Derry Girls: A Postfeminist Catharsis

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Derry Girls (2018-2019) is of the moment: a wholesome family sitcom, not a traditional sitcom by any means (no laugh track or live audience), so far consisting of two series, each featuring six episodes running from twenty to thirty minutes. Set in Derry, Northern Ireland and written by Lisa McGee, *Derry Girls* has become the most-watched television series in Northern Ireland since modern records began in 2002 (Ryan). The show gives a comical insight into the lives of teenagers growing up in the 1990s against the backdrop of the Troubles, a thirty-year bout of violent conflict in Northern Ireland that claimed the lives of more than 3,500 people (McEvoy 1). It follows the lives of four girls and one boy growing up in Derry during the last few years of the Troubles. Checkpoints, bomb threats, and British soldiers are all commonplace but are often considered background static, or something that "gets in the way" of a more pressing and overcrowded family life.

Amid all the chaos, Lisa McGee never loses sight of whose story she is telling. Indeed, her magic is in the way she allows the characters to experience the usual awkwardness that defines one's teenage years without letting extraordinary times overshadow the hilariously ordinary things in life such as the humiliation of having a diary read aloud by a cousin. Storylines are realistic, witty, matter-of-fact, and above all, easy for every modern woman to identify with. They are bluntly humorous and touching at the same time (Ryan). McGee is sensitive to the cultural context of the times throughout the series while still centering attention on the usual trials and tribulations of a teenager's life. She focuses on those trivial but urgent matters that dominate their lives, with the added chaos of not being able to go to a Take That concert without being accompanied by army patrols and the possibility of violence.

Even against the backdrop of terrorism and political upheaval, the characters

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maintain tight friendships and the rebellious nature of their teenage days. Erin "know-it-all" Quinn (Saoirse-Monica Jackson), Orla "space cadet" McCool (Louisa Harland), Clare "goody-two-shoes" Devlin (Nicola Coughlan), Michelle "bad bitch" Mallon (Jamie Lee O'Donnell), and James "wee English lad" Maguire (Dylan Llewellyn), who plays Michelle's younger English cousin, make up the core teenage cast. James attends the girls' school, lacking in any men's restrooms, as his family fears that sending him to the local boys' school would be sentencing him to a life of constant bullying and beatings. The story is not over yet. Filming for the third series began in October 2021 and is set to air on BBC Channel 4 sometime in 2022. As Mills suggests, the ending is hard to place in a potentially endless series.

Sitcoms have a cultural and social impact on how we see the world and our societies. Because the genre is inherently temporal and effectually develops over time, it is embedded in the relationship between a text, its producers, and its receivers. Mittell argues that genre should be viewed as "a fluid and active process" (1), always ongoing, always open to reinterpretation, development and mutation, just like our cultural views and values. The greatest problem with much of genre theory, according to Mittell, is that genre is conflated with content. Instead, "the answer to what constitutes difference is what gives us the notion of genre" (Atallah qtd in Mittell 98). In other words: "If we conceive of genres as sites of tension between stability and change, then their role is aimed at both capturing and highlighting patterns of innovative thinking at the intersection between the expected and the unexpected" (Garzone qtd in Mittell 1). These parameters make a program such as *Derry Girls* part of the sitcom genre, parameters that are always being tested and redefined.

Just like our families look and behave differently from the way they did when the first family sitcom was aired (*The Goldbergs*, 10 January 1949 on CBS), so too does the relationship between series and audience. They no longer teach us how to be a "normal" family, but instead confirm our flaws and reveal our differences while supporting unconditional love at the heart of families (Dalton 45). In this way, a show such as *Derry Girls* mirrors where we are culturally and signifies that what people want is a sitcom that relates somewhat to reality, past or present. To put it simply:

> There are good ideas that have never been made because it wasn't the right moment, and quite often you just need things to align, so you need things to become relevant and something that wasn't relevant last year or the year before, for whatever reason, becomes relevant, or of the moment, which

> unlocks it' (Brown 15).

The sitcom *Derry Girls* is a manifestation of postfeminism and in this context is a present-day catharsis to its viewers. This analysis draws on Rosalind Gill's theory of postfeminist sensibility to demonstrate how *Derry Girls* can be seen through a postfeminist lens and is a contemporary articulation of (contradictory) feminism(s) and femininity. Moreover, in this context, the show is cathartic both in how it reinserts women back into the canon and the Troubles narrative. It reconstructs notions of appropriate femininity and is powerful in its use of humor.

