PWDRO accession 3901.

international scale, such as the response to the HIV/AIDS epidemic, and on a local level where murder became a response to cruising forced the gay community, warts and all, into a far more public than they had occupied before. The rise of a place like Mr Harry', which had endeavoured to reconcile the multiple discourses of queer with the less savoury aspects of Plymouth society, shows the queer community adapting to these changes in terms of their own performance. Gay issues have brought the LGB and T communities far more into the public consciousness and, in the years that followed, stigma and discrimination were still often the reaction.

The queer communities were being forced to perform these identities more publicly and in wider spaces and, while they were being performed in opposition to stigma, the sense of pride that these performances created was based around this challenge. The formation of specific LGBT groups such as the Plymouth Pride Forum were the beginnings of a more public performance of pride but that pride was limited to an uneasy form of public performance for the queer communities of the city. Public expression of non-heteronormative sexualities or non-binary gender roles may no longer have been restricted to the back bars of pubs but they were still a long way away from entering the mainstream consciousness of the people of Plymouth.

## Chapter Six: Exhibiting Pride

This chapter considers in depth the “Pride in Our Past” exhibition which ran from 28 April to 30 June 2012. As has been noted in the introduction to this thesis, the exhibition was part of the initial bid to the Heritage Lottery Fund and so this outcome was in place prior to the commencement of this PhD. However, throughout the process, it became clear that this public performance of the archive which was being created could showcase the archive and provide an opportunity to test the narratives that were being uncovered with a public audience.

It also became clear that this exhibition, occurring in the first year of this PhD study would provide an opportunity to test both methodology and research aims that underpin this thesis. The exhibition became an opportunity to perform pride for several publics using the archive itself. If Plymouth’s LGB and T communities have traditionally tended to avoid the spotlight then showcasing their history in this manner could provide valuable insight into what pride as a concept really meant to them on a local level. It was suggested, at the end of the 20<sup>th</sup> century, that “gay and lesbian history is tangible today because lesbians and gays had the will and determination to constitute and reclaim histories by writing books and building presses, and by establishing community-based archives and history projects”.<sup>517</sup> Yet, despite this, as noted in the introduction to this thesis, LGBT community archives in the United Kingdom remained limited until the first decade of the new millennium.

In 2006, Mills noted “a significant discourse is emerging on the staging of lesbian, gay, bisexual and transgender (LGBT) history for the British public,”<sup>518</sup> and further suggested that the repeal of Section 28 in 2003 may well have been a contributing factor for this level of interest. At the same time, he had warned that it was “difficult for LGBT public cultures to resist coming out narratives” or “to avoid the temptations of what philosopher Michel Foucault called the ‘repressed hypothesis’ – the notion that Western cultures are characterized by a stiflingly Victorian attitude to sex that has been progressively unravelling since the 1960s”.<sup>519</sup> This narrative was certainly an anticipated one for the Pride in Our Past

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<sup>517</sup> P. Thistlethwaite. “The Lesbian Herstory Archives” in C. Cough & E. Greenblatt (eds) *Gay and Lesbian Service*. (London: McFarland, 1995), Vol 10: p.40.

<sup>518</sup> R. Mills. “History at Large. Queer is here? Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual and Transgender Histories and Public Culture” in *History Workshop Journal*. Vol 62, 2006: p.253.

<sup>519</sup> Ibid. p.255.

exhibition but it was also very important to the curation team that this exhibition specifically told the story of Plymouth's LGBT communities. As Mills states, "those who self-identify as lesbian, gay, bisexual or transgender have stories to tell about complex paths they've followed from desire to identity to community to political consciousness, and about the levels of silencing, victimization and hate they've endured along the way".<sup>520</sup>

In preparing for the exhibition itself, I, and the rest of the curation team, revisited the aims put forward to the Heritage Lottery Fund. The agreement with them, in terms of the exhibition had been specified that:

The interviewees will be given the opportunity to share their story and contribute to LGBT heritage through preparation and production of an exhibition of LGBT Plymouth based on the project activity providing an opportunity for those involved in the archive project to disseminate that which they have uncovered and learn new skills in the curation of the exhibition.<sup>521</sup>

There were few interviewees who wanted to participate in the curation of the exhibition although each person tended to be interested in how their own story was displayed. In light of that, as community liaison, I endeavoured to keep them apprised of the planning and progress taking place whilst meeting the timeline and requirements of the museum staff. My combination of roles in the year leading up to the exhibition – that of interviewer for the oral history interviews, community coordinator for the Plymouth Pride Forum, and project manager for the Heritage Lottery Fund (controlling and reporting on the budget for the project to that organisation) placed me in a privileged position to witness discoveries and themes as they came to light, to liaise between the contributors of the material and the museum, and to reflect these negotiations in the exhibition as a member of its curation team.

As mentioned in the introduction to this thesis, the nine months leading up to this exhibition coincided with the first year of this PhD study and I was given the opportunity to work closely with both Plymouth Pride Forum as their community archive coordinator and also with the Plymouth City Museum and Art Gallery, where the exhibition was to be held. This link enabled me to contribute extensively to the curation of the exhibition. In some ways, due to the positioning of the heritage lottery funded project within the context of this PhD, it would seem appropriate to begin the thesis narrative with the exhibition as this was work I was undertaking in the first year. However, this is also (and primarily) the story of

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<sup>520</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>521</sup> Adapted from Heritage Lottery Fund application for "Your Heritage" funded submitted on 20<sup>th</sup> January 2011 by Alan Butler.

Plymouth's LGB and T communities, and the exhibition continued to perform that history and heritage. As a PhD researcher, my role in the exhibition enabled a further opportunity for me to sift and consider the materials available and ask myself what meaning they held for the performance of pride in the city. Then by displaying these materials to the larger public there was the opportunity for feedback on the archive at the end of its first year in existence.

So, for the purpose of this thesis, the exhibition is analysed as a performance of LGBT pride in its own right. Michielon suggests that: "Compared to the adjectives "interactive" and "narrative", the word "performative" simply seems better suited to frame the features of new multimedia installations developed with intuitive interaction and the "disappearance" of the technological device in mind. Furthermore, it especially emphasizes the centrality of human activity".<sup>522</sup> In this way, the exhibition could be regarded as both a performance of pride in the displaying and sharing of individual's stories with a wider audience but also in the means in which museum visitors interacted and engaged with the stories. For example, there was such an abundance of visual and oral history material that the curation team of volunteers and museum staff decided to install two iPads in the gallery, one containing all of the oral histories and the other containing all the photographs and imagery that had been collected. These tablets then enabled visitors to negotiate their way through the material in a manner specifically relevant to them, particularly as each interview was referenced with a title relating to its main theme which matched the themes and panels of the exhibition, relating to ancient LGBT history, Plymouth history, an underground subculture, HIV/AIDs, In Other Words bookshop, legislative changes, the murder in the park and the rise of LGBT rights since the turn of the millennium. The exhibition also included intergenerational work and specific sections relating to bisexuality and the transgendered community which will be discussed shortly. Michielon also offered that "from the performative perspective, by adopting a user-centered approach, the focus is placed on the user rather than on the communication project designed by the curator, on the exhibits themselves or the arrangement of the displays, which seem more in keeping with the term "narrative".<sup>523</sup> As the exhibition was principally being drawn from materials that had been obtained through interaction with the communities in question it seems most appropriate for the exhibition to reflect this in its relationship with its audience.

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<sup>522</sup> V. Michielon. 'Grounding a new meaning of performative museum on the paradigm of Natural Interaction.' *Tafterjournal* Vol. 61. July 2013. <<http://www.tafterjournal.it/>> [Accessed 2<sup>nd</sup> July 2015]

<sup>523</sup> Ibid.

In planning the means by which we could collect reaction and feedback, the curation team decided that both myself and the research assistant would give guided gallery tours around the exhibition. In addition to this, I spent time in the gallery space during the nine weeks listening to comments and reaction. The museum normally has a comments book for exhibitions but I was concerned people would be reluctant to leave thoughts and comment details so openly; I therefore arranged for a closed letter box to be in place in the gallery along with A5 slips asking for contact details (if people were prepared to share them) and comments about the exhibition. The feedback sheets, on the whole, seemed to evidence that the exhibition produced a sense of pride with an LGBT audience, coupled with (or perhaps due to) some surprise that it was being presented in a space so associated with a dominant cultural discourse. I also included a notice next to the box outlining the title and purpose behind this PhD study and asking for individuals who wished to participate or offer ideas around their own notions of pride. Responses unfortunately were all based around feedback concerning the exhibition.

There was an underlying sense, from the curation team, that the exhibition would support the recognised narratives around LGB and T history, as identified by Foucault, as being repression moving towards acceptance and reflect the impact of such a journey in terms of pride and in terms of the city embracing equality and diversity. There was also a definite desire to use the exhibition as a means to show what had been unique regarding the Plymouth story in relation to that narrative. This aim linked very suitably with the aims of this PhD project and provided a second opportunity to consider what complexities occurred in considering the unique aspect of the LGB or T experience in Plymouth. This aim was supported and enhanced by the desire to work intergenerationally as these hidden histories had not been transmitted from one generation of LGBT people to another. For instance, in my initial meeting with the Out Youth group, a twenty one year old gay man could not understand how, as a child in the mid-1980s, I could be aware of my own homosexuality without knowing what it was or that there were others like me. When I explained that, for the generation before, homosexuality was illegal he was shocked. The group's involvement also related to increased visibility for the LGBT communities of Plymouth and, also, the opportunity to educate the wider population of the city while providing some authentication of an LGBT individual's place in the city's history.

Spatial concerns related to the size and shape of the gallery then came into play and the decision was made by myself, the research assistant and the museum's design team, that the

four main walls of the gallery would each represent a period, or stage, in time. Stage one would be “The Early Years”, stage two would relate to “The Underground Scene”, stage three was “Changing Times” and stage four was “The 21<sup>st</sup> Century”. The movement of a visitor around the gallery was meant to mirror the chronological movement through time.

## Stage One: The Early Years

The beginning point of the timeline was initially intended to commence from the oldest relevant story that was discovered in the archive. This was extended further though when museum staff became aware of the possibility of borrowing The Warren Cup from the British Museum for the duration of the exhibition. The cup is named after its first owner in the modern age, Edward Perry Warren and has been dated to CE 5-15. Its interest for this exhibition is that each side contains a homoerotic scene displaying two pairs of male lovers. “On one side the erastes (older, active lover) is bearded and wears a wreath while the eromenos (younger 'beloved', passive) is a beardless youth,” while in the opposing image “the erastes is beardless, while the eromenos is just a boy”.<sup>524</sup> The museum came to the curation team to discuss if we wished to display the cup in a manner where only the first side was visible as notions of paedophilia have been associated with the second. While they were prepared to display it with both sides visible, decision was taken not to risk offence. The inclusion of the Warren Cup in what was effectively a community exhibition was unexpected and required an additional panel to discuss homosexuality in Ancient Greece, but the potential increase in interest from more traditional museum audiences could not be ignored and in several conversations with attendees they indicated that seeing the cup had been their principal motivation for visiting the exhibition. Also, its inclusion enabled the exhibition to begin with a panel which emphasised the British Museum’s description:

The Romans had no concept of, or word for, homosexuality, while in the Greek world the partnering of older men with youths was an accepted element of education. The Warren Cup reflects the customs and attitudes of this historical context, and provides us with an important insight into the culture that made and used it.<sup>525</sup>

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<sup>524</sup> D. Williams. “The Warren Silver Cup” in *British Museum Magazine*. London: British Museum. Autumn/Winter Edition, 1999: pp.25-28.

