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Her Voice on Air: How Irish Radio Made Strides for Women's Rights

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ABSTRACT: Radio is the voice of the people; this is no less true in Ireland, a nation that prefers talk radio and phone-ins. These formats were popular from 1970-2000, formative years for the feminist movement. Scholarship suggests a correlation between radio and women's issues in Ireland but does not answer what elements create this. Here, I analyze 10 archival radio clips from Ireland's national public service broadcaster, RTÉ, looking at how women's issues are framed. After analyzing these clips, I found that Irish identity embedded in the shows allows for the discussion of controversial ideas. Radio promotes an inclusive environment, by dispelling shame and encouraging political conversation among women. This allows women to hear and be heard, creating a space for equal representation.

Introduction

As I was sitting on a bus from Dublin airport back to my apartment in Cork City, I heard a late-night radio show playing on the bus speakers. The radio show host was discussing the 2018 abortion referendum, immediately catching my attention. This was almost a year after the referendum to legalize abortion in the country, a very controversial debate. The host was interviewing two women. The women held opposite views on the topic, but the conversation was calm and well-mannered. The host never had to raise his voice, and each woman was given time and respect. I found this respectful, open conversation refreshing compared to our media environment in the United States.

Ireland is a nation of people who love talking and sharing and talk-radio is widely popular. I spent five months studying in Ireland. While I was there, I learned a great deal about the media landscape of the country, its complicated relationship with Northern Ireland and British media, and the influence of the Catholic Church, which has seeped into every aspect of Irish culture and media. During my time there, I was able to take a course, Media in Ireland. It taught me a lot about the

history of Irish media and the history of women's rights in the country, or lack thereof. This helped me to understand its media today as well. In my course, we learned about radio's role in this island nation. Our professor always said that "the Irish love to hear themselves talk." My experience on the bus was not unique; chat-style radio shows have been intrinsic to Irish radio for decades. Ireland's airwaves are filled with talk radio and many of the topics are now and have long been about women's issues.

When radio first came to Ireland in the late 1960s it gave women a platform that they had never had before. Through talk radio, women's issues have come to the surface starting in the 1970s to today. Radio has a large reach on this European island and has been popular throughout the country from its arrival and continues to be popular today. The amount of people who listen to radio every day is "higher than that of any other media, including social media use in Ireland" (AdWorld). Radio is something that is very important to the Irish people, as it has historically been a way for them to communicate their thoughts in a heavily censored Irish society.

The Catholic Church's hold on media in the country has led to this heavy censorship and political debate, but Irish media firms have consistently pushed the boundaries on what is allowed to be aired, distributed and published. Women have had a particularly fraught role in Irish society but have found a voice in radio programming. Women's rights in Ireland came significantly later than the rights of their American counterparts; it wasn't until the 1970s that married women were allowed to work. Even after the marriage bar was lifted, many married Irish women still did not work. Women were often at home during the day; radio was the married

woman's connection to the outside world. Radio catered to the Irish "housewife." While radio was catering to Irish women in the home, women's rights issues like contraception, divorce and equal pay, were being fought for by second-wave feminists. In my research, I explore what properties of talk radio contributed to the progress of women's rights during these formative years.

Literature Review

Ireland's history of women's rights is complicated with a pull between a democratized new nation and the country's strong Catholic identity. As a result, feminists began pushing back against conservative Irish policies supported by the Church. Molly Mullin's article gives an overview of the history of feminism in Ireland and discusses how the arts have historically given women an outlet. Her article begins in 1988, on the one-thousandth year of Dublin history, titled the "Dublin Millenium" [*sic*]. Leading up to this celebration, many feminists expressed feelings of disappointment with a country that has seen such little progress in women's rights in the span of one thousand years; some feminists even made the argument "that feminism in Ireland had 'reached its lowest point in twenty years'"(Mullin 33). Women at the time were facing a number of disadvantages. Mullin recalls a lack of access to healthcare, specifically information and counseling regarding healthcare after abortions that occurred outside of the country (Mullin 33). Women were also seeing their stories be pushed out of the narrative of Irish history. In one example, she notes that during the Dublin Millenium, posters representing Irish progress were displayed surrounding the event. The posters, however, only included the faces of Irish men (Mullin 31). Surely it was not just men who contributed to Ireland's history.

While female voices were being stifled in many ways, Mullin does mention the opportunities that were created for women through “cultural expression,” including publishing, painting, and theater. She writes about controversial journalist Nell McCafferty. McCafferty used dark humor to talk about women’s rights issues, ““encouraging women to laugh at the silly things that were said and written about [them]”” McCafferty’s humor, however, does not downplay the seriousness of these topics. Mullin writes that “in the same introduction, [McCafferty] echoes the persistent lament of Irish feminists that the 1980s were a disastrous period for Irish women” (Mullin 38). Mullin’s account of feminism throughout Irish history gives an overview of the lack of representation and opportunities for women at the time, while also addressing opportunities carved out for women through writing, media, and the arts.