Derry Girls Is Postfeminism (As a Sensibility)

Using Rosalind Gill's *Postfeminist Media Culture* as a theoretical context, this section maintains that *Derry Girls* is a manifestation of postfeminism. It does so by looking at Gill's themes of femininity as a bodily property, the shift from the woman as a sex object to desiring social subject, and the reassertion of sexual difference.

By this, I do not necessarily situate postfeminism in any distinct wave but consider it, as Gill writes it is best understood, as a "distinct sensibility" ("Postfeminism and the New Cultural Life of Feminism" 147). A critical term, "postfeminist culture" according to Gill should be our object of analysis rather than perspective. Thus, postfeminism is understood not as an epistemological perspective, historical shift, or even as a backlash to other feminisms, but simply emphasizes the entanglement of both feminist and anti-feminist ideas. Since postfeminism is not against feminism but about feminism "today" (Brooks), it needs to be situated in the context of a contemporary neo-liberal, late-capitalist society characterized by consumer culture, individualism, humor, and post-modernism ("Adriaens, F. 2009. Post-Feminism in Popular Culture"). At heart, Gill's approach examines the question of what is distinctive about contemporary articulations of gender in the media and emphasizes the contradictory nature of postfeminist discourses ("Postfeminist Media Culture" 147). Media discourses and popular culture play a crucial role in the representation, evolution, and development of this new feminism and a new, critical way of understanding the changed relations between feminism, popular culture and femininity ("Adriaens, F. 2009. Post-Feminism in Popular Culture").

Femininity as a Bodily Property. One such theme which runs throughout contemporary media, and indeed in *Derry Girls*, is the notion of femininity as a bodily property rather than a social, structural, or psychological one. For several of the characters, a desirable physical appearance is presented as a women's key source of identity and power and requires constant consumer spending to conform to societal perceptions of female attractiveness: "it is her asset, her product, her brand and her gateway to freedom and empowerment in a neoliberal market economy" (Gill, "The Affective, Cultural and Psychic Life of Postfeminism" 616). Consumption within a neo-liberal context is a tool to achieve power and pleasure and acts as an alternative route for self-esteem. In this way, women construct their identity and receive societal appreciation through consumption (Featherstone qtd in Gill, "Postfeminist Media Culture: Elements of a Sensibility" 5). This is evident in "The Prom" when the girls buy dresses they cannot afford for the upcoming prom with the intention of returning them to the store afterwards.

Linked to this theme is the notion of individualism, choice, and empowerment; the reprivatization of issues and the notion that all our practices are freely chosen is central to postfeminist discourse. For example, Erin, a self-proclaimed free-thinking and empowered young woman, unwittingly gives in to socially constructed mass-mediated ideals of beauty that she internalizes and makes her own. Similarly, the girls are subject to (and subject each other to) scrutiny for their physical features and wardrobe malfunctions. For example, Claire often gets mocked for her outfit choices:

> "No Michelle, this is wrong!"
>
> "So are those ski pants, Claire, but it didn't stop ye pulling them over your hole this morning" ("Episode #1.2" 00:19:02).

Aunt Sarah, James's mother who abandons him in the first episode of series one, in the series two finale comments repeatedly on Cathy's glorious eyebrows when she returns to recruit her son for her new business venture in "self-adhesive labels" ("The President"). She also remarks on the appearance of Maeve, Granda Joe's new lady friend, as if her hairstyle warranted a badge of honor: "I just want to say, although I'm not happy about this thing with me da, I have to give it to you, that is a cracker blow-dry" ("The President"). Aunt Sarah separates Maeve's self-expressions of femininity from their interpersonal relations. Although disapproving of her choice of companion, Aunt Sarah is appreciative of Maeve's consumption choices which are viewed as powerful markers of identity and individualism.

Also within the show is the contradictory acknowledgement that the body is a canvas that may not reflect how one truly feels inside (Gill, "Postfeminism and the New Cultural Life of Feminism" 150). We see this in "The Prom" when Erin feels deflated and still decides get glammed up and attend the prom. According to Gill, this “cult(ure) of confidence" systematically calls a new kind of female subject into being. It urges women to believe that they are being held back not by patriarchal capitalism or institutionalized sexism, but by their lack of confidence; an entirely individual and personal matter unconnected to structural inequalities or cultural forces (Gill and Orgad 330).

