Northern Ireland stands apart from the rest of the United Kingdom, in part, because of the sectarian conflict between Catholics and Protestants referred to as "The Troubles." My essay argues that conflict in Northern Ireland and the concurrent trends of religiosity and ideals of hyper-masculinity make the movement for the decriminalization of private homosexual acts between men during the later twentieth century unique from movements for decriminalization elsewhere in the United Kingdom. The Troubles consumed the attention of the people of Northern Ireland and forced issues of equality for gay men and women to the political and social back burner. The Troubles often made people hyper-aware of their religion. Neither Catholicism nor Protestantism was traditionally accepting of homosexuality, so this stifled popular support for decriminalization. Hyper-masculinity was another product of the violent conflict in Northern Ireland, and it worked against equality for homosexuals because homosexuality did not fit into commonly accepted definitions of manhood.

The process of decriminalization was different in England, Wales, and Scotland, where Parliaments passed decriminalization legislation due to broad popular support. Because of Northern Ireland’s unique cultural and political struggles, however, it took a ruling by the European Court of Human Rights to initiate decriminalization. On a Study Abroad to Northern Ireland, I gained access to legislative and private documents concerning decriminalization, and I also interviewed leaders in an organization called the Rainbow Project. These sources supplemented my research and allowed me to argue that the Troubles helped an alternate path to decriminalization in Northern Ireland.