<sup>525</sup> *Ibid.*

Beginning the exhibition's narrative from a time before terms relating to "alternative" sexualities had any meaning provided a means to destabilise notions of gay identity as necessarily "other". Instead, the exhibition began with the idea that same sex encounters were unremarkable and less to do with gender and more concerned with discourses and power relations of class, age and prowess. Notions of LGBT communities as discussed and analysed in this thesis would have no meaning in this epoch of time. For the exhibition's public to be made aware of this shift before accessing the materials available in the form of the archive served to already disrupt the narratives that they may well have anticipated seeing.

There was surprisingly little specific feedback received from visitors to the gallery about the Warren Cup. It was installed and alarmed by representatives from the British Museum and some comments were made that the case was a little low as it was shorter than other cases used in the space. One of the most significant impacts it had on the exhibition space was that its inclusion meant that a museum attendant had to be present in the space throughout the museum opening times. Without its inclusion, the Hurdle Gallery, where the exhibition was installed, would have been principally unattended. One quote from a British Museum gallery attendant about the Warren Cup, from a previous exhibition which had involved its display, said "It has been amazing to see the reactions from all the visitors. They either love it or they hate it with a passion. Who doesn't like a little bit of controversy?"<sup>526</sup> Yet it provoked no controversy with the Plymouth public who seemed to engage far more with items and stories that spoke specifically to the Plymouth experience.

As Warner has offered, not only does a public exist in a space "by virtue of being addressed," but also, "since multiple publics exist and one can belong to many different publics simultaneously."<sup>527</sup> Within this gallery space for this particular exhibition, different discourses were employed that focused on Plymothian LGBT identity and a museum going audience. In general, those visiting the gallery had entered the space due to an interest in one aspect or the other (excluding those who were employed in some capacity to be there) or possibly both. The Warren Cup, despite its subject matter, seemed more of a draw to those individuals concerned with more traditional museum exhibitions and artefacts and did provoke some interest from members of Plymouth's LGBT counterpublic community who

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<sup>526</sup> *Pleasure you can Measure*. An online version of a report prepared by MHM for the British Museum., 2006. <<https://www.britishmuseum.org/pdf/Warren%20cup%20final%20online.pdf>> [Accessed 1 March 2014].

<sup>527</sup> Warner. *Publics and Counterpublics*, p. 67 and 71.



were surprised to discover that “their” history had endured for this long. In both cases, the sheer age of the artefact seem to create a discourse of authenticity around it and, as a consequence, same sex experience and practice.

This section was also designed to highlight the archival stories that were discovered in the PWDRO archive (and also described in Chapter One) around Robert Gould Shaw III and Mary/Mark Weston but the curation team also wanted to share the traditional discourse of LGB or T people being perceived as criminal or insane. In connection with this, a panel was created entitled “The Long Arm of the Law” to outline the punitive restrictions that were in place, both nationally and specifically in the city and also included pictures of specific places today in the city which were a part of that history such as old prison buildings. This notion of the law also allowed for several law books held by PWDRO to be brought out for display; being left open on the page where an offence linked to homosexuality was recorded. The inclusion of these artefacts again served to show how queer encounters had been taking place throughout history but had been responded to differently from era to era.

## Stage Two: The Underground Scene

The next section of the exhibition seemed to resonate far more strongly with the gallery visitors as it explored the subculture which had existed in the 1950s and through to the 1960s.<sup>528</sup> This section of the exhibition generated a great deal of feedback forms, perhaps because it was Plymouth-centric and, also, because it seemed to reveal some “secrets” of the gay experience in the city of which many exhibition visitors may have been unaware. The sense of “insider knowledge” equally resonated with the LGBT counterpublic too. “I never thought I would see this in Plymouth Museum. Great to hear and see stories of my past in Plymouth - a great place to be. I never had any trouble”.<sup>529</sup> This was a familiar comment which was repeated by several oral history interviewees with the proviso that the individuals did not make a fuss or draw too much attention to their queer identity.

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<sup>528</sup> This section included three panels with specific focus on The Lockyer Tavern and Mr Harry’s nightclub as two significant spaces during this period.

<sup>529</sup> Quoted in H. Phillips. *Pride in Our Past Evaluation Report*. Submitted to the Heritage Lottery Fund. 13<sup>th</sup> September 2012.

The first of the three panels in the theme was entitled “Going Underground” and displayed headlines related to the implementation of Section 13 of the Sexual Offences Act 1967 (discussed in Chapter Two). The panel also displayed a picture supplied by Ted Whitehead, a member of the gay community of the time who had provided an oral history interview for the archive. This image (Figure 6.1) indicates the underground subculture that had come into being as in response to such legislation and how moments like this were still regarded as being taboo or inappropriate in the years that followed.

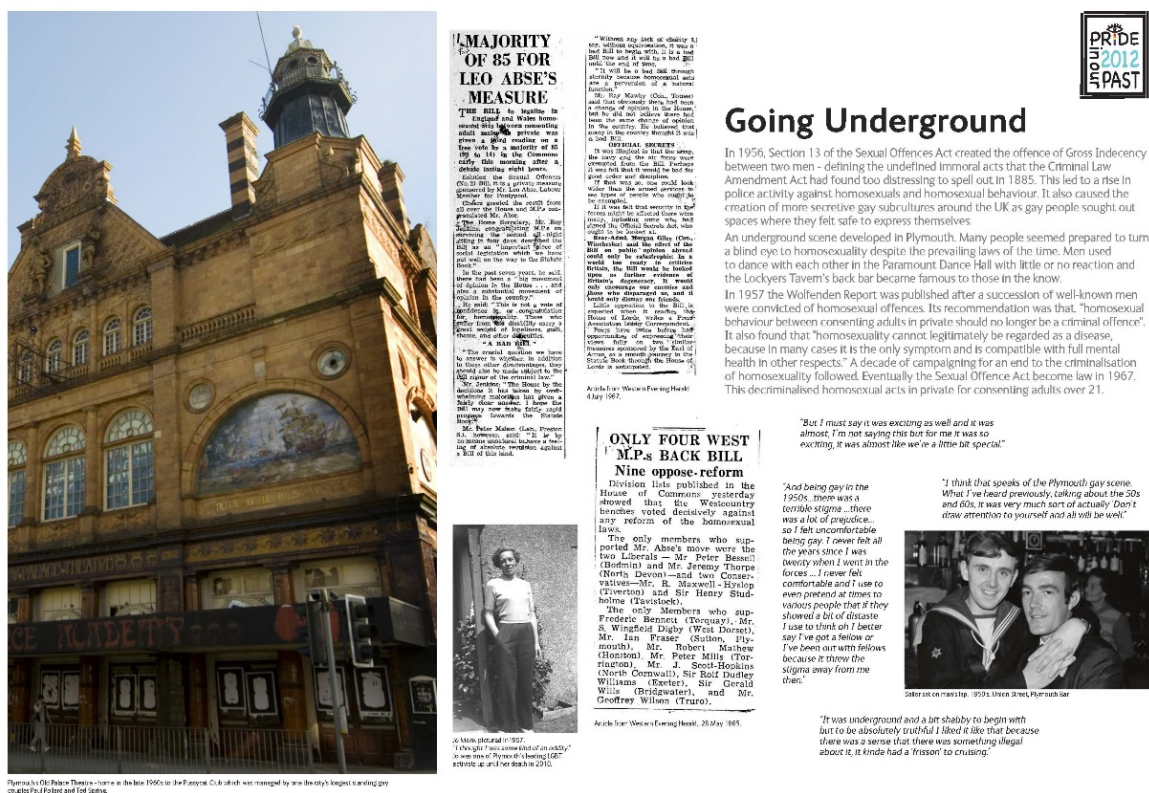


Figure 6.1

## “Going Underground” Pride in Our Past Exhibition Panel © Plymouth LGBT Archive 2012

I had been discussing with Ted, prior to his interview, why the lack of archival materials which exist in the traditional sense (e.g. photographs, letters and other documentation) led to me conducting an interview to effectively archive his memories. Ted saw the logic of this but then recalled a picture which featured himself socialising in a Union

Street bar with a sailor sat on his lap. He recalled the young man in question had been discovered to be gay and was due to be court martialled the next day. As a result, he was feeling very bold on that night and happy to be photographed. Ted could not recall who took it but just that it was “too good an opportunity” to miss on the night. It is a picture that resonated with many of the visitors to the museum and I was told informally on a number of occasions that the two looked like “nice men”. The picture expressed to many visitors the reality of the ban on gay men in the services which remained in force until the turn of the century.

The panel also included pictures of historic buildings in Union Street but taken today to highlight that the LGBT community had lived, worked and socialised in places that were part of Plymouth’s past, present and future. The aim here was to create a sense of a secret that was now being shared with the wider public but was still very relevant to the gay community. The narrative of the exhibition had reached a period of time which was remembered by some of the project’s interviewees and audio pens were added to the panels to include them. These were pens designed for use by the blind community; soundbites could be recorded onto the pen and correlated to stickers. The traditional use is that visually impaired people can move through their home placing the pens onto stickers on objects and hear a recording which confirms what the object is. In the case of the exhibition, visitors would find the pens hanging next to the panels and would be encouraged to tap the pen against a small square including the pre-programmed sticker. As a result, an audio clip would begin and bring to life the panel using the new oral history archive.

In this section, visitors could hear first-hand Mavis Arnold’s recollections of when she first realised she was working in a gay bar (see Chapter Two). Some quotes from oral history interviews were directly written on the panel, such as Peter Buckley’s comments, when discussing Mr Harry’s night club (see Chapter Five): “It was underground and a bit shabby to begin with but to be absolutely truthful I liked it like that because there was a sense that there was something illegal about it, it kinda had a 'frisson' to cruising”.<sup>530</sup> This recollection was chosen because it seemed to encapsulate Plymouth’s underground gay scene as it emerged from the project interviews: It was exciting, risqué and somewhat rough and ready but that is what made it of value to those who participated in it. Gay pride in Plymouth, as noted earlier, was most clearly performed in relation to the stigma which was normally associated with any

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<sup>530</sup> *Pride in the Past* Exhibition. Plymouth City Museum and Art Gallery. 28<sup>th</sup> April to 30<sup>th</sup> June 2012.

form of queer identity. This was emphasised by placing Peter Buckley's quote above next to this one on the exhibition panel:

And being gay in the 1950s...there was a terrible stigma ...there was a lot of prejudice... so I felt uncomfortable being gay. I never felt, in all the years since I was twenty when I went in the forces ... I never felt comfortable and I use to even pretend at times to various people that if they showed a bit of distaste I use to think oh I better say - I've got a fellow or I've been out with fellows because it threw the stigma away from me then.<sup>531</sup>

This recollection is made even more specific to the city of Plymouth by the fact that the person concerned was a in the military. This displays again how both wider and LGBT cultures that exist in the city of Plymouth is so often tied up with the armed forces.