Newspaper advice columns were one area of the media where women were able to voice their concerns. Angela Macnamara’s advice column in the *Sunday Press* is an example. Paul Ryan’s journal article speaks to the range of topics that Macnamara’s column advised on, many of them taboo in Irish culture. Macnamara’s weekly column received over four thousand letters a year (Ryan 318). Macnamara was a devout Catholic woman who offered advice to those who wrote to her on very liberal ideas within Catholic Ireland, including subjects about sex and homosexuality. Macnamara was an agony aunt for women in the 1960s and 1970s. She aided in popularizing the advice forum that radio presenter Gay Byrne later used in his talk radio segments. MacNamara’s column hollowed out a space for subjects of sexuality to be discussed, which was revolutionary in Ireland at the time. She created meaningful discussions about contraception and homosexuality, making these topics commonplace in a very conservative Irish society.

As publications became more progressive, new media posed a bigger threat in upending conservative Catholic ideals. The church feared that new media like television would corrupt the Irish people's core identity, but it proved the opposite and helped to promote Irish culture, including Irish traditional music and the Irish language. Maurice Walsh details the effects of television and publications on the Irish public from 1960 to 2008. Walsh explains the intrinsic fears the Irish government and the Catholic Church had about television's arrival in Ireland. But there was an even bigger fear that British and American T.V. would become commonplace in the Irish home. It was decided that Ireland must create its own national television programming, embracing "television as a modern phenomenon that could no longer be avoided" (Walsh 255). Walsh acknowledges that television's history in Ireland was very much critiqued by the Catholic Church, as the late-night television show *The Late Late Show*, which was hosted by radio host Gay Byrne, became popular for its unexpected, and often controversial discussions including those about contraception or the politics of Northern Ireland (Walsh 258). Television was often seen as corrupting the people of Ireland, especially its youth. To a lesser extent, Walsh also discusses the role that publications played in the republic as they began becoming more liberal, defying the Catholic Church. This article does not provide much information on understanding the Irish housewife's consumption of media but does provide background of the history of media in Ireland and its relationship with censorship and the Catholic Church. It explains the importance of Irish media in upholding Irish culture and tradition.

Irish media is intrinsically Irish, as it has helped to re-popularize Irish trad music, the Irish language and cater to its audience with an abundance of talk shows and radio. Contrary to media theorist Theodor Adorno, Irish media has helped in maintaining and restoring the Irish culture. Adorno counters the media's positive effects on society, theorizing that mass media has

turned everyone into a conformist (Adorno 36). Adorno describes mass media as a culture industry, devoid of a true and unique essence. He stresses the importance of critical scholarship on media and the large role it plays in people's lives. Adorno is aware of the influence of media, which is why he is skeptical of its nature. He says that the culture industry has turned art into a commodity "through and through" (Adorno 32). In looking at media in Ireland, Adorno's theory does not hold true. The Irish people's culture has flourished as media has become a major part of their day to day lives, and it is media that women have used as a platform to bring about change. Media in Ireland has allowed people like Angela Macnamara and Nell McCafferty to confront and go beyond conformity. Ireland's identity and culture are expressed through its mass media, in contrast to what Adorno is arguing. Adorno states that "Culture, in the true sense, did not simply accommodate itself to human beings; but it always simultaneously raised a protest" (Adorno 32). In this sense, media in Ireland is true culture as it has helped to raise a protest and push against the status quo.

This can especially be seen in the history of Irish radio as it pushed back against conservative politics. Radio has had a complicated yet powerful history in establishing Ireland as a new nation. Ireland's first radio service, 2RN, now called Raidió Teilifís Éireann, was launched in 1926, just a few years after Ireland became a free state (Day 27). 2RN was a state-owned radio service, as the new nation feared that radio was too powerful to be in the hands of private entities. In these formative years, it was crucial for Ireland to bring the new free state together after civil war. From the very onset, radio had lofty goals to live up to. According to Rosemary Day, radio had the potential to project "the image of a new Ireland to its citizens and beyond" (Day 28). In 1937, Ireland was renamed The Republic of Ireland, and subsequently, 2RN was renamed Raidió Éireann. Radio was still seen as an important medium for spreading Irish

national identity, and “Raidió Éireann was expected to be all things to all listeners and its programming was consequently safe and conservative” (Day 30). Ireland’s national image remained conservative and Catholic. Ireland was changing though. As the country embraced modernization, urbanization and free education until high school, along with globalization, younger generations began to doubt the founding principles of Ireland and the ideals of the Catholic Church (Day 30). Young people were uninterested in listening to the conservative national radio of their time, and in turn, pirate radio stations began taking over in the 1970s. In response, Ireland had to rethink its strategies towards radio. There was a push for independent and commercial radio; the 1988 Broadcasting Act, now called the Broadcasting Authority of Ireland was established to license and regulate a new privately owned, commercial sector of radio (Day 34). Ireland found that local, commercially driven radio was proven to be successful. Irish radio adapted to changes in the attitudes of its listeners and it has continued to thrive with a daily listenership of 85 percent (Day 39). Day provides an in-depth history on radio in Ireland and describes how radio has consistently reflected a changing nation and been a voice for its people. Day does not look into how radio has opened up conversations on women’s rights issues in Ireland, but she did describe how Irish radio had evolved with its people. She gives an overview of Irish radio history and how important radio was in establishing a national identity.