From Sex Object to Desiring Social Subject. “We’re doing it for peace all right… a piece of that fine Protestant ass” Michelle declares brazenly to her peers in response to Erin’s rather unconvincing attempt to reassure her mother she’s not participating in the peace-initiative to ‘get off’ with protestant boys (“Friends Across the Barricade” 00:04:10)**.** In an oppressed and constrained Catholic Ireland, women were constrained by fear, secrecy, and silence. Irish writer Nuala O’Faolain described Irish communities as being “savagely punitive”, and for many years, “fully in the grip of an institutionalized fear of women; that is, of sexuality” (Ryan 94). The silencing of female sexuality, which was often equated with sin, meant that single mothers and other women who were seen to flaunt their sexuality were ostracized for their alleged deviant behavior. Both church and state maintained that women should hold a certain morality, particularly relating to areas of sexuality and reproduction (Ryan 93).

However, there has lately been an upending of the conversation and an increased consciousness surrounding the obstacles women encounter, both personal and professional. Women previously presented in the media as passive, mute objects of an assumed male gaze are now increasingly portrayed as having agency, freeing themselves of cultural and patriarchal taboos (Langone). In this era of empowerment, movements such as Time’s Up and #MeToo, sexualization works differently. Females are shown to be “active, desiring sexual subjects who, if choosing to present themselves in a seemingly objectified manner, do so because it is in their liberated interests to do so” (Goldman qtd in Gill “Postfeminism and the New Cultural Life of Feminism”). Women in *Derry Girls* are similarly depicted as strong, albeit morally conflicted, empowered, and eschewing victimization. For example, Michelle is a sexually autonomous young woman who plays with her sexual power and is ‘forever up for it’, freely expressing her teenage sexual drive (Gill, “Postfeminism and the New Cultural Life of Feminism” 151). In her usual brazen manner, Michelle unapologetically admits to her gawking at British soldiers while they inspect the school bus at a checkpoint: “Ach, some of them are rides, I’m willing to admit it, even if nobody else will, because I’m a beacon of truth”

("Episode #1.1" 00:10:10). Gill refers to this as to the shift from the male judging gaze to the self-policing, narcissistic gaze, an internalized male gaze where power is not imposed externally but constructs our very subjectivity (Gill, "Postfeminism and the New Cultural Life of Feminism" 8).

A Reassertion of Sexual Difference

Gill speaks about a reassertion of sexual difference as a characteristic of this postfeminist sensibility in which women control the stakes, and men are left walking on eggshells and on tenterhooks about their partner's inevitable furious response (Gill, "Post-Postfeminism?" 11). This difference is evident in *Derry Girls* like it is in several contemporary cultures: upgraded forms of sexual representation that depict women's objectification as a mode of empowerment, and in the repeated depiction of men as somewhat hapless, bumbling victims (Gill, "Post-Postfeminism?" 6). The first episode of series two shows Erin and the gang preparing for an outdoor pursuits peace-initiative for Friends Across the Barricade, a woeful attempt at social bonding between Catholic and Protestant students. There is an obvious commentary on their religious separation when they are given an exercise to give examples of the differences and similarities between Catholics and Protestants:

> Catholics really buzz off statues and we don't so much
> Protestants hate ABBA ("Friends Across the Barricade")

However, peace is hardly at the forefront of Michelle's mind once she finds out that there will be Protestant boys there. Instead, the view is focused on Erin and Michelle's failed attempts to seduce their male buddies: "I bagsy Harry..." / "That's not fair, he's the only good looking one!" ("Friends Across the Barricade" 00:09:21). Even in their failure to grasp the attention of a Protestant boy, the girls express a sexual power and confidence that inevitably one of them will end up with him, it being merely a case of whom.

Within the sitcom, there are moments of subtle feminism, and one might be forgiven for thinking it has moved beyond postfeminism. The characters tend to think and act communally rather than individually; they do not revel in pain or suffering (e.g., *Handmaid's Tale, OITNB*); and characters are not flattened or sexualized (*Mrs Browns Boys, Two and a Half Men*). There is a postfeminist entanglement: Michelle's unruly woman character shows traits of both feminism and postfeminism; Clare is obedient and a "wee lesbian"; and Derry is displaced and conflict-ridden in contrast with the typical postfeminist romantic-comedy setting. Gill draws our attention to the entanglement of feminism with other ideas; she argues that some of what is celebrated today as feminism is shaped profoundly by postfeminist elements (McRobbie qtd in Gill "Post-Postfeminism?"). She calls on the need for approaches that appreciate the way multiple and contradictory ideas can co-exist "in the same moment, plane, field" (Gill, "Postfeminism and the New Cultural Life of Feminism" 2), emphasizing the need to be able to "think together" these contradictions and avoid being tempted by singular narratives (Gill "Postfeminism and the New Cultural Life of Feminism" 613). To say that something is postfeminist should be the starting point, not the end of the analytical process; it should open up rather than close down thinking.