If we continue to consider the two principal publics for the exhibition (regular museum visitors and members of the LGBT community), it would seem possible that the links to the armed forces would be equally as interesting to both although perhaps for different reasons. There is also a potential third public to consider who are not regular museum visitors but are interested in Plymouth history regardless of the LGBT aspect. For the LGBT audience it could potentially lead to the recollection and valuing of these times and experiences, as it would appear to have with this individual; "Lovely to see photos of friends and places now sadly gone, but good to see lots of people, young and old in here looking at the exhibits."<sup>532</sup> If visitors were too young to recall the time in question, perhaps the notions of stigma may historicize an aspect of their own experience. The discourse for the non LGBT community, alternatively, was intended to be one of information and discovery and, on the basis of feedback such as this, may be considered successful:

I found the exhibition of *Pride in Our Past* most interesting and informative. How very distressing it must have been to be ostracised because of your sexuality. Thank goodness, there is a section of today's society who appear to be more understanding of others who unfortunately are misunderstood by the general public.<sup>533</sup>

This comment seems to have been made by an individual who is considering, with empathy an experience outside of their own. In terms of educating the wider Plymouth population, this comment would appear to indicate some success in getting across the often distressing lived experiences of LGBT individuals in the city.

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<sup>531</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>532</sup> Quoted in H. Phillips. *Pride in Our Past Evaluation Report*. Submitted to the Heritage Lottery Fund. 13<sup>th</sup> September 2012.

<sup>533</sup> *Ibid.*

Some of the art and culture which is most associated with Plymouth as a city, included aspects of the LGBT history which had been uncovered and explored during the formation of the LGBT archive. In this section of the exhibition, therefore the curation team decided to display two paintings by well-known Plymouth artists. The first was a painting of The Lockyer Tavern by Beryl Cook (See Figure 6.2). During the exhibition, the painting was referred to as *The Lockyer Tavern* (1976) but is actually one of three versions she painted of the same scene which have also been referred to as “The Back Bar of the Lockyer”, “Tom Dancing” and “Tommy Dancing”. Both paintings show a group of men who could be perceived as somewhat camp watching a man dance with a crutch. Beryl Cook images had been shown on Plymouth’s Big Screen, located in the city centre piazza, and the idea was suggested at one of the curation team meetings to combine an image of Peter Tatchell heading the Plymouth’s previous pride walk underneath that screen and to include one of Beryl Cook’s Lockyer images. At the time, Peter Tatchell was carrying an “Equal Marriage” banner but that was amended to appear as if he was carrying a logo for the exhibition.<sup>534</sup>



<sup>534</sup> Peter Tatchell was contacted by email, prior to the publication of the poster, to obtain his permission for these amendments.

Figure 6.2.

Pride in Our Past Poster © Plymouth LGBT Archive 2012

Beryl Cook's (10 September 1926 – 28 May 2008) work is regarded by many as a quintessential part of Plymouth's artistic culture due to her long association with the city and the many Plymouth landmarks she included in her paintings so the inclusion of The Lockyer Tavern several times within her body of work again serves to place the gay community squarely within Plymouth popular culture. The national art critic, Adrian Searle, wrote of her work, "The best that can be said is that Cook celebrates ordinariness. She makes art for people who don't much like art, which is fine ... Say no to Cook and you are an illiberal, snobbish bore, with no sense of fun."<sup>535</sup> In this somewhat patronising review which seemed to indicate that Plymouth might be rather uncultured and ordinary, we are reminded of the earlier comment expressing how part of the joy of the underground scene was precisely because it was a bit ordinary and shabby. In the curation of this exhibition, there was a feeling that Plymothians have never traditionally viewed their home as a particularly cosmopolitan or glamorous city. Rather, that ordinariness is accepted and celebrated so with Cook's inclusion of The Lockyer Tavern that pride in the ordinariness of her city is extended to its gay community.

The second panel in this section featured a history of The Lockyer Tavern itself including plans of the building which displayed how space could be renegotiated and reinterpreted by a community. It indicated, to the museum visitors, that The Lockyer Tavern had been a space in the city and its historical discourse which included LGBT individuals. In his consideration of space, Nigel Thrift offers there are "many kinds of spaces, many kinds of dynamics, many kinds of existences, many kinds of imagination, holding each of these spaces in tension and never trying to resolve them: collisions, concordances, cataclysms".<sup>536</sup> At different times, and to different groups of people, the Lockyer Tavern had different meanings and the curation team wanted to showcase that, for the purposes of this narrative, the building had meaning for the gay community during the 1950s through to the early 1980s. Thrift suggests that we should not look to resolve these differences and instead accept that they produce "a sense of trajectory which is probably the nearest thing to what used to be called

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<sup>535</sup> A. Searle. 'Call This a National Treasure'. *The Guardian*, 24<sup>th</sup> July 2007  
<<http://www.theguardian.com/artanddesign/2007/jul/24/art>> [Accessed 12<sup>th</sup> June 2015]

<sup>536</sup> N. Thrift. "Space" in *Theory, Culture & Society*. (London, Thousand Oaks, CA and New Delhi: Sage Publications, 2006), Vol 23: p139-146.



history that social theory can now offer”.<sup>537</sup> While Thrift’s comments relate to actual space, from the varying narratives of oral history interviews, I would argue history as a discipline must create space for these multiple accounts and a means to encompass and represent them all for multiple publics as myself, and the curation team, were seeking to do in this exhibition. Discourses surrounding Plymouth and the LGBT communities needed to be interwoven for the exhibition to have meaning.

The final panel in this section of the exhibition was entitled “Subculture in Plymouth” and showed how the subculture changed and came more to the forefront of the mainstream public’s perception following events, such as the Stonewall Riots, taking place internationally. The panel prominently featured a large scale reproduction of a painting by Plymouth artist Robert Lenkiewicz entitled *Mr Harry’s Club* which was made in 1983. (See Figure 6.3).



Mr Harry's Club, 1983, Robert Lenkiewicz, 100x150cm, Oil on canvas, mounted on paper. - See also the artist's biography at: <http://www.robertlenkiewicz.com>

"The focus of the scene was very much one pub and one club. In terms of being able to describe what Plymouth gay community looked like, that was extraordinarily difficult because the focus it seemed had always been about the people who used the local gay pub and the local gay club."

"You know back in that day, and we all used to go out and have a great time. There was a real camaraderie and just enjoyment of the music of the time and everything. And there were a lot of places. I mean there was Gypsy Moth which now is called - what's it called, the 'bad arm'?"

"I used to go to loads and loads of discos every week at Devonport, which were CBE discos. I used to love it. And the times we used to have down there were amazing."

"It was refreshing to see it really different people to different jobs. I mean I met people who were plumbers, roofers and... ordinary people they weren't carrying handbags or..."

"We had the Penrose which was in Penrose Street which is like off Western Approach, behind there."

"We had our own women's pub the Penrose... Yes, the Penrose was amazing."

"And people if they were going on a hen party or stag party they'd go to Harry's to see the queers."

"Harry's was amazing and I kept meeting people... It was packed, you couldn't move, you'd go in there of an evening after being at a job which would have been the 'bad arm'."

"It was nice to have somewhere very female because there tended to be not really much of it at that time."

"Harry's, legendary. The place to go and we loved it."



## Subculture in Plymouth

In Plymouth, the Lockers Tavern continued to thrive and the local gay community continued to be 'quietly' gay within their spaces. However, events both at home and abroad were taking place that would affect the city's LGBT community.

Members of this community were also a big part for the instigation of the Stonewall Riots in New York in 1969 following the death of Judy Garland who had visited Plymouth in 1951. Seven days after her death, police raided the Stonewall Bar in New York - a fairly common event during that depressive time. The grieving crowd of gays and drag queens inside fought back. This event marked the beginning of the international gay rights movement.

One year later the first 'Gay Rights Protest' was held in New York City setting the foundation for the International Pride Movement and the celebrations we still enjoy today. Political struggles in the UK and the rest of the world persisted though. In 1971, the first Gay March took place in London protesting about the uneven age of consent for gay men.

Surgical procedures for gender reassignment were becoming more accessible and medical and academic thinking was beginning to call for gender to be recognised separately from biological sex. In 1960 the Beaumont Society was founded, a London-based social support group for people who cross-dress, are transvestite or who are transsexual.

On the Plymouth social scene, the Lockers Tavern received national attention when, early in 1976, the Sunday Times ran a Beryl Cook feature with a painting of the tavern. As it moved towards the end of its lifetime, and final demolition in 1982, the tavern became somewhat of a faded star.

By this time, however, new places were providing Plymouth's LGBT community with spaces of their own. The Gypsy Moth was a favourite haunt of many people along with a large number of venues that, while not specifically designed to be gay haunts, adopted the Plymouth approach of 'being okay with it'. 'Suzie Social Club' and the 'Good Companions Women's Disco' were just a couple of these. Mr Harry's was a far more openly gay nightclub than the city had seen before and proved popular with all groups both gay and straight.



Lockers Tavern, Plymouth, late 1970s and 1980s



2011 Gypsy Moth Club, Plymouth, late 1980s and 1990s

Figure 6.3

“Subculture in Plymouth” Pride in Our Past Exhibition Panel © Plymouth LGBT Archive 2012

<sup>537</sup> Ibid.

The image was contextualised in the exhibition with ten oral history quotes about the venue that were included in Chapter Five of this thesis including “Harry’s. Legendary. The place to go and we loved it”.<sup>538</sup> The original painting was owned by an independent art collector at the time of the exhibition, and there had been much discussion with the museum staff as to whether it should be hired and displayed.<sup>539</sup> Ultimately it was decided not to take this course of action as we were offered another Lenkiewicz original which showed a different aspect of LGBT life in Plymouth and will be discussed shortly.

Lenkiewicz, like Cook, is an artist who is very much associated with Plymouth. Up until his death in 2002 he worked on long-term projects and created large-scale exhibitions of paintings related to what the Lenkiewicz Foundation refers to as “sociological issues” on themes such as “vagrancy, mental handicap, old age, suicide, death”.<sup>540</sup> One of these projects was called “Sexual Behaviour” and it was as part of this subset that he painted Mr Harry’s Club. Lenkiewicz’s aim was to illuminate the lives of “invisible people”. As discussed in the previous chapter of this thesis, it was this nightclub that Plymouth’s LGB and T communities had become more visible to the greater Plymouth public. Harry Greenslade, as a figure in the centre, dominates the painting just as his presence and character set the tone for the nightclub. Mr Harry’s had been a venue very publicly associated with Plymouth’s LGBT community and was very much in the Plymouth consciousness. Many people were aware of Mr Harry’s in the 1980s and, consequently, aware of Plymouth’s LGB and T communities through that connection. Mr Harry’s, as a venue, also, consequently, became somewhere that could feel friendly to many of Plymouth’s more alternative scene in much the same way as “In Other Words.” In a similar way to Beryl Cook’s painting, Lenkiewicz’s willingness to paint the queer community of Plymouth was another step in bringing them into the public eye, in much the same way that his subject, Mr Harry, had done with his nightclub.

### Stage Three: Changing Times

The next grouping of four panels, each relating to some of the materials discussed in earlier chapters and chronologically fitted into a time frame of the 1980s through to the early

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<sup>538</sup> *Pride in the Past* Exhibition. 28<sup>th</sup> April to 30<sup>th</sup> June 2012.

<sup>539</sup> Sadly, and ironically, the original painting was destroyed in a fire during the time of the *Pride in Our Past* exhibition.

<sup>540</sup> The Lenkiewicz Foundation Website -< <http://www.robertlenkiewicz.org/content/about-robert-lenkiewicz>> [Accessed 4th April 2015].



2000s. Although the curation team initially felt these served to reinforce the stigmatization of gay experience, we believed that this would subsequently lead to the questioning and possible challenging of such notions. The panels were titled: “Don’t Die of Ignorance” relating to the HIV/AIDS epidemic; “Getting Political,” which referred to the Section 28 legislation; “Murder in the Park” which dealt with the hate crime attacks which took place in Central Park in 1995 and “Proud to Serve” which addressed the fact that it was not until 1999 that the European Court of Human Rights overturned the ban on lesbians and gays serving in the armed forces.