This idea of national identity can also be seen in German radio during the Nazi Regime, which surprisingly, hollowed out a space for female voices on the airwaves. As Kate Lacey describes, “the strict exclusion of women from the ‘important’ matters of politics and economy was defended unquestionably,” but there was a possibility that a woman could become the “voice of a nation” (Lacey 204). Women’s voices were not driven out of German radio, as long as matters of a political nature were not discussed. As seen in Irish radio programming as well,

women's programming in Germany favored the "fireside chat" approach. Although women's voices began to be heard throughout Germany as "presenters of individual programs in prime-time radio," women were not finding opportunities as radio announcers, which is what gave a station its "characteristic signature" (Lacey 193-94). Lacey describes how men's deep voices remained preferable as radio announcers, while women's voices became prevalent on-air when shows entertained approaches including "chit-chat, gossip, and the heart-to-heart" (Lacey 194). According to Lacey, these strategies were also used as propaganda of the Third Reich. German radio and the female voice, in particular, was one of assurance. Radio allowed women to feel as if they were not alone, but part of "a larger listening community" (Lacey 212). Presenters learned to address one listener personally so that all listeners felt the presenter was addressing them. This feeling of inclusion and intimacy was important in women's programming, but as Lacey points out, it was also effective in Nazi Germany propaganda. Many of these strategies and themes present themselves in Irish radio as well. Lacey's article is helpful in describing how a nation employed these themes of the "fireside-chat," reassurance for women, a connection for women to the outside world, etc. While these themes may appear on Irish radio, it does something drastically different. Lacey describes how these strategies are effective in radio propaganda. Ireland may not use radio to manipulate its people, but these strategies create a feeling of intimacy and are effective in receiving listenership and popularizing women's programming.

Popular Irish radio hosts used these strategies as well. A prominent figure and household name in Irish media is radio and talk show host Gay Byrne. Finola Doyle O'Neill's book *The Gaybo Revolution: How Gay Byrne Challenged Irish Society* specifically addresses Gay Byrne's impact on women's issues in Ireland. One chapter is solely devoted to Gay Byrne's Radio show,

The Gay Byrne Show. His radio show first aired in 1973; it was then called *The Gay Byrne Hour*. This radio show was targeted at women in the home. The show became very popular, as it discussed issues and topics often taboo in Irish popular culture (O'Neill Chapter 3). Byrne was a charismatic personality on the radio and recalled that people often complained, not about the lack of music on the radio during his show, but about "the fact that there was too much music and that there should be more talk" (O'Neill Chapter 3). It was not until the 1980s that Byrne's show was allotted a two-hour time slot and a more diverse range of topics were introduced to his radio show. Uniquely, Byrne "was not afraid to challenge the autocratic authority of Church and State" (O'Neill Chapter 3), which he was able to do because, like Angela Macnamara, he gained the trust of Irish women because he was a devout Catholic. Byrne's show was controversial, though his personality allowed him to open up about sensitive subjects. As O'Neill pointed out, he played a critical role in the lives of housewives throughout Ireland because his was the first Irish radio show that allowed for live telephone calls. Women often called Gay Byrne's show for advice. Some of his most important segments included stories about teenage pregnancy, domestic violence, and abortion (O'Neill Chapter 3). He opened up discussion, which allowed women to voice their opinions and brought attention to very important issues for Irish women.

Ireland's media has historically pushed boundaries against censorship, the Catholic Church and patriarchy. To understand women's place in the Irish media landscape, one has to be familiar with the history of women's rights in Ireland. These sources help to understand how open discussion allowed through media has helped to create meaningful and important conversation in Irish society and made a space for Irish women to have a voice. Through conducting my literature review, I have concluded that there is not much scholarship on the role that radio has played in the lives of women in Ireland. In a nation that "loves to hear themselves

talk,” radio has been a critical medium through which stories have been shared and conversation has brought about change. Ireland’s heavily censored past and mired relationship with the Catholic Church has historically given women’s issues and rights an unequal footing. My research question looks at how radio gave women a platform. In this research, I will answer the question: what properties of talk radio contributed to the progress of women’s rights issues in Ireland from the early 1970s to 2000?