Irony and Knowingness. Irony gives room to breathe. It allows a space for playfulness, openness, and a chance to test boundaries. Gill claims that irony is a diverse distancing practice that allows someone to "express an unpalatable truth in a disguised form" while claiming it is "not what they meant" (Virdis 44). For example, in postfeminist consumer culture irony is used to present sexist verbal and visual contents as inoffensive and intentional postmodern jokes. Should anyone find fault with the jokes, those people are deemed rigidly orthodox feminists and lacking a sense of humor. This is evident in the Wonderbra billboard advertisement of 1994 in which model Eva Herzigova glances down at her chest, the caption reading "Hello Boys". As McRobbie explains, the self-consciousness of the image implies it is void of any exploitation or sexism, and that the advert was created out of free will. Gill sees this as the foremost function of such 'risky' irony of entitlement in postfeminist culture: "a way of having it both ways" (McRobbie qtd in Missler 21). Similarly, Lockyer writes: "While a feminist discourse is drawn on as a system of representation that challenges the sexual objectification and subordination of women, it is repeatedly destabilized by the presence of oppositional discourses through the use of irony" (173). *Derry Girls* delivers when it comes to satirical storylines and ironic one-liners. For example, when Erin argues that Michelle cannot marry an Orangeman, she retorts "It's a pity, 'cos I think there's something really sexy about the fact that they hate us so much" ("Episode #1.5"). Despite their displays of confidence and intermittent celebration of single status, the rhetoric of their defiant and unapologetic expressions of teen sexual desire is somewhat destabilized by the show's ironic treatment of singlehood as an unremitting dilemma.

Catharsis. "Macaulay Culkin isn't a Protestant, ma!" ("Episode #1.1" 00:01:39).

An enraged Erin makes it known to her mother that she will no longer tolerate having her boundaries crossed. The last straw for the teenager is catching her cousin Orla reading her diary aloud - “what’s next, I’ll catch her tryin’ on my knickers?!”. She informs her mother that Macauley Culkin might be divorcing his parents, as “teenagers have rights now you know”. Erin’s mother asks if he is one of the protestants she met at the peace-initiative summer scheme.

Humor is a common form of storytelling-based catharsis in our society. Catharsis, according to Zeman, is “the act of purging emotional stress or releasing of pent-up emotions vicariously through watching others perform it inside of a narrative” (5.2.2). The sitcom’s relational model insists on an intimacy between artist, medium, and audience. The sitcom is ours because it comes closer to showing us who we are. The temporal limitations that come with a twenty-minute episode result in a richer, fuller impact on the audience. Something is fulfilled in this relationship between viewer and sitcom – a relationship that depends upon consistency and catharsis (Martin). The ensemble element of the sitcom also provides a collection of smart, funny, and diverse female characters for viewers to identify with.

The juxtaposition of feminist theory and popular culture has an inevitable impact on the consumption of culture mainly because popular culture has the power to put up a mirror to our lives and show connections between media, socialization, and identity (Trier-Bieniek xiv). This is evident early on in *Derry Girls*, where distinct characters come to the fore each with their own moral conflicts making them utterly human and relatable. Comedy, in this way, provides one of the few artistic lenses through which an audience can view its own weaknesses and that of the world without “falling into nihilism and despair” (Martin). Moreover, “the better the catharsis, the better the entertainment we consider it” (Zeman). The characters, and writer/producer Lisa McGee, can move between the sentimental and the disengaged, thereby creating something not only entertaining but also spiritually enriching. Although McGee is committed to humorous delivery, it is evident that she also feels the weight of responsibility to tell an accurate story. For instance, in the final moments of the first series, the poignant juxtaposition of the light-hearted side of the show and the dark realities of growing up in Northern Ireland during the Troubles is accentuated by the intro music of “Dreams” by *The Cranberries*. It offers a moment of catharsis to its viewers, allowing them to achieve some degree of personal peace as well as creating the opportunity for public reflection.