An audio clip was included on the latter of a Plymothian sailor, Martyn Hammond, who reflected on his treatment when he was dishonourably discharged from the navy for being gay, just a few years before the change in the armed forces’ policy. The curation team selected an audio segment from the oral history interview, recalling a time when Martyn had been detained for the ‘offence’ of being gay in the Navy. He shared that “I was interviewed for a couple of hours, given a break, another couple of hours, given a break and then they’d lock me in a cell again ... which was the most disgusting, depressing, vile place you could ever want to go.” When this process was over for the day, he was “shoved in there for the night and I tell you what I’ve never felt so scared I suppose for a better word of it, thinking this is what they can do to somebody, for being what, Gay, this is it as I am, I haven’t done anything wrong”.<sup>541</sup> The spoken testimony, as part of the panel, brought to light the lived experience of a gay man in the Navy and was intended to make the museum audience consider how it had been for all those servicemen and women affected by the living with the fear of a dishonourable discharge.

Each panel was designed to display a shift over time in terms of representation and human rights, of which perhaps the dominant public would not necessarily be fully aware, and, for the LGBT audience, to highlight some of distances which had been travelled. One comment, which did not confirm if the respondent was from the LGBT community or not, referred to this section of the exhibition as “very in depth” and went on to say: “I considered myself quite well informed about the LGBT community, I was pleasantly surprised to be proved wrong”.<sup>542</sup> It seemed that individuals connected to the exhibition on a number of levels in relation to their subjectivity.

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<sup>541</sup> Interview with Martyn Hammond, 47 year old Gay man from Plymouth. Recorded 21<sup>st</sup> February 2012. PWDRO. Accession 3901-37.

<sup>542</sup> Phillips. *Pride in Our Past Evaluation Report* 13<sup>th</sup> September 2012.

## Stage 4: 21st Century

The final three panels were designed to bring the story up to date for the 2012 exhibition. The first provided a list of the many changes in legislation which took place since the turn of the century attempting to show in national and international terms how far LGB and T rights had been legislated for in the twelve years prior to the exhibition. To highlight some of these changes on a local level, the panel included a recreated image of a same-sex marriage, in which the two women involved agreed to recreate their wedding day for one of the project's volunteer photographers entitled *Civil Partnership Ceremony*; an image, entitled *Transition*, of a young transgender woman looking at her reflection in the window of the Plymouth College of Art where she was embarking on a degree course; and a three year old girl, the daughter of lesbian couple who had contributed to the exhibition, in an image called *Family Matters* to match her t-shirt. (See Figure 6.4).



Figure 6.4.

“Birth of Rights” Pride in Our Past Exhibition Panel © Plymouth LGBT Archive 2012

The lesbian couple advised the photographer they would prefer not to be named but as they had undertaken a number of photoshoots for her they were happy for the image to be used in the exhibition. The young trans woman felt at the time of her involvement she would prefer to leave her name off the panel although, by the time of the exhibition, she was very happily posing for photographs next to the image. This is an indication of the type of pride the process instilled in some of those who participated. With regards to the third image, there were some concerns on the part of museum staff that this young girl could potentially become the victim of bullying when she went to school as the result of her inclusion in the exhibition but they finally adhered to the desire of her parents that the image be included to highlight the fact that many members of the LGB and T communities are parents. The conversations surrounding this panel did highlight, however, how multiple audiences are aware of the stigma and prejudice which is traditionally associated with LGB and T identities and how that can be continued and reproduced through the very best intentions of protecting a minor. In terms of Altman's identified responses to homosexuality discussed in Chapters Three and Four, this could be seen as an unfortunate development of tolerance. In this way, the implicit assumption of the troubling difference of a non-heteronormative family makes it something to avoid representing publicly.

I also selected an audio clip from the oral history archive for this panel in which an older man reflects on how much more meaningful being in a civil partnership had been than he expected. After agreeing to the ceremony due to pressure from his partner and principally doing so to obtain legal rights, he had been shocked at how the process had made him reconsider their relationship with an increased sense of legal standing and validity. The discourses about law and, consequently legitimacy, led to him taking an increased sense of pride in his role as a civil partner.

The next panel was entitled "Everyone's Business" which focussed on how legislation such as the Civil Partnership Act, Gender Recognition Act and Equality Act had moved LGBT identity from being something that was taboo and not to be discussed to something that is at the forefront of thinking for businesses and statutory bodies due to the effects of equality legislation. Rather than something to be ignored, consideration of LGBT people and culture is now a very real consideration for employers and service providers on both a national and local level.

The final panel was entitled “21<sup>st</sup> Century Pride” which featured Plymouth’s first Pride Parade, as described in the introduction to this thesis. As outlined there, this parade was limited in terms of length and duration. As a deliberate attempt to support the narrative trajectory of repression to visibility (outlined at the beginning of this chapter), however, the curation team chose an image which showed the parade in its most favourable light with a large image of a group marching through the city proudly. The caption claimed that “a wide range of activities and events, including candlelight vigils, protests and celebrations have helped to do this – drawing more attention to the diversity that has always existed here in Plymouth”.<sup>543</sup> While the image was a true one and the caption was accurate, the sense of pride that we as curators were trying to display in the panel did not really match the lived experience of those individuals shown in the picture. It was a fleeting, bold performance for them which we captured and highlighted to represent a positive ending for the period of time represented within the exhibition.

## Representing Diversity within Diversity

In terms of diversity, it was clear that the exhibition, as with the archive and indeed this thesis, contained principally the stories of gay men. There was a collection of stories from lesbians but the numbers were significantly less. We had only one account from a transgender woman, and she was reluctant for much of her story to be made public. In a bid to counter this slightly, the decision was taken by the curation team to include two panels which were made up solely of quotes given in the more limited number of interviews that touched on transgender issues and bisexuality even though many of these came from gay interviewees. It was widely felt by all those involved to be an unsatisfactory solution but was taken to give some space in the exhibition to these two groups of people who had been harder to track down and talk to during the course of the oral history interviews at the point the exhibition was being finalised.

I still did not feel this significantly represented bisexual individuals or experience, so I specifically appealed to one of the project’s volunteers, Rachel, who defined as a bisexual

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<sup>543</sup>*Pride in the Past* Exhibition. 28<sup>th</sup> April to 30<sup>th</sup> June 2012.

woman and had been reluctant to participate in an oral history interview of her own. A few days before the exhibition, she emailed me this account:

I'm not undecided, I know who I'm attracted to and there's really no confusion from my perspective. I like people for their differences as well as their sameness and for me, this just happens to involve a level of sexual attraction. I hate that this is seen as greedy, I am proud to identify as bisexual. It would be nice to think the rest of the world might be suppressing certain desires due to conformity; maybe I'm the one who's more 'normal'.<sup>544</sup>

Her willingness to queer herself and society and step outside of hegemonic notions of what many (both gay and straight) think sexual desire should be provided a powerful narrative. This consequently enabled the exhibition space to include a bisexual voice in a way that I felt the quotations panels would be unable to do. Rachel's use of the word "pride" in relation to her identification as bisexual was perfectly in fitting with the exhibition and when the quote was printed ready for inclusion in a display case, she decided to attach her full name to it.

Our transsexual interviewee was happy to include this quote, reflecting on childhood Christmas presents, as part of the panel: "That Christmas I got an Action Man, so whether there was somebody saying I'd asked for a doll and here, lo and behold and suddenly you were given an Action Man, you're a boy that's what boys have".<sup>545</sup> It did not really seem to be enough material to represent the transgendered community of Plymouth in the exhibition but there was a sense among the curation team that we had made some attempt to redress the balance. Also, the remit had always been for the exhibition to primarily reflect the stories shared in the archive so to some extent we could only work with the material that had been generated by the project. Fortunately, along with the story of Mark Watson, transgender representation was also addressed to some extent in the contribution from Plymouth's LGBT young group which I will discuss in a subsequent section.

The shortfalls of the exhibition were not lost on its audience, who made comments such as: "Lacking in information about lesbians, history of women – mainly focussed on men"<sup>546</sup> and "As a whole, needs more women! Happy to do an interview/dig out photos etc. Fantastic though!"<sup>547</sup> As we can see from this second quote, creating a LGBT discourse in and through

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<sup>544</sup> R. Cunningham. Written panel from the *Pride in the Past* Exhibition. Plymouth City Museum and Art Gallery. 28<sup>th</sup> April to 30<sup>th</sup> June 2012.

<sup>545</sup> *Pride in the Past* Exhibition. 28<sup>th</sup> April to 30<sup>th</sup> June 2012.

<sup>546</sup> Phillips. *Pride in Our Past Evaluation Report*. 13<sup>th</sup> September 2012.

<sup>547</sup> *Ibid*.

the museum highlighted the gaps in the archive at that time and also, in some cases, provided a potential solution as people saw their own lives and experiences not fully represented and so offered to come forward and share their stories to fill these gaps. Our endeavours to reflect the bisexual experience with pride were successful in at least one instance, however, as one feedback form shared “This exhibition makes me so proud to be a 21year old bisexual in Plymouth today; we owe a huge debt of gratitude to those who fought for equality in the past”.<sup>548</sup>

## Generational Interpretation

As outlined in the aims of the project as part of the original Heritage Lottery Bid, Plymouth’s Out Youth group was to contribute and respond to the archive in a manner which felt significant for them. The group is maintained by Plymouth City Council youth workers and provides a weekly meeting for thirteen to twenty five year olds who are lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender or questioning either their sexual or gender identity. It seemed important for the archive, and the exhibition, to celebrate and represent our past but also our present with an eye to the future. One common feature for people working with oral history interviews is the way in which stories and histories are handed down from generation to generation to give young people a sense of their place in a community along with a history that in many ways they are the successors to. LGBT children though often tend to not be born to LGBT parents so they grow up with no sense of heritage with regards to this aspect of their identity. The community archive provided a means to collect stories which they otherwise would not have heard and also offered them a platform to begin thinking about their own stories in relation to this heritage.

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<sup>548</sup> *Ibid.*



Figure 6.5

“Out Youth” Photo as part of the Pride in Our Past Exhibition Panel © Plymouth LGBT Archive 2012

The young people had been surprised at how different life was for LGBT people just ten, twenty, or thirty years ago. I had told them stories of a Plymouth gay male couple I had interviewed for whom homosexuality was illegal in their youth. This narrative seemed to be something that fired their imaginations and it caused them to think about their lives in a way they had not before. They created time lines of their lives and wrote letters to people looking into the archive one hundred years in the future. Upon reading a number of these letters, it was very noticeable the comments the young people were making to “future LGBT” people focussed around telling that person that they should not be afraid or ashamed of who they were. They were pressed to seek out others like themselves and obtain support from groups and communities. There was a clear sense of pride in these letters from the young people, saying that they had been on a journey and were the stronger for it. Yet, it was interesting to note in each case, there was no assumption that LGBT representation would not remain stigmatized. Pride was being represented by the young people but again in the face of anticipated and continuing stigma. Despite this somewhat pessimistic vision for the future, one young person shared at the exhibition that being part of the project made him feel as if he was ‘making history.’ He had been surprised by how empowered that had made him feel,

showing how being able to voice one's story and make it part of the historical discourse could engender a sense of pride and a sense of heritage and legitimacy.