Method

Radio in Ireland created a space for women’s issues to be openly discussed in the public sphere. In order to understand more about how radio fostered these conversations, I listened to archival radio clips from Ireland’s national public service broadcaster, RTÉ. RTÉ also provided a brief synopsis about the audio clip, which adds history and background about the program or program presenter, and media metadata, describing how long the clip is, the broadcast date, the series title, etc. I used the metadata as well as the synopsis to discuss the clip’s content and some background on the show. RTÉ does not provide an exhaustive archive of radio clips. With this in mind, I looked at the radio clips available to me, focusing specifically on radio from the early 1970s to 2000. This time period is when women started gaining many rights in Ireland; the marriage bar was lifted, divorce and contraceptives became legal, women were allowed to sit on juries and have a pint in a pub. As I searched through the radio archives, I paid particular attention to popular radio personalities Gay Byrne and Marianne Finucane, as well as any radio show that included the words “women” or “woman” in the title, or that mentioned particular women's issues, including but not limited to contraception, abortion, sex education, pregnancy, and divorce. I did not listen to radio clips that interview or mention women with historical

significance in Ireland prior to the decades I am analyzing. With these criteria and what is available in the archives¹, I listened to a total of 10, two to seven-minute clips.

I used an inductive approach in my research. I looked specifically at how women's issues were talked about, the language used (words that suggest open-mindedness and empathy), the cadence of the host's voice, the diversity of issues discussed, who is talking about them, and what they are saying. These conversations did not necessarily have to be framed as "feminist," but they are honest, open, and non-judgmental. In listening for these characteristics in the radio shows themselves, I also thought about who the target audience might be according to how the conversation is framed. With this research, I found common themes in the topics discussed and the language used through listening to these radio clips. I broke up these findings into categories based on the effective properties radio uses to discuss these issues.

Analysis

For my research, I am looking at a selection of RTE radio clips ranging from two minutes to seven minutes. The clips that surfaced include clips from popular radio personalities including Gay Byrne and Marian Finucane, as well as news broadcasts. News broadcasts seem to focus more on facts and figures, while talk shows like the *Gay Byrne Show* and *Women Today*, focus on anecdotal stories of everyday women, offering education, and advice. The clips that I have found are set up as an interview question and answer, or as advice forums (the host reads a letter from a viewer and follows it up with advice on the show). Gay Byrne typically prefers the advice forum set up, while news broadcasts prefer interview-type segments. Through close analysis, I

¹ These 10 clips are only a small percentage of the "thousands of hours of moving image and sound recordings" available in the archives (About RTE Archives, rte.ie). While the archives are full of different "exhibitions" (a curated selection of media), I find that it is mostly a place to preserve any artifact of media that has survived.

have found that these two conversational formats are the most popular and that the language is colloquial, suggesting wide accessibility of the material discussed. Many of the people who are interviewed are average people, like Dublin boys walking on the street, which is portrayed in one segment of *Women Today*. Among some of the titles are “Inequality In The Workplace” and “The Man Didn’t See It As Rape, But She Did,” suggesting a wide range of topics and a tendency to not shy away from potentially controversial topics. The hosts are frank and informative on such matters and the conversations are framed as educational, but the language that is used is not overtly gratuitous. In one clip from *Women Today*, Marian Finucane is interviewing a woman who works at a Rape Crisis Center. The woman describes one instance when a girl is raped after a dance. She is not salacious but strictly discusses the rape to help a listener understand that rape is not always by a random aggressor. From my analysis, I have also found that non-judgmental language and tone is used as the presenters’ speech is conversational but devoid of normal cadences that may suggest judgment. One example of this is when Gay Byrne reads letters from his listeners; Byrne’s voice is always straightforward and does not imply judgmental undertones.

Dispelling Shame

Byrne acts primarily as an agony aunt for non-working wives and mothers. His show, according to the RTÉ synopsis under his radio clips, “was often used as a forum by housewives, who confided their problems in letters” to him. Gay Byrne’s show tends to offer up misconceptions about women’s problems and attempt to dispel them. One theme I have found used by popular talk-show hosts like Gay Byrne and Marian Finucane is the inclusion of various groups of women as a way to dispel shame. There are often misconceptions about the “type” of woman who attracts certain behaviors, and the feeling that no one understands. In a clip, “The

Hell in Which My Children and I Live” (1986), Byrne offers advice to a woman named Mary from Mayo. Mary is seeking help from her alcoholic husband who is beginning to “threaten [her] with physical violence.” Mary’s letter to Byrne is out of desperation, as her children begin to perform poorly in school, and she has no money to afford her children’s schooling. Mary says, “As I live in a small, west of Ireland town, I feel I’ve no one to help me. No one would understand.” Gay Byrne is someone to turn to for these housewives in small-town Ireland, who feel as if they have no one to go to. Byrne helps women to feel as if they are part of “a larger listening community” (Lacey 212). The way Byrne introduces Mary’s letter and offers advice is non-judgmental and reassuring. Byrne begins this clip by acknowledging that Mary is not alone. “This could have come from a great number of people around our country,” he says. Byrne reassures Mary that this is a common problem for women in Ireland. Nearing the end of the clip, Byrne confesses that Mary has been contacted privately, but her letter was read on air to let other women know there are people in the same situation. Byrne closes by saying, “Something can be done.” This simple sentence can present a sense of hope for women.