Humor. Humor often works as an instrument of power to deliberately exacerbate or undermine hierarchal relations and their assumptions (Pailer 9). McGee has managed to write a poignant yet hilarious sitcom giving viewers a glimpse into post-conflict times from a woman's perspective. It depicts a true representation of sharp-witted Derry women in the backdrop of the Troubles, and this humor and satire is a big part of why the show is so cathartic and well-received. The sitcom has generated laughs all around the globe since it was first broadcast in January 2018 on BBC Channel 4 and on Netflix in December 2018. Its humor is so powerful that it transcends the boundaries of language. It allows the experience of growing up during the Troubles to be recognized from the perspective of young women in a sensitive yet hilarious manner. Many representations of women during these times show them falling apart in crisis, asking "What do we do now?".

Such does not happen in *Derry Girls*, where women are the pillars of society. The show does justice to women in sitcoms, women in general, and female writers; it represents a postfeminist transgression for women and humor, women who laugh and cry in the face of fear and dilemma. In this way, laughter is a form of liberation from and a way to transcend secular oppression. Pailer writes: "In modern fiction, readers are often confronted with women who theoretically could represent feminist role models but are instead ridiculed for their weaknesses, and their adherence to typically 'female' clichés are emphasized, exaggerated, and mercilessly exploited" (324). More often than not these female characters eventually turn out to be victims, but instead of winning the readers' admiration or pity, they become the laughingstock (i.e., Rachel Greene in *Friends* or Jessica Day in *New Girl).* In *Derry Girls,* it is the men who are the laughingstock and the token accessories, for instance Mary's husband or the "wee English lad" James, who take the brunt of the jokes. Pailer asserts that humor carries psychological relief and that maybe the time has come, a period of cultural unlock, in which: "Many people need a break from complex emotional topics and simply want to relax and laugh at something that they could only approach with high seriousness before. After the break, they can go back and continue the cause (324)." We only have to look at Sister Michael, the headmistress at Our Lady Immaculate College convent school, with her sarcastic one-liners and eye rolls to see that McGee wanted to inject some real comic relief into what for many people are repressive memories of a Catholic school system. Together, humor and the female perspective can help to unravel and disarm the dominant instruments of power at play. If we assume for a moment that humor and feminism share similar mechanisms, then we can deduce that both open up similar possibilities, the access to “other sectors of reality” (Pailer 325). Working together, they can reinforce their potential and their power of revitalization and de-mechanization (324).

Nostalgia and Women Reinserted into the Troubles Narrative

Unlike traditional representations of adolescence marked by violence and sexual repression, *Derry Girls* reinserts women back into the narrative of the Troubles. During these times women were the backbone of the community and yet were the most isolated. Chinkin asserts that the peace process was a “top-down process” in which local communities and in particular women, were typically excluded and despite their contributions to informal peace processes, remained for the most part absent from the formal negotiations (Chinkin in Ward 2). Although the benefits of involving women in conflict resolution were evident in Northern Ireland, little was done to implement the pledges put forward in The Good Friday Agreement, also known as The Belfast Agreement, a peace agreement between the British and Irish governments signed on Good Friday, 10 April 1998, to ensure a greater level of gender parity in public life (Ward 4).

Women were the pioneers of peacemaking long before official peace negotiations began. They were actively building bridges between Catholics and Protestants and looked forward, coming up with solutions and strategies for healthcare and education, and developed a common cause that would eventually influence public opinion (Angon 34). Through dedication and cooperation, they represented a peaceful alternative showing that “coexistence is possible despite a bloody history” (Kvinna in Ward 8). As John Darby and Roger McGinty point out, militarism infiltrated Northern Irish society so that: “violence and its effects had worked their way into the very fabric of society and become part of normal life so that [people] became accustomed to the routine use of violence to determine political and social outcomes” (Ward 7). Female figures such as the McCartney sisters who began a campaign seeking the truth behind the murder of Robert McCartney in Belfast City in 2005, helped to open debate and reflection on the consequences of women’s continued under-representation in public life and the nature of masculinity in a society that had been so profoundly marred by violence. The debate they helped start raised profound questions concerning the nature of post-conflict societies. Bernadette Devlin is another example of a female who was an important communicator for social change, who went largely unrecognized and whose contribution to the Troubles was deleted from mainstream history. The key to sustainable peace then, according to Kvinna, lies in changing stereotyped gender roles and improving gender equality within the various sections of the community (Ward 5).