At a weekend residential course, the group worked with local artists to make a series of photographs and paintings which could potentially be included in the exhibition.<sup>549</sup> When the selection process took place, however, museum staff were keen to include them all. The young artists also included written accounts of their motivations for creating different pieces and, as a large percentage of the group self-identified as being transgender, this inclusion provide further insight into this community. One young transgender man shared:

This piece I honestly created almost without thinking. The creativity struck me and I just began to paint with the purpose of displaying a simple message, which I also painted on the piece itself. "Even in the darkest of times, there is always hope." This has been true to me, it's a good motto to remember.<sup>550</sup>

As a result, the younger transgender experience was much more available to both the archive and the exhibition than testimony from those who had been part of Plymouth's transgender community in the past or for longer periods of time. Much of the young people's work spoke of being "true to yourself" as somebody who was "Born this Way." Borrowed from pop icon Lady Gaga, this was a message that resonated strongly with this group. One participant shared that, "some LGBTQ people, including myself, have been told by family members they believe our sexuality is a passing phase, this is not true we were all born this way".<sup>551</sup> The need for their embodiment as LGBT individuals to be viewed as authentic was a theme that ran through their contributions.

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<sup>549</sup> Working in conjunction with two local Community Interest Companies – Fotonow and Be Free Media.

<sup>550</sup> *Pride in the Past* Exhibition. 28<sup>th</sup> April to 30<sup>th</sup> June 2012.

<sup>551</sup> *Ibid.*





Figure 6.6.

#### “Out Youth” Painting

As part of the Pride in Our Past Exhibition Panel © Plymouth LGBT Archive 2012

Abi, the artist of the piece represented in Figure 6.6, described her motivation as follows:

Before coming out life is very black and white, people label you to their own expectations, people tell you who you are and what you do with your life. Coming out and entering the LGBT community openly gives you your own individuality without looking a certain way. People don't base their opinions on how you look it becomes about you as a person.<sup>552</sup>

The need for individuality to be respected is a theme that was included in much of the group's contribution and the wider public seemed to respond to that message. One piece of audience feedback commented that: “The exhibition itself was well presented – a good variety – from written word, audio, photographs, books, clothes etc. It was good to see young people as well as adults included”.<sup>553</sup>

Close to these more current offerings, the curation team installed two iPads which included all of the oral histories and images from the archive not included elsewhere so

<sup>552</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>553</sup> Phillips. *Pride in Our Past Evaluation Report*. 13<sup>th</sup> September 2012.

visitors could interact with the materials in their own way. The following comment was provided by a teacher who visited with a group of school children aged 9-10:

The exhibition gallery had a real buzz! It was fantastic there were pre-schoolers reading books with parents and grandparents, primary school children who just loved the pictures and oral histories on the iPads, secondary school students who were fascinated with the Out Youth Group art work and older visitors who studied the panels and exhibition cases in detail.<sup>554</sup>

She also wrote that her student group “were very inquisitive and asked lots and lots of questions. They understood how people could be discriminated against and knew that it was wrong.”<sup>555</sup> Warner tells us a public is constituted through it being addressed and in this way, the exhibition helped to create a new public in Plymouth who, regardless of their current or future sexual or gender identities, were being addressed with the message that it was not shameful to be different. To receive that message early in life allows for the possibility of explorations of pride based on positivity, rather than being defined as a challenge to stigma. Young people growing up as heterosexual or cisgender may be made aware from an early age that people who identify as queer or simply different are part of their community. For young people who may eventually embrace queer identity positions, the exhibition could serve to show them Plymouth as a place with a queer heritage and a place in which LGBT people are part of their community’s past, present and future.

## Exhibition Space

Space was a major consideration for the curation team when planning for the exhibition. It was installed in the museum’s Hurdle Gallery, which is one of the galleries designed for temporary exhibition but is set back from the main access areas of the museum. Both entrances to The Hurdle Gallery were actually doorways from two other galleries and, as a result, both the gallery and consequently the Pride in Our Past exhibition could not be directly accessed from the museum’s main public space. Within a week of the exhibition opening it became clear this was something of an issue. Regular museum attendees knew where to find this space and after the nine months of work so did the curation team and many of the volunteers. I was told by several attendees, however, that this exhibition marked the first time they had visited the museum, having specifically attended as LGB or T individuals

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<sup>554</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>555</sup> *Ibid.*

and this led to some comments recalling the subculture of the 1950s and 60s: “Finding the exhibition in the museum wasn’t easy – why was it hidden away? You needed to be in the know to find it – bit like the old days?”<sup>556</sup> and “Only complaint – a shame it wasn’t more clearly signposted and positioned for ‘passing trade’.”<sup>557</sup> The back room in The Lockyer Tavern seemed to have been unintentionally invoked through the positioning of the gallery and various aspects seemed to chime with those who could remember the places being represented and provided those who could not with a sense of that history.

One comment, added to *The Herald* website following an article about the exhibition, noted “this exhibition shows that, far from being something ‘new’, Plymouth has a long association with gay culture”.<sup>558</sup> Comments such as this seem to evidence that we were successful in maintaining a local discourse at the heart of exhibition. The sense of Plymouth as a place needed to remain at the heart of the narrative and provided something different to the expected LGBT exhibition discourse which deals, often on a national level, with the struggle for rights and acceptance. The sense that Plymouth was an unlikely place to both examine and frame its LGBT heritage continued throughout the run. Even individuals who had been part of that history had not expected to see it celebrated in this manner. Feedback sheets were submitted saying “I think it’s a real significant moment when Plymouth showed recognition for its LGBT” and “Very thought provoking. Powerful exhibition to be held in Plymouth and putting the LGBT history for the city on the map”. Gay Jones, when reflecting on the exhibition in a feedback form of her own, confessed “Still a bit hard to believe that it’s here!”<sup>559</sup>

One aspect that she found most surprising was the attempt to recreate her bookshop, In Other Words, within the gallery space where many of the shop’s books, which had only been available via an Ebay site, could now be perused and purchased again. There were practical reasons for doing this as the Hurdle Gallery, as a result of its location, is also visited by those who need to walk through it to reach another gallery. By creating a space which was welcoming for them to stop and sit, it seemed possible to increase the levels of engagement with the materials. Also, for many visitors to the gallery this was an initial engagement with LGBT culture and so providing a range of reading materials and local information seemed a useful introduction. The creation of a safe environment to explore LGBT writings and

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<sup>556</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>557</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>558</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>559</sup> *Ibid.*

materials for this nine week period echoed the role of the In Other Words bookshop discussed in Chapter Four. In recreating some sense of that space within the gallery, we were attempting to directly enable the past to resonate with the present. Many of the books that had lined the bookshop shelves were still in Gay's possession as part of an online book store she still maintained and she was happy to lend them to the project.

It also provided an opportunity to include something that would not have been well received during the life of the bookshop (as we have noted previously) LGBT themed children's books. A selection of these were purchased and placed on a coffee table in the space. Part of this consideration arose from the museum team's remit that all exhibitions should be as family friendly as possible. A selection of children's books dealing with same sex relationships and representations of non-heteronormative families served to both fulfil this requirement but also to indicate to groups such as parents and grandparents how multiple discourses could be contained within this space. With the children's books at easy reach a coffee table and two chairs positioned either side for the adults to sit and peruse the adult LGBT books, the opportunity existed for families to explore aspects of LGBT culture in a safe environment that had additional meaning for those who had known the "original" In Other Words.

## Evaluating the Exhibition

As we have seen, the exhibition was trying to represent multiple narratives and many of these narratives were not necessarily harmonious. Suggestions have been made that "gay men and lesbians may identify around a single issue without assuming a common identity. Indeed, many individuals, past and present, may themselves feel excluded because they do/did not belong to the 'mainstream' LGBT communities".<sup>560</sup> We can immediately complicate this further with the inclusion of bisexual and transgendered individuals and then compound this against the notion of multiple publics. To attempt to tell a story that offers such heterogenous meanings and perspectives, the exhibition had to reflect the individual lived experiences of LGB and T people in the city of Plymouth considered in relation to that space. As a result, we

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<sup>560</sup> D. McIntyre. "What to Collect? Museums and Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual and Transgender Collecting" in *JADE*, Vol 26: 1, p.52.

can see how location became an important factor in the archive, the exhibition and the lives of LGBT people living within that location. The exhibition was therefore surprising to multiple publics: to the mainstream public who were largely unaware of the LGB and T histories that had existed in Plymouth and to the LGBT communities who were largely surprised to see their lived experiences acknowledged and celebrated within the city in such a manner. One anonymous feedback form, left by an attendee at the private launch of the exhibition on 4<sup>th</sup> May 2012, has this to offer in terms of importance of the archive and the exhibition:

I found this a fascinating discovery of a past that might have remained hidden and discarded if not for this project. It is a human story as well as a valuable archive of Plymouth's past. I love that it looks towards the future and I encourage anyone to attend and everyone to re-think our attitudes and invaluable worth of our individual histories or herstories.<sup>561</sup>

This quote indicates that for this visitor at least the exhibition, and indeed the archive, had achieved its aims of acknowledging a hidden history but with a keen eye on the city of Plymouth, and had also made a connection between that past and the future. As the community archive coordinator for the project I was invited to write the foreword for the Heritage Lottery Fund evaluation. I took the opportunity to share an aspect of how the archive and the exhibition had impacted upon me on a personal level:

As a member of Plymouth's Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual and Transgendered community, I agreed wholeheartedly there was an absence of those experiences in traditional archives and so I could see the merit immediately but, what I couldn't anticipate, was how it would change lives – including mine. During the course of this project I have witnessed a sense of community grow from amongst a group of people who didn't realise they were a community. People have shared stories around what was often their most closely guarded secret and have been empowered through that process.<sup>562</sup>

In each of the roles I performed, as part of this project - researcher, archivist, interviewer, curator and community liaison for a community I was already part of as a gay man from Plymouth – I came to gain an insight into a group of people of whom I believed I had knowledge but who were the products of many different backgrounds and histories. Thrift suggests for comprehension of space “as a place in which everything comes together, if only for a little while, in a centred space in which things are co-located in such a way that presentations can come into alignment, thereby

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<sup>561</sup> Phillips. *Pride in Our Past Evaluation Report*. 13<sup>th</sup> September 2012.

<sup>562</sup> Phillips. *Pride in Our Past Evaluation Report*. 13<sup>th</sup> September 2012.

producing a sense of well-being which also confirms certain values”.<sup>563</sup> I was aware of a sense of this synergy for both myself and the wider LGB and T communities with whom I was working. This sense of well-being in the instance of this project and exhibition can be linked to the notions that surround pride. Being told these stories and narratives was affirming for me in each of my roles and provided me with performance practice of pride which seemed to endorse me in each of the roles while, the alignment of all these stories into an exhibition provided a reading to the watching publics that could only be interpreted with a sense of pride.

The complexities and diversity of these stories became apparent in the exhibition because, as Mills tells us “ours are not *simply* histories constructed out of confrontations with homophobia and gender policing”.<sup>564</sup> Instead, those represented had rich and varying stories but each were told in relation to Plymouth as a space inhabited for varying lengths of time, from a visit to a lifetime. The city impacted upon both those who contributed to the exhibition and those who visited it. According to Andrew Gorman-Murray, “personal space and personal identity are co-constituted”<sup>565</sup> and a sense of a safe space is dependent on how far an individual maintains relations between the private and the public. For sexual minorities, he suggests, there is a “heightened need to control the public/private boundary”<sup>566</sup> which it could be argued arises from the traditional need to negotiate any form of non-heteronormative performance depending on the environment in which one finds oneself. The assumption is often that ‘home’ is a safe place in which performance should not need to be modified to meet traditional discourses.