Similarly, Marian Finucane offers insight to the shame felt after rape in an interview with Mary Doran of the Rape Crisis Center that had recently opened in Dublin. In this segment titled “The Man Didn’t See It As Rape, But She Did” (1979), Finucane begins her interview by asking “what *sort* of people were getting in touch with you.” She puts a slight emphasis on the word *sort* and Doran follows up saying “very varied really.” Finucane’s questions set up to dispel the myth that rape only happens to a certain *sort* of woman. Her emphasis on the word *sort* encourages listeners to pay attention as Doran answers that there are many types of women who can be affected. Doran goes on to tell the story of a woman who received a ride home with a man after a dance and was taken advantage of. Doran also spends a considerable amount of time discussing

the “guilt complex” that women may develop after being raped and goes further to discuss some situations when the woman might feel like it was her fault. Finucane asks, “Did [the girl] ring you herself?” Doran says no, that parents often are the ones calling worried about their child, suggesting that girls are often too afraid or ashamed to call themselves. These stories about domestic abuse and rape are not told to induce shame but rather framed as a way to spread awareness. Hearing these stories may encourage other women to seek help. In both these instances, on the *Gay Byrne Show* and *Women Today*, this idea of shame is discussed. By telling other women’s stories, the presenters are letting listeners know that they are not alone. They should not feel ashamed but should seek help.

Irish Identity to Correct Misconceptions

Not only do Byrne and Finucane tell heart-felt stories as a way to dispel shame, but their platforms also give them the ability to right wrongs and misconceptions. Both presenters are able to use their shows as a way to correct widely held misconceptions; what allows them to do this is the relationship they hold with their listeners. Because of the nation’s conservative, Catholic identity, ideals that are thought to be too progressive might create distrust with listeners. Byrne and Finucane often frame their conversations in the context of religion, family values and Irish identity. As mentioned in the literature review, Byrne “was not afraid to challenge the autocratic authority of Church and State” (O’Neill Chapter 3). He is able to challenge these authorities because of his position as a devout Catholic; he is “approved” of by the Irish people.

Byrne’s balancing act between challenging Church and State while staying within the trust of his listeners is demonstrated most notably in the clip titled “These Girls Are Getting Away With Something” (1986). Byrne interviews two women (about taxpayer support for unwed mothers): an unwed mother of two named Marianne McArdle and an information officer with an

organization that helps unmarried mothers named Mary Higgins. Byrne begins by asking McArdle what the allowance is for one baby. She says, “54 pounds, and many people feel that you get another 54 for the second, but it’s not.” She goes on to say how much money is allotted for the second child, and Byrne restates this, “12.35 on top of the first one.” The way this conversation is framed allows little room for the listener to interpret it differently as Byrne plainly repeats the number.

The conversation is not only hard to misinterpret, but it is also framed in a way that connects with Irish ideals. Information officer Mary Higgins explains that a taxpayer’s role is to support those who cannot support themselves. She states, “ I think that in a Christian, civilized, caring society as Ireland purports to be that there is a fundamental understanding that where you have people who are vulnerable and are not in position to provide for themselves that the state and society as a whole takes over that role.” Higgins speaks to something the Irish hold near and dear to their hearts—religion. She shows them that *this* is why they should care.

Higgins opens the hearts of listeners by framing the conversation around religion, allowing Byrne to further unpack the argument. Because the conversation has been framed in a religious light, listeners are more apt to listen; this allows Byrne to suggest a more controversial understanding. He boils the argument down to sex. Byrne pushes, “Do you have a feeling that in all of this argument, what we’re really talking about again is sex?” Byrne guides the conversation, but really it is the women who carry it. Throughout this clip, Byrne only chimes in to ask questions or to restate comments, helping to frame the discussion and clarify for the listener. Byrne is not shy or hesitant to bring up this discussion of sex, and Higgins agrees with him. She says that a woman’s role is to bring up children, “But it is to bring up children within the context of a married family and when women don’t do that, people feel threatened; they feel

that marriage is being undermined.” Byrne and Higgins effectively explain why Irish people do not want unwed mothers to receive state support. Byrne retorts, “this has to do with sex specifically and there is a feeling that these girls are getting away with something. This is promiscuity rampant in our society and they are being paid to do.” Instead of covering up or ignoring that this is how many people feel, he bluntly states it. Byrne does not divulge his own opinions, but simply guides the conversation. By acknowledging and suggesting that people might be hesitant about providing aid to unwed mothers, he allows Higgins to disprove misconceptions about these women. Higgins says that these are women who “thought they were [in] secure, stable relationships... they’re not promiscuous.” This clip effectively shows how framing can right wrongs. Byrne is blunt; he is able to understand the reluctance of the Irish people because he too is a Catholic Irish man, but he does not perpetuate their misconceptions, allowing McArdle and Higgins to correct them. As he directs the conversation forward, Higgins speaks to what the Irish find most important.