Peace, inclusivity, and equality is the legacy of Lyra McKee, a freelance journalist, writer, and social activist from Derry who was murdered in 2019 by indiscriminate fire as she covered a riot engineered by the so-called dissident IRA in Derry (National Union of Journalists). In her piece "Suicide of the Ceasefire Babies", McKee writes about the effect the war in Northern Ireland had on her generation growing up in Belfast following the Good Friday Agreement. She speaks about the number of young people taking their own lives in Northern Ireland, a region with the highest suicide rate in the U.K (Yeginsu), and one which has doubled since the region's militant groups struck the peace deal more than twenty years ago. The Good Friday Agreement finally put a stop to the three-decade conflict, but the 35-page long text failed to address peace and reconciliation and how to heal the wounds of the past. Northern Ireland is still a society in trauma and the scars of a divided people remain in the form of corrugated iron "peace lines", barbed wire fences and tribal murals (Geoghegan). For all their perceived differences, both communities seemed to have the same opinion on deviant gender or sexual behavior. The rigid belief system that persisted in the Catholic and Protestant communities regarding religion and national identity also ensured that they maintained similar opinions on homosexuality and transgenderism. As multiple studies show, people in Northern Ireland were homophobic during the Troubles (van Vliet). McKee wrote an open letter to herself about growing up gay in Belfast and her fraught journey to self-acceptance, which garnered viral attention in 2014, and was made into a short film. McKee's writing, whether on social justice or the legacy of the Troubles, is fearless in how it questions the status quo. It challenges conventional and accepted ways of thinking and bears testament to how the pen is mightier than the sword. She represents the vigor of a youth born from the Good Friday Agreement and a determination to work on the imperfect peace it made.

Derry Girls, while acknowledging the irrevocably traumatic time that was the Troubles, also reminds us that for many people these years were not just a national trauma, but someone's teenage years, not a political moment, but Clare's intensely personal coming-out scene ("Episode #1.6"). There is an extreme inhabiting of the girls' point of view: teenage antics, popularity contests, and discovering they do not have trust funds. In this way *Derry Girls* is quite radical, not dwelling in the victimized woman narrative, but reclaiming their power and taking up space. When feminist scholars or writers such as McGee make women's stories visible, they help to expose the multiple ways in which notions of femininity and masculinity are sculpted by the intersections of "historical location, situation, culture, ethnicity, class, and in the particular case of Irish women, colonialism" (Earles 4). An overarching theme in Girl Culture according to Mitchell is Lost Girlhoods, a form of social forgetting or the practice of covering over the past, often through forgetting the pleasures of girl play. Lyn Mikel Brown and Carol Gilligan reference the idea of girls losing themselves or their voice at adolescence and the importance of recovering voice (Mitchell xxix). This suggests that much of girls growing up amounts to survival and escape (Mitchell xxix) whereas in *Derry Girls,* they are thriving as teenagers, not merely surviving a political situation. By exploring historical and current documents through a feminist lens, we begin to ask questions that have been previously unanswered and which may help to serve those women who continue to fight injustices. Earles maintains that as war persisted in Northern Ireland, civil usefulness became defined as strength, public leadership, and willingness to face death for men, while femininity became identified with and constrained into terms of sacrifice, passivity, and dedication to family. Even as these ideals were disobeyed by women, the prevailing discourses certainly became more difficult to challenge and corrupt (Earles 12). A man was positioned as both the epitome of masculinity and the absolute within the army, whereas femininity became construed as a sign of weakness (Earles 12). In this way, theory and the sounding of women's voices become intimately joined in the creation of spaces within which women can heal and become empowered. Earles argues that dissent, in particular female dissent, "disrupts the discourses of patriarchy and colonialism which expect passive domesticity" (59). With the expression of social grief through theory and the voicing of women's words, the creation of feminist resistances whether mass-based or within everyday disturbances becomes inevitable. Past struggles and triumphs cannot be ignored. Monica Culbert explains, "We lost a lot, but we learned a lot. You can't let those years be lost. They have to count somewhere" (Earles 58). *Derry Girls* is a testament to this and represents a kind of resistance to the silencing of women's stories.