## Conclusion

Michielon suggested earlier in this chapter that, a ‘user centered approach’ empowers the visitor within the communication that is taking place within the gallery and this exhibition was designed to have some meaning for anyone whatever their sexual or gender identity. Such a public performance was very atypical for these communities and this increased its

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<sup>563</sup> Thrift. “Space” in *Theory, Culture & Society*. p.139-146.

<sup>564</sup> Mills. “History at Large. Queer is here? Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual and Transgender Histories and Public Culture”, p.253.

<sup>565</sup> A. Gorman-Murray. “Queer politics at home: Gay men’s management of the public/private boundary” in *New Zealand Geographer*. (Sydney: New Zealand Geographical Society, 2012), p.111.

<sup>566</sup> *Ibid*.

impact. Members of the queer communities and those outside were equally surprised to see it taking place and, as a result, came to see what it had to say. In this way, the exhibition provides a means of interpreting and displaying the archival materials in ways that “are not aimed at truths, but at experiences. It is not a question of one true story, but of various perspectives, stories, types of expertise. It is not the objects that are focused on, but the story told with the aid of objects – stage properties. A constative exhibition is characterized by material authenticity, a performative one by a narrative authenticity”.<sup>567</sup> If LGBT histories have been hidden from view in Plymouth the exhibition provides a fresh opportunity to re-enact these stories in a different and far more visible manner.

The traditional discourse from oppression to acceptance, identified by Foucault, was very much at the forefront of our thinking during the curation as it indicates forward motion to a better version of our communities. However, the exhibition came to highlight just how subjective Pride as a concept can be and designing cohesion was incredibly difficult as it quickly became apparent that people took pride in different things and in different ways. The notion that Plymouth was an accepting forward thinking city led us to highlight the only pride ‘parade’ which had taken place in the city to date and to employ it as a visual representation of Foucault’s ideas to indicate a shift towards acceptance.

The story of Plymouth’s LGB and T communities was far more complex than this, however, with pride being a shifting reinterpreted concept for those who found it part of their experience. Despite this constant shifting, however, it became clear that the exhibition displayed enough narratives for a wide section of community to feel engaged with it and, perhaps more importantly, to be able to detect reasons for their own pride within the narratives.

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<sup>567</sup> D.Hoebink. “Closereading van ‘Een monument vol verhalen’”, Bulletin KNOB Vol 110 No 5 (2011), online at <<http://bulletin.knob.nl/article/view/81>> - [Accessed 2nd July 2015].

## Conclusion

The overarching aim of this thesis has been to consider how the varied LGB and T communities of Plymouth performed and signified their identities, during the sixty-two year timeframe in question, based upon the testimonies shared and archival research which formed Plymouth's first LGBT archive. Through the collection of these materials, and the subsequent analysis, this thesis has sought to offer an exploration of the ways in which LGB and T individuals and communities have used performance to signify these aspects of their identity.

It can be argued that this thesis has made a contribution to knowledge in a number of ways. Firstly and perhaps most significantly, it does so in the documentation of the experiences and narratives of Plymouth's LGB and T communities. As outlined in the introduction of this thesis, the lived experiences of LGB or T individuals did not traditionally generate the type of materials normally regarded as suitable for inclusion in an archive and so purposeful intervention was required to ensure the stories took a place in the historical record. This enabled the participants to tell their stories in ways which were meaningful for them, while still allowing them to be captured and archived. This provided the narratives with a degree of legitimacy that would not otherwise have occurred and had the consequence of making the subjects consider their own life stories to be a legitimate form of history. In this work, it has become clear that differing histories can be constituted, transmitted and maintained through communication and performance. Notions of what an archive should be and what it should contain are constantly evolving through challenges in the way in which we communicate. In terms of the LGBT people, that communication has often been represented through notions of stigma and shame, which have served to limit representation.

The PWDRO accession contains some flyers, leaflets, meeting minutes and photographs but these only tell part of the story. What is more abundant, and potentially more valuable, are the oral history interviews, both as audio files and transcriptions. Some of these stories contradict one another or offer opposing views of how Plymouth felt but each one of their experiences are valid and truthful for the individual in question.

The study has engaged with differing forms of performance and provided an opportunity to explore them and their relationship to LGBT pride. Among these are gender



performances, performances as protest, mass media and the pride parade, all of which, it can be argued, have been reinterpreted to one extent or another during the time period in question.

In the performance and signification of Plymouth queer identities, several themes have emerged as particularly significant. I am aware of a personal reconceptualisation of pride which occurred during the course of my investigations. I initially considered a performance of LGBT pride to consist of a very public performance, best highlighted in a parade or a public event where a large group of people from the four strands of LGBT and beyond show solidarity with one another. What I have come to understand, however, is that while this definition remains valid and important, pride often occurs as the result of much more personal narratives and individual performativity. In Plymouth, LGBT people have taken pride in quietly choosing to not accept the stigma that has been traditionally attached to this aspect of their identity. While, the potential always exists for pride to be performed for a far wider group via deliberately constructed public performances, these have not traditionally been part of the Plymouth experience.

In an interview with Ted Spring and Paul Pollard by the *Herald* newspaper, to commemorate their 55<sup>th</sup> year together as a couple, Spring shared that he preferred growing up in a time when homosexuality was illegal saying that “I think it was better when it was against the law, if I’m being honest. We were like a big family; we all knew who we were and where we could go”.<sup>568</sup> With an understanding of where it was safe and regarded as appropriate to perform being gay, it is possible to detect how significant the subculture of the time was in instilling a sense of pride in those who accessed the gay scene. This pride was not so much gay pride in its more traditional sense, but instead an excitement attached to having places and opportunities to step outside of heteronormative conventions and indulge in performative practices which could be shared and understood by the participants of gay subculture of the time.

In the same interview, Ted notes that “I was always frightened by the gay side of life, but Paul didn’t care. He used to say, ‘What’s wrong with being queer? What’s wrong with that? Who cares what people think!’”<sup>569</sup> With this admission, he is providing a snapshot of both the changes in attitudes and the changes in language since that time. Paul’s use of

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<sup>568</sup> C.Giordano. “55 years on and Ted and Paul are as happy as the day they first met”, *The Herald*, Plymouth. 16<sup>th</sup> Sept 2015.

<sup>569</sup> Ibid.

terminology in referring to the two of them as being 'queer' indicates a willingness to performatively create a sense of pride in response to the stigma that was felt so acutely by this partner and so endeavour to challenge that stigma which was so effective in defining Ted's more restricted performativity of his sexuality.

As Weeks indicated, such stigma has traditionally provoked a response from the spectator of persecution, discrimination or tolerance, all of which have created discourses of otherness around LGB or T identities. In the face of such stigma, a response to combat this is pride and, in particular, taking pride to validate identities which are otherwise ascribed as being other. Key factors in the performances of pride are the spaces in which these performances are enabled to take place, the individual performativity of those in action to reinforce or challenge commonly held assumptions around what it means to be LGB or T and, subsequently, how such performances are viewed, interpreted and understood by the watching counterpublics.

The perceived trajectory of stigma moving towards acceptance for LGB and T people, while common throughout the timeframe of this thesis, is actually much more complex. This is evident in the differing speeds at which Ted and Paul came to terms with aspects of their sexuality and also highlights how LGB and T individual live lives which include moments that both correlate and deviate from this narrative.

Since the 1950s, Plymouth has had spaces that have been deemed 'safe' to enact LGB or T identities and, as pride in such identities has grown, so have the both the boundaries of these spaces and the reception of a wider viewing audience. Location became a far more significant factor than I initially anticipated because, as we saw at the onset, Plymouth has not been a place traditionally associated with the LGBT experience. Indeed, we must consider if people's sexual orientation or gender identity was actually a major factor in their social performance, or if their day to day performativity resonated more strongly with other aspects and realities of living Plymouth? If that was the case, to what extent was pride relevant in their lives?

In the late sixties, when the Stonewall riots took place on a local and then subsequently international level, shifts began to occur in terms of gay liberation and pride marches. Pride, as a concept in Plymouth, remained mostly unaffected by these moves and stayed very much attached to the maintenance of a hidden subculture which linked to men of the armed forces who were prepared to participate. Gay identity at this point was being both

signified and withheld, depending upon the nature of the scenario which Taylor claims can “frame and activate long standing social dramas” but allows attention to “context, milieus and corporal behaviours like gestures, attitude and tone not reducible to language”.<sup>570</sup> In this way, performances can be reproduced and discourses maintained or the performance can be disrupted in one form or another and the discourse challenged or made visible for a watching audience. For the men who were part of the gay subculture in Plymouth at this time, their performance in the scenarios of camp or cruising was impacted upon by the presence of the matelots and so pride was more closely linked to these scenarios rather than a more traditional notion of gay pride as a response to stigma.

While the “repressed hypothesis” (discussed in Chapter Six) as outlined by Foucault cannot be regarded as incorrect, it assumes (as Foucault himself identified) that the LGB or T experience has been consistent for all the individuals who define themselves in this way. As we have seen, however, a myriad of other factors impact upon this experience, including geographical location, social class and mobility, fiscal concerns and a host of other considerations. For Plymothians, the city’s links to the sea and the armed forces have impacted massively on their lives; and why should this be any less impactful for the city’s LGB or T communities? Customs and codes of behaviour were created as much in response to these aspects of the individuals’ lived experience as to their sexuality and gender roles. What was specific to Plymouth was the involvement of the matelots in the places where these practices took place. With their more flexible approach to sexuality, their performance on Union Street transgressed invisible boundaries which were presumed to be in place and so instead created alternative sources of pride for Plymouth’s gay community, creating scenarios where buying a sailor a drink or taking him home for the night was something to take great pride in. While the overarching narratives do indeed chart a movement from discrimination to acceptance, this narrative may not fit as comfortably into the lived experience of people in the city.

Using the oral history interview process as a form of LGBT performance came to highlight just how important the coming out narrative is to individuals, particularly when establishing common ground. Both participants could performatively share a sense of pride in the transmission of the interviewee’s coming out story. While LGBT people come out (or

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<sup>570</sup> M.Hirsch. ‘What’s Wrong with These Terms? A Conversation with Barbara Kirseheblatt-Gimblett and Diana Taylor’ in *Modern Language Association*. <<http://www.jstor.org/stable/25486254>> [Accessed 10th July 2015] (PMLA, 2005) Vol 120: 5, pp.1497- 1508.

choose not to) again and again, day after day, depending on a multitude of different factors, there tends to be a definitive incident where they first chose to publically perform against the norm. This is always recalled as being a significant step in their lives and is often defining to their performativity going forward. There is no one single coming out narrative, but each individual's story holds great significance for the way in which they associate pride with the queer aspects of their identity going forward.

One concern has been that, while endeavouring to investigate the Plymouth LGB and T experiences, I have been somewhat unsuccessful in obtaining voices from bisexual and transgendered individuals. As a result, there is a need to be mindful that two groups which I sought to investigate are very much underrepresented in this study. While this is certainly something I would have hoped to avoid it does correlate with the known makeup of the LGBT community in the city at the time of the initial call for interviewees and is something I would seek to proactively address in future work with the archive.