Marian Finucane uses similar strategies in “*Women Today’s First Broadcast*” (1979) about sex education. Finucane prefaces the broadcast by reinforcing the importance of sex education, stating that “GPs, priests and social workers can give long lists of sad cases of monumental ignorance. A very strange phenomenon, you might think in view of what’s called the permissive society, and indeed the very explicit kind of detail, not to mention innuendo, in films and on television.” Not only does she right a wrong by stating that although this is what many people think, it is actually untrue, but she proves this with the expert opinions of social workers and GPs, or general practitioners, as well as *priests*. In a Catholic society like Ireland, the opinion of a priest is an important one, and Finucane knows that their opinion will be valued on the same level or maybe an even greater level than that of a doctor or a social worker.

Finucane presents the episode and explains that this episode is part one of a two-part program; this part includes interviews from 19 to 20-year-old Dublin boys on their sex education. The reporter, Doireann Ní Bhriain, presses the boys on their knowledge of sexual matters like periods and pregnancy, but the boys seem to have little idea about the science of sex. Their answers are often awkward or rushed, including a lot of pauses. One boy says, “I think I knew where they came from... I just wasn’t that sure how they got there.” He pauses in between and laughs a bit at the end, noticeably uncomfortable. Through presenting these interviews, Finucane is clearly pointing out that Ireland is doing a poor job educating younger people on sex. It is also interesting to note that the interviewees are all male, perhaps suggesting that women of the same age (19-20) are too innocent to discuss such matters on radio. While Finucane seemingly disapproves and is pushing back on the current state of sex education in Ireland, one may argue that the country is still lagging behind by not including a variety of voices. At the same time, however, this suggests that Finucane is aware that the Irish people may not accept the voices of young women as well as they may young men. Overall, the sentiment is inclusive of both male and female however, as the reporter mentions periods and the female body, and Finucane stresses the importance of sex education for all.

Finucane also previews the second part of the two-part episode. She says that it will include a panel of specialists including “a nun, a doctor, a nurse and what is generally called an agony columnist.” While a nun and an agony columnist’s presence on a panel about sex education might confuse many Americans, their presence here on Irish radio makes perfect sense in Irish society. Irish media speaks to this true and unique essence of the Irish people (Adorno 32). As both Finucane and Byrne correct misconceptions, they frame these conversations in the

context of Irish ideals. They understand Irish identity, allowing them to reach their listeners in order to right wrongs.

Encouraging Political Discussion

While radio personalities like Byrne and Finucane focus on anecdotal stories we can empathize with, news programming typically focuses on facts and figures, but more interestingly, they bring up political concerns. News programming largely employs male announcers who interview female “experts” in the area they are discussing or a woman with a political story to tell. The “female expert,” often a researcher or a politician, explains how politics affect women, while the political story *shows* women how they are affected. This can be seen in one clip, “Josie Airey Takes Irish Government to European Court of Human Rights” (1979), which discusses how divorcee Josie Airey takes the Irish government to the European Court when she was denied free legal aid to divorce her abusive husband. Both of these formats force women into the discussion, but with different strategies.

In both cases, the women interviewed are able to speak freely and uninterrupted, but the male announcer ultimately has the final say on the topic. This inclusion of women into the discussion of politics suggests an encouragement for women to become more involved in political discourse and discussion; however, the fact that these programs are presented by men, who lead the discussion, suggests that there is still work to be done.

This sentiment is plainly stated in a *Women for Today* broadcast titled “Encouraging Women To Be Involved in Politics” (1975), presented by Kevin O’Connor. In the clip, O’Connor speaks to politician Gemma Hussey about Joy O’Farrell, Chairperson of the Women’s Political Association. O’Connor frequently plays back a recording of O’Farrell speaking at a meeting in Dublin. In the recording, O’Farrell states, “From the time we get up in the morning to

the time we go to bed, we are completely at the mercy of government policies of one kind or another.” O’Farrell is speaking to a room full of women in Dublin. O’Connor’s use of this recording is unique to radio, as it allows a vast number of women to hear this message who otherwise would never have been able to attend the meeting. As the host introduces O’Farrell, he is careful in his discussion of her. In a slip-up, he introduces her as “Chairman... Chairwoman...Chairperson—what you will.” His wording here shows that there is still a tendency to think of a chairperson as male, but as this clip brings up, women are becoming increasingly more involved in politics and his attempt at clarifying “chairperson” points to an Ireland moving towards change.