"Sláinte Motherfuckers": The Unruly Teenager

The female unruly teenager is often left out of literary and cultural representations of Northern Ireland. Because they are unruly, hormonal and morally transgressive, they have the power to unsettle traditional ideas around identity. *Derry Girls* is a joyful portrayal of the Northern Irish teenage woman, and one that is wholly realistic. During the Troubles, discourse surrounding issues about women were overwhelmingly dominated by religious and moral rhetoric (McCormick 5). Such a repressive moral code was consumed with protecting the purity and innocence of girls while hampering undesirable activities. It was of utmost importance that a teenage girl's modesty was protected in the conservative faith traditions of Northern Ireland. If immodest ideas were discussed, they had the power to unsettle traditional ideas around identity. As a result, teenage girls are often left out of literary and cultural representations of Northern Ireland. The issue is not that these narratives do not exist, but rather that the Irish literary canon fails to take account of them. Repression and the dogma of the Catholic religion permeated through much of pop culture and literature on the Troubles era, so much so that if young women were portrayed, it made sure to represent them as obedient "good girls".

Novels and films based on the Troubles often give prominence to male protagonists due to the drama of their potential involvement as paramilitary foot soldiers, and the possibility of their refusing to take part in the conflict. For example, the film *Good Vibrations* (2013) focuses on "teenage kicks" who are, almost exclusively, male. Novels such as Glenn Patterson's *The Rest Just Follows* and Tara West's *Fodder* seek to redress the gender imbalance of these portrayals of punk's adolescents, much in the same way that *Derry Girls* does. The show not only gives us access to the extraordinary lives of teenage women in Northern Ireland, but also offers a true depiction of how they had normal teenage years in many respects (e.g., chasing boys, getting detention, making hash scones), not a far cry from the school teenagers of today or yesterday, and that they too were be brash, bold, and vulgar. A true representation of female teenagers, it goes against ideological beliefs of how a woman or young girl should act and provides a frank and positive voice for these largely female issues and the everyday experiences of women in Ireland. In this respect, the show is a prime example of how pop culture allows for the reevaluation of the relationship between femininity and feminism, and how we define appropriate femininity.

Derry Girls oozes girl power and agency (Ryan 93), challenging the entrenched cultural ideals which surround appropriate femininity. Defined by the tension between being pretty and being funny, a sitcom such as this satirizes the culture's ideals of "pretty" (Meeuf 45) embodying everything that pretty women should not be "loud, vulgar, assertive and unafraid to flout the culture's definition of womanhood" (Rowe 11). The figure of the unruly woman contains much potential for feminist appropriation, for "rethinking how women are constructed as gendered subjects in the language of spectacle and the visual" (11). Russo believes it is the parody of the unruly woman and the comedic conventions surrounding her which provide a space to act out the "dilemmas of femininity" (Russio qtd. in Rowe 225) and to make laughable these tropes of femininity. In season one, episode one, the girls had agreed to wear denim jackets instead of their school blazers ("Episode #1.1") to celebrate their individuality, but it is only young Clare Devlin who pulls through with it and delivers the classic line "Well I'm not being an individual on me own!" ("Episode #1.1" 00:04:06). Russo asks in what sense women can produce and make spectacles of themselves for themselves and use their visibility as power (Rowe 11). By utilizing their image as power in rebellious acts such as this, they might begin to negate their invisibility in the public sphere or the schoolyard, claim narrative space, and affect how they are seen by others.

Conclusion

Had *Derry Girls* come out during the times it was written about, the show would not have at all been received in the positive way it is now; it was not the right moment for a television show which brought humor into the equation and spoke to the ordinary moments in a teenager's life growing up in Northern Ireland. However now in a period of cultural unlock, it is wholly relevant and speaks to the human part of everyone that longs for a reason to laugh at something they could only approach with seriousness before. The sitcom's representation of women during the Troubles draws upon postfeminist discourse, and via Rosalind Gill's theoretical framework of postfeminism as a sensibility, shows up contradictory ideas of femininity and womanhood; not any distinct wave or backlash to other feminisms, simply emphasizing the entanglement of both feminist and anti-feminist notions. In this way, the sitcom is cathartic, reinserting the funny, loud woman back into the narrative and exposes the fact that there are a multitude of ways that a woman can be a woman or, that a girl can be feminine. Through investigating popular culture such as *Derry Girls* juxtaposed with (feminist) theory, dominant images, notions, and stereotypes can be exposed and challenged. *Derry Girls* is reflective of the postmodern woman that is not against feminism or ignorant to the great efforts of other women that got us to this point but is also not afraid to be unapologetically and defiantly human.

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