So, in considering the discursive and cultural elements which have impacted on Plymouth's LGB and T communities in the late 20<sup>th</sup> century, we can see that the links with the armed forces were as powerful and defining as anticipated; however, I was unprepared for the nature of some of the interactions which took place between the differing factions. Blank week became a scenario where the matelots could skew their performance of their sexuality and engage with the gay community with a complete lack of stigma. Scenarios such as these were framed by location and the fact that many of the city's accepted gay spaces in the 1950s and 60s were the somewhat run down bars and pubs which also tended to be frequented by the servicemen who were in town for a limited period of time and looking for a good time on a limited budget. This created a situation where both groups socialised and played together in these environments while the armed forces continued to directly disavow LGB or T individuals. The economy of the city continued to be reliant on the dockyard and the armed forces while the continued ban on LGBT individuals in the services until the year 2000 maintained a discourse around the inherent "wrongness" of an LGBT lifestyle. Accounts shared in formation of this archive highlight that LGBT Plymothians came to accept that they could not fit comfortably into mainstream society, but, if they were prepared to accept the limitations and boundaries possible within areas and spaces which were considered available to them, then they could maintain a position within Plymouth culture. They just had to accept and understand their place. This recalls Ted Whitehead's comments about people being accepting as long as you did not 'broadcast'

things, allowing him to adjust his performativity in certain locations and so live his life with appropriate levels of pride for differing audiences. This, in turn, served to avoid conflict. He could perform camp in the gay bars, he could perform sexually in the cruising grounds and then in other public spaces he would ensure his performance was not problematic for mainstream public.

So in considering how LGB and T identities have been renegotiated in the second half of 20<sup>th</sup> century it is possible to detect differences on a local and national/international level. Pride in Plymouth has not traditionally been performed in the same way to the pride being displayed during the Stonewall Riots or the first Pride Parades, but instead a pride can be detected in performativity which felt appropriate. Taking a matelot home for the night while your day to day performativity signified you to your peers at work as part of the heteronormative norm was something many people took great pride in. Success at the subterfuge may not have moved LGBT forward greatly but it was a source of pride for Plymouth's gay subculture.

As time moved on, these performances were renegotiated due to internal shifts in local LGBT culture. Mr Harry's club was a very different place to The Lockyer Tavern, and while both were regarded as being safe spaces, the venues over time came to be accessed by a much wider audience. In this way, the counterpublic observing performances of LGBT pride was increasingly made up of more and more people, not just of knowing LGBT individuals but also individuals who saw themselves on the outskirts of the mainstream for other reasons such as political association or alternative lifestyle choices. Multiple and contradictory scenarios were being enacted and, through the use of the oral history process, have been performed once again and then captured and archived. Mr Harry's nightclub can be documented as a shack to one person and a legendary place to another, and both narratives can be true.

The 1980s and 1990s was a time when a great deal of stigma was being attached to any form of LGBT identity. Factors such as the HIV/AIDS virus and legislation such as Section 28 created a sense that such lifestyles should remain unspoken or unperformed and that was felt particularly strongly in Plymouth where LGB and T communities had always felt they should not be drawing too much attention to themselves, despite small pockets of resistance at places such as Mr Harry's or In Other Words. When the time came for the Pride in Our Past project in 2011/12 it was a direct response against this. With the oral

history interview as the main means by which to capture these ephemeral accounts of times gone by, individuals were able to share stories, encounters, scenarios and moments that they had often not been able to discuss or reflect on greatly at the time. Some of these accounts underpinned much of their lives. When I first met Jeanie, who reflected on her time in the army in Chapter Two, at an Age UK meeting she shared that she had recently lost a partner of thirty-five years and that she had never expected to have the opportunity to share their story in her lifetime. For her, being part of the oral history process and, to a degree, re-enacting parts of those thirty-five years served to reignite the pride she had felt at being half of a couple. The interview provided her with an opportunity to be proud of her past by articulating it and having it valued by others.

When we move to the late 1990s and the murder in Central Park we can see that a renegotiation in the performance of LGBT identity began to occur. Before then much of the LGB and T performance in the city had been limited to the accepted places and spaces, but now those communities were effectively outed by the media attention which this murder attracted. Groups such as Plymouth Pride Forum and Plymouth Pride Event, and people such as Jono Madeley and Prudence de Villiers, sought to create new types of performance of LGBT identity with these groups in Plymouth and so “open up new life narratives and alternative relations to time and space”.<sup>571</sup> This was perhaps made easier by the fact that the city was not the place of their birth or somewhere that they had grown up being taught not to make a fuss or draw attention to themselves. Although certainly Madeley’s own performativity, judged by his comments in Chapter Five, was based around a desire to show how similar LGB and T people were to the rest of the Plymouth population rather highlighting ways in which they could be seen as other to the wider community.

## Contribution to Knowledge

This thesis, through an analysis of the development of LGB and T communities in a specific place, over a specific period of time, offers insights into local gay and lesbian studies which are normally overlooked through attention to the ‘bigger picture’ and subsequent shifts in attitudes and culture on national or international scale. The subtleties of

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<sup>571</sup> Halberstam. *In a Queer Time & Place*, p.2.

how these shifts are interpreted and reflected, in the performance of those living their lives against, and in relation to, these cultural attitudes within specific places are often overlooked. To date, few of the published studies appear to have examined a location which, on face value, appears very separate to the LGB or T experience and drilled into the specific details of the lives of the people from those communities and how they respond or contribute to societal changes.

In this way, the use of performance as a tool for analysis provides a unique opportunity to conceptualise the actions and performance of these communities in a manner that is sufficiently detached from notions of “inner truths” and inescapable identities and instead to ask how individuals and communities make sense of their position in relation to the environment they inhabit. As Taylor offers, “a performance studies lens requires that we pay attention not only to the functions actors perform as characters in relation to narrative structures but as well to the social actors who embody roles” and therefore consequently “such a lens also encourages us to examine the context in which the scene [...] is activated”.<sup>572</sup> In this way, both performance studies as a tool and oral history as a method enable the voice of the individual to be listened to more clearly and, where applicable, to challenge overarching narratives that may be unconsciously accepted otherwise.

When we consider the various characteristics which Equality Act, 2010<sup>573</sup> currently protects under law, sexuality can be one of the more invisible characteristics, so by adjusting one’s performance the opportunity can be there to publically disassociate oneself with anything other than a heteronormative role. For transgender people, public roles and performance of them are very much linked to the transitioning process as they move their public performance from one gender to another. Halberstam notes that “while gender codes may be somewhat more flexible in urban settings, this also means that people become more astute in urban contexts at reading gender”.<sup>574</sup> In a place like Plymouth, where individuals were encouraged not to draw attention to themselves, this could pose a problem for those whose performance did not appear completely cisgender.

A theoretical consideration using a performance approach, in conjunction with the oral history interview methodology, has also provided the opportunity to extend the application

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<sup>572</sup> Hirsch. ‘What’s Wrong with These Terms? A Conversation with Barbara Kirshenblatt-Gimblett and Diana Taylor’. *Modern Language Association* <<http://www.jstor.org/stable/25486254>>

<sup>573</sup> The Equality Act, 2010 legislates against people being treated differently due to age, disability, gender reassignment, marriage and civil partnership, pregnancy and maternity, race, religion or belief, sex or sexual orientation.

<sup>574</sup> Halberstam. *In a Queer Time & Place*. p.44.

of the oral history process. LGB or T histories have often gone untold by members of the community and, often, that community would not be somewhere as specific as the City of Plymouth. The interviews within this archive were primarily conducted by individuals of Plymouth's LGB and T communities and have been analysed in this thesis by an individual who is part of that community. While it certainly can be argued this situation creates tensions in terms of objectivity it has broken down initial difficulties identified in the years prior to this study when Jo Stanley was unable to find Plymothian participants for her "Hello Sailor" project.<sup>575</sup> Instead, the familiarity has provided insights and the opportunity for some of the interviews to extend further than anticipated through the acknowledgement of common ground and empathy.

LGB and T histories do not tend to be handed down generationally as many histories are. The next generation of LGBT individuals will not be born of the current generation, as is the case with ethnicity or race. Parents may be understanding or supportive but often the experiences of their LGB or T children will not mirror their own. This thesis and project has provided a means and opportunity to capture the voices of one generation and to hand them onto the next in a way that would not have naturally occurred without intervention and analysis.

It has also provided an opportunity to consider the changes that have been won, for those accessing the products of this project, those who have created the materials and those who have been the subjects. Shifts in language can be detected and charted as words are claimed as insults and then reclaimed with a sense of pride, but also the changes in society and legislation are brought sharply into focus through the recollections of individuals. Incidents and moments that were perceived as shameful can now be recalled with a sense of pride as modern day sensibilities are applied to them. Most significantly, there is the realisation (which normally goes unconsidered) that situations and choices that were considered illegal at the time can now be recalled with a sense of freedom and even validation because those were the moments that pushed against societal boundaries and contributed to thinking and allows for pride, rather than shame, to be associated to these histories. This is a pride that extends into the present and allows for a different future.

In terms of local history, this thesis has addressed an area that was almost completely overlooked in terms of Plymouth's past. Discoveries of stories such as Robert Gould Shaw

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<sup>575</sup> P. Baker & J. Stanley. *Hello Sailor! The Hidden History of Gay Life at Sea*. (London: Routledge, 2003)



II and Mark Weston had not been included as part of the city's history, and stories such as these and the gay male community's participation in the process of the matelots' blank week show that Plymouth's LGB and T history, while kept discrete for the most part, was not something different from or separate to the city's more mainstream history. Instead, it weaved in and around all the other narratives that were brought to life in the city, and that acknowledgment has served to create a sense of validity around the LGB and T histories, which has directly impacted upon the LGB and T communities today in ways which will be discussed further in the second half of this conclusion.

The use of varying interdisciplinary methods, employed in this thesis, can also offer some contributions to the understanding of archive and museum studies. The project has been interdisciplinary in terms of academic departments (i.e. Theatre & Performance and History) but also in terms of use of the archive in conjunction with practice-led research and community engagement. Notions of the archive explored in Chapter One of this thesis spoke of a system which provided the basis from which history was written. The inclusion of oral history narratives into the city archives extended the remit of the archive and, through the practice of interpreting that archive into an exhibition, the materials were interpreted and shared in the first year of this PhD. This provided an opportunity for work involving a community to be shared with that community, in addition to the regular museum going audience (who were also in a position to evaluate the materials against the more traditional Plymouth museum narratives which they were regularly exposed to) and to create much of the thinking for this thesis.

In both the exhibition and the thesis, the organisation of material was driven by themes rather than a chronological narrative, although it is significant to note that the themes identified followed a mostly chronological path. In this, it was possible to detect something of the repressed hypothesis narrative but the reception of the exhibition from traditional museum public and the LGB and T potential counterpublics indicated that the narrative had meaning for both groups. As Warner suggests, "styles of embodiment are learned and cultivated, and the affects of shame and disgust that surround them can be tested, in some cases revalued".<sup>576</sup> The exhibition provided an opportunity for the archive to be interpreted and reinterpreted and the themes used to shape and form the exhibition became intrinsic to the chapter structure of this thesis and provided a provocation that these archive materials,

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<sup>576</sup> Warner, *Publics and Counterpublics*, p62.

due to their previous exclusion, must be continually shared, presented, interrogated and indeed performed to address their previous exclusion from the historical narrative.