O’Connor simply provides background knowledge, while the clips of O’Farrell and his interview with Hussey, carry and frame the conversation. Hussey recalls that “Even as recently as two years ago, it was difficult to get women on their feet discussing political issues with a large number of people.” O’Farrell is an outlier in the political world, but she knows how to frame her discussion on politics to reach the hearts of women across Ireland. She consistently brings her discussion of politics back to the future of Ireland’s children, which is something that will resonate with Irish mothers. In a plea to get women more involved, she says:

“Whether we’re in a job outside the home or working in the home, the state interferes in our lives at all times either directly or indirectly. When we shop, prices are sanctioned by the government. When we are sick, state hospitals and medicine usually take care of us.... The state has a considerable say in the number of children we have.”

All of O’Farrell’s arguments point back to concerns that non-working wives and mothers may have in their day-to-day lives. O’Connor mentions that O’Farrell is a mother of six. This mention

may suggest that O'Farrell is more accepted on Irish radio because she is a mother. While this could be suggestive of Irish conservative ideologies, O'Farrell's motherhood allows her to reach the hearts of other mothers who otherwise may not know that their opinion on political matters is important. It is also important to note here that she is not just talking about women's involvement in "women's issues" but how all political matters are a woman's issue, and women have a right to be in the conversation.

In another clip from *Morning Ireland*, the interviewee, Dr. Margaret Fine-Davies, constantly refers to why policy change is something women are especially affected by. Davies discusses the politics of abortion and divorce in Ireland—abortion obviously affecting women—and divorce, which, as her research presents, was voted against because of the consequences that would befall the wife. Her research points back to the importance of women in political discussion because these are issues that affect them. In the clip "The Role of Women in Ireland" (1988), the presenter David Hanly interviews Davies on a recent survey that she was involved in conducting on attitudes towards abortion. It found that "58 percent of the population feel that abortion is permissible under certain circumstances." This figure is shocking in light of the recent abortion referendum (1988) vote against legalizing abortion. Its discussion here shows an openness to talk about these progressive political issues. He asks, "Does [this] mean that the abortion referendum was not a *true* reflection of how people felt about abortion?" Hanly emphasizes the word "true" to further understand Davies' research. In doing this, he is trying to grasp why there is this division shown between Davies' research and the national referendum, something that listeners might also question. Davies says that the referendum is not a "full representation." While Hanly does push Davies to clarify her findings for the listeners, he allows her to speak freely and without interruption.

Neither presenter divulges their opinion or stance but discusses the topic to show a much more nuanced and unified Ireland. Davies admits that the referendum is an “oversimplification.” Her research shows a consensus in pro-amendment and anti-amendment voters on instances when abortion should be legal, when the mother’s life is in danger for example, despite the polarity that many people felt leading up to the referendum. Davies presents that the issue is not as black and white as people assume, which shows other women that their ambivalence towards the issue is common and acceptable. It encourages conversation among people who do not necessarily fall on one side of the spectrum. Davies goes on to discuss the referendum on divorce, stating that the “economic and social consequences of the wife” were two of the most pressing reasons why people voted against its legalization. Davies’ discussion on abortion and divorce force women into the discussion. Her research is consistently pointing back to how these policies directly affect women and Hanly allows Davies to fully and thoroughly explain her research, only chiming in for clarification or as a way to guide the conversation to another topic.

In another interview with David Hanly titled “Inequality In The Workplace” (1986), Hanly discusses the matter of female inequality at work. He states, “Although large strides *had* been made, in the direction of... equality, there would now appear to be a regression.” Hanly stresses the fact that there “*had*” been progress made, pointing out the importance of this recent regression. He interviews chairperson of the Employment Equality Agency, Sylvia Meehan. Meehan, an expert in workplace inequality for women, breaks down why this regression has been occurring and explains it in a way that is understandable to a lay audience. Wage inequality occurs when there is “A slightly higher value [of work] but a much wider gap in the wages, and the legislation at the moment doesn’t take that into account.” Meehan shows how the value of work compared to wages are disproportional. Meehan’s expertise allows her to explain the

politics behind work inequality so that other women listening may start to understand it. This tendency for radio programming to use informal, easily understandable language, allows it to be accessible to a large audience.

Although Meehan does not directly address why women should be concerned, there is an understanding that if there seems to be a regression away from female equality, this is something that women should be concerned about. It is an issue that cannot more obviously effect women. This particular concern has the ability to rally women who are angry to see regression where there once was progress especially now that the politics behind this regression have been outlined and explained.

Looking Back

As Ireland sees progress towards equality among the sexes in many other ways, there becomes a greater interest in looking back to see how far the nation has come. From an *RTÉ News*’ broadcast “What Northern Women Think Of The South” (1981), a survey sent to Northern Irish women found that there was an “ignorance of the changing Ireland.” Because Northern Ireland, a country in the United Kingdom, has historically been ahead of the Republic of Ireland on women’s rights issues, the survey suggests that they are unaware of the strides towards equality in the Republic. As the women of Northern Ireland answer many of the survey questions wrong, this shows that public perception of the country is not up to date. It also points out the progress that has been made. The clip looks back to how far the Republic of Ireland has come as it talks specifically about the availability of contraceptives, but it falls short on other issues, such as divorce. As Ireland is ever-changing, Irish radio is able to look back at the progress of the nation while also explaining why feminism is still important today.

This is notably expressed in a clip titled “Irish Women’s Movement” (2000). Presenter Pat Kenny interviews Nell McCafferty and Máirín de Burca, “two veterans of the Irish Women’s Liberation Movement,” about how far the country has come (RTÉ Archives). The women agree that the biggest challenge they faced was contraception. They recall the “famous contraceptive train to Belfast in 1971 to illegally bring some back to Ireland” (RTÉ Archives). As the women reflect, they remember sacrifices they made to gain popular support. De Burca explains that she would not go on the contraceptive train as a single woman because “it would be sending out terrible vibes” to the women in rural Ireland. De Burca is suggesting that women of rural, conservative Ireland would be more understanding of married women having access to contraceptives. If single women were also trying to get access to it, there may have been much more pushback from this society steeped in the Catholic faith. The ability to open up now about the decisions that were made then shows how much Ireland has progressed—these issues can now be openly talked about. Importantly, de Burca says “you never forget that you were once second-class citizens.” She calls attention to how poorly women were treated and how important it is for this history to be remembered. Laughing now, Nell McCafferty recalls how the children’s allowance “was paid to the father” and both women think back to when all important matters fell on the husband. The women laugh because, as Kenny says, it seems “almost an unreal, fantasy kind of place that people lived in.” De Burca cuts him off adding that equal pay “has not become a reality for women.” While there is a tendency to look back at how far the nation has come, forgetting about the inequalities that still exist, this clip tells its listeners what Irish radio has always told them, there is still progress to be made.

Irish radio has historically created a space for controversial women’s issues to be discussed, albeit within the context of Irish society. Irish radio is intrinsically Irish, and this

national identity can be seen woven through every aspect of radio programming, as mentioned in Marian Finuacane's clip about sex education. A nun and an agony columnist's opinions on an expert panel is something you may only find in Ireland and framing the importance of helping women in need around the nation's Catholic ideologies would not be as effective in other countries. RTÉ is nationalistic in this sense, but not propagandistic. As we see in the example above, radio consistently allows for women to push against the status quo. It recognizes that there can always be room for progress and allows these voices to be heard without stifling them in order to push more conservative narratives. The framing may revolve around Irish, Catholic identity, but as we have seen, the ideas push this narrative and express that progress can be made, not despite, but because of Irish identity.

Conclusion

Ireland in the 1970s into the 2000s was still a nation steeped in tradition, slow to create laws for equality for women, but radio has played a major role in speeding this process; this medium began pushing boundaries and allowing for conversations to happen. Irish radio presenters' charismatic and friendly voices created a feeling of friendship for those listening, and their embrace of Irish national identity created a trusting relationship between listener and host. Radio during this time did not lend itself to pushy or aggressive statements; rather through stories and interviews, it was able to encourage, promote, include, and right wrongs. Radio shows interviewed female experts and told stories about everyday people. They often cleared up misconceptions and helped women to understand that they do not have to feel ashamed for things out of their control. Radio news shows, especially, promoted women's involvement in politics. While women's equality still had a long way to go, radio created a space where women could

talk and listen to other women talk; it was a place where controversial issues were discussed, and women were able to create a network—understanding that they were not alone.

Radio is unique in its ability to create this sense of community through phone-ins and chatty live sessions, something that other forms of media are not capable of. Journalism in Ireland during this time also played a major role in the women's movement. As Paul Ryan writes, Angela Macnamara's advice column often discussed controversial topics. Her column has many similarities to radio shows of the time. She, like Gay Byrne, was an agony aunt for Irish women and used her Irish Catholic identity to gain trust among her readers. Though she wrote about progressive topics, people held her to high regard because she was like them. Ryan's article about Macnamara helps in understanding Irish radio. The two build on each other. Newspapers were important in the women's movement but because of accessibility, radio possessed the characteristics to reach a wider audience. It was free and could be listened to while doing housework, but it was also more easily accessible because of the informal, chit-chat style it used. Both of these mediums are intrinsically Irish and assisted in women's progress, but each one is uniquely important as they both have different strengths and weaknesses.

It can also be said that Irish radio became a voice for women who otherwise did not have one. Rosemary Day's article about the history of Irish radio shows how radio has progressed with the people of this island nation. Radio changed with the times, but Day does not mention the role that it played in the lives of women in Ireland