An interdisciplinary approach, however, was not without its limitations. Occasionally the interweaving of two academic disciplines brought the two into conflict. Oral history as a historical discipline requires a very objective approach which at times I compromised to take advantage of my subjective position as a member of the community I was researching to obtain information which I felt I might otherwise miss. The coming out narrative as part of almost every LGB or T person's experience was highlighted as important almost from the onset of the interviewing process and, sharing my story with some individuals in the process of the interview came to feel like a necessary bartering tool as well as a means to obtain a relationship with the subject even if it could be perceived to compromise my objectivity in the process.

Another limitation was that while thirty seven interviews provided a good basis to include LGB and T narratives into the city archives, those interviews could not provide a complete picture of LGB and T life in a sixty two year period. Also, aside from pure numbers, the nature of interviews revealed significant shortcomings as only seven were conducted with individuals who defined themselves as lesbians, there were no interviews with anyone who defined as bisexual and only one interview with a transgender person. As discussed in Chapter Six, the exhibition highlighted these shortcomings and steps were taken to redress this balance in terms of what was presented in the gallery space but the materials available for consideration in this thesis are still limited to the interviews available in the archive. Upon reflection, perhaps the study should have been based on gay male culture in Plymouth or perhaps the gay and lesbian experience. However, while it would appear that this study is replicating a gender bias it can also be argued that the interviews undertaken represent the willingness of the communities to come forward and share their stories and so perhaps include those with a willingness to explore pride as a concept for themselves.

## Cultural Impacts and Outcomes

Upon completion of the 'Pride in Our Past' project, there was also a desire at the Plymouth and West Devon Record Office that following the exhibition (and the deposit of the archive accession with them) that the materials did not just sit on a shelf. The intention had always been that this PhD study of the materials would continue for the next three years until completion but what was unexpected was the continuing interest in the archive from the LGB and T communities and from outside groups and agencies. An interesting dichotomy has been while the archive has received increasing attention, both locally and nationally, one of the collaborative partner organisations in the PhD study, the Plymouth Pride Forum, has folded believing the implementation of same sex marriage indicates there is no longer a need for any form of pride movement. While it can certainly be argued that LGBT pride is constantly evolving and being reinterpreted some of the cultural impacts that have arisen as a result of the archive project developed through this PhD would indicate there is still an interest among the wider community and, indeed, a need for positive action.

## Community Archive and Heritage Group

At the Sixth Community Archive and Heritage Group Annual Conference held on 27th June 2012 the Plymouth LGBT community archive was given the award for most inspirational community archive category. The judges praised the way the project had 'gathered the voices of and given a voice to often-ignored communities'<sup>577</sup> which had been at the heart of what the project was intended to do. Collecting the award and speaking at the ceremony led to some interesting feedback from other archivists across the UK, many of whom felt that Plymouth was a very unusual place to be carrying out this type of work. This type of impact indicated that the archive work should continue beyond the Pride in Our Past exhibition, in addition to this PhD.

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<sup>577</sup> Online -< <http://plymlgbtarchive.org.uk/2012/06/27/plymouth-lgbt-archive-recognised-as-uks-most-inspirational-community-archive/>> [Accessed 10<sup>th</sup> June 2015].

## The Archive as an Educational Resource

While many schools in Plymouth had provision for dealing with alternative races and religions, non-heteronormative sexualities and gender roles seemed to be in short supply. As a result, I was invited to present some of the material from the archive at the 2012 Plymouth Schools Citizenship and PSHE (Personal, Social and Health Education) and in discussions with a number of teachers was invited to bring this material into classes. I was told “off the record” that there tended to be a fear in dealing with anything around sexuality in the classroom for fear it would become a sex education class. As the materials from this archive so clearly relate to narratives from a community of people it was felt to be a safe way to introduce the subject to school children. As a result, the archive itself is now being presented and accessed in schools with the hope that it will engender pride in those young people who consider themselves to be LGBT or questioning and also, that it will provoke true acceptance in their heterosexual/cisgender peers.

## Community Archive

Parts of the archive have been incorporated into a mobile stand which can be taken and displayed at various events around the city in the form of a pop up archive. This enables the material to reach people who may not have come to the exhibition and will not access the information elsewhere. Initially most of the events that the pop up archive attended were those connected to diversity but, as time continued, the archive has been at many events which are simply part of their local community's offer. At a street party for the Stonehouse neighbourhood of Plymouth in 2011 a conversation with an 82 year old man around Robert Gould Shaw prompted him to share that he had never had the opportunity before to have a conversation around these topics with an openly gay person. For him, this pop up event provided a performance of pride that he had not witnessed before in his lifetime and certainly would not have, in this format, without the archive project. In this way, the archive has continued a public presentation of pride beyond the end of the exhibition.

In addition to the ongoing archive work, I have provided LGBT heritage walks for Plymouth City Council. These walks often involve taking participants to places that are no

longer physically there but I attempt to redress that through the participation of individuals who recall the original location or by electronically playing relevant parts of their interviews at the scene.

The use of the archive, in this manner, draws directly upon the defining themes around Plymouth's LGB and T communities which were explored and uncovered through this study.

### Archive in Performance

The ephemeral nature of much of the material that was collected to be part of this archive serves to lend itself to being reproduced in ways other than the written word. One aspect has been the inclusion of aspects of the archival narratives in various performances. Writer Nick Stimson read several of the oral histories before including the plot of a married man coming out of the closet in his play *Sailors and Sweethearts* which subsequently ran in Plymouth's Drum Theatre in March 2013 which was in turn viewed, certainly with a degree of pride, by several of the men who had shared their stories.

Research, and members of the city's LGBT community also featured in a Jean Genet inspired film project, at Plymouth University entitled *Heaven is a Place* which involved creative movement dance sessions based on aspects of Plymouth's LGBT history. Much of the film's iconography arose from the links that this PhD study uncovered between the gay subculture of the 1950s/60s and the Navy. In the process of making this film, I worked as community liaison with the LGBT community and dramaturge.

### Pride in Plymouth

Perhaps the most unexpected outcome of the archive project, however, was the fact that it reconnected the participants and recreated a sense of those (multiple) communities that had been lacking since Pride Event ceased and so stopped providing the pride events which had taken place in the guildhall. With renewed interest, and the support of the Friends of Devonport Park (who had just completed their own Heritage Lottery Funded project to

restore its bandstand) 2012 marked the first outdoor pride event Plymouth had ever seen so in terms of pride as an event, the exploration of its history in Plymouth led to it re-emergence as a festival. The evidence would seem to support however that LGBT pride, and its performance, for the people of Plymouth has not exactly correlated to pride in other places. More significant, for all of Plymouth's publics and counterpublics, has been our place as a port, on an extreme point of the UK mainland, and some pride in being a space which supports and adheres to the traditions of the armed forces, and a way of doing things that does not rock the boat too vigorously, in the process of change. When reflecting on what is counter about a counterpublic, Robert Asen identifies the "'participants' recognition of exclusion from wider public spheres" and "articulation through alternative discourse practices and norms".<sup>578</sup> For the LGBT communities of Plymouth though alternative practices may have embodied approaches to sexual and gender identity which were alternative but in regards to the norm surrounding Plymouth life the practices were designed to sit relatively within that existence. Indeed, many of the local performances have only come into view as being different or queer, when disruptions occur to make them visible to the public as a whole and these are the moments when pride can flash into view.

Significantly, many of the performance practices explored in this thesis coalesced together on 9 August 2014 when Pride in Plymouth held its third annual Plymouth Pride event on the iconic Plymouth Hoe. The move was prompted to make full use of the city's waterfront location and also to enable a parade in 2013 which was significantly longer and travelled a greater distance than the parade of 2009. It seems significant while Pride parades commenced in the late 60s Plymouth's first attempt at such a display did not occur until around forty years later in 2009.

The day provided an opportunity for pride to be performed in Plymouth in a multitude of ways, however, the parade consisted of several hundred people all assuming a collective position of unity in a queer performance. Traditions were also maintained as the parade was joined by other alternative groups such as CND campaigners and the Plymouth Humanists group. As the group paraded through the city centre, the procession walked under Plymouth Piazza's big screen (as featured in the *Pride in Our Past* poster) and Plymouth City Council had arranged to play the *Heaven is a Place* film to show their support for the event. The parade climaxed on the Hoe where a festival style event ran for an eight hour period,

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<sup>578</sup> R. Asen. "Seeking the 'Counter' in Counterpublics" in *Communication Theory* (Vol 10 November, 2000), p.426.

Plymouth Hoe was reinscribed into a queer space (other than a cruising ground) and the LGB and T communities came together with Plymouth's wider population to celebrate their differences with pride.

## Appendix 1: Breakdown of Participants

	<b>Male</b>	<b>Female</b>	<b>Defined as Lesbian</b>	<b>Defined as Gay Man</b>	<b>Defined as Bisexual</b>	<b>Defined as Transgender</b>
<b>26 – 35</b>	1	2	2	1	0	0
<b>36 – 45</b>	1	0	1	0	0	0
<b>46 – 55</b>	5	1	0	5	0	1
<b>56 – 65</b>	4	5	4	3	0	0
<b>66 – 75</b>	1	2	2	1	0	0
<b>75 – 85</b>	1	0	0	1	0	0

N.B. Two of the female participants in the 56 – 65 age group did not define as LGBT but instead were either a relative of an LGBT individual or worked with the community.

	<b>Male</b>	<b>Female</b>	<b>Interviewed by Author</b>	<b>Interviewed by Research Assistant</b>	<b>Interviewed by Community Volunteers</b>
<b>26 – 35</b>	1	2	0	0	3
<b>36 – 45</b>	1	0	1	0	0
<b>46 – 55</b>	5	1	1	3	2
<b>56 – 65</b>	4	5	3	7	0
<b>66 – 75</b>	1	2	2	0	1
<b>75 – 85</b>	1	0	1	0	0



## Appendix 2: Oral History Interview Questions

### Background

Each of the interviews were conducted on a semi structured basis.

Each of the interviewees had been met prior to the formal interview to explain about the archive, the subsequent exhibition and particularly why their story could be important in building up a picture of the LGBT history of the city of Plymouth.

During these initial meetings we would discuss aspects that they felt might be of interest and would often reminisce about aspects of shared history. During these conversations, themes would be identified which both the interviewer and interviewee would agree would be interesting to explore in the recorded interview and the interviewee would confirm he/her would be happy to discuss these areas.

### Opening Questions

Each of the interviews began with a series of questions

1) *Could I ask your name please?*

2) *And your date of birth?*

3) *Where did you grow up?* – This question tended to elicit a good deal of information from the participant. Normally involving them sharing something of their childhood and background.

4) *Could I ask what your parents did for a living?* – Again settled the interviewee as nothing yet around LGBT matters and also provides background in terms of their past.

5) *When did you come to Plymouth?* – If they had not already indicated they were born in the city. This question revealed a little of their relationship to the city. If they were born in

Plymouth I would often develop this to ask where they grew up and if they had lived away at any point.

6) *Can I ask you about coming out? When did you come out and to who?* – This question would then mark the end of the set questioning and would normally open up quite a lengthy narrative. At all times, as the interview continued, I would have in mind the agreed points we had planned to discuss but, the coming out narrative often resonates so strongly with LGBT individuals that it opens up conversations into all areas. If the interviewee was a little uncomfortable sharing aspects of their coming out story I would, on occasion, interject with aspects of mine which would tend to get a dialogue happening.

### Conclusions

This process ensured the individual would not feel pressured or tricked into sharing details they did not wish too.

The only limitation was often some engaging material came out of the initial conversations (while the recorder was off) but these stories did then provide possibly prompts and in several interviews I began a question with “You mentioned before that . . .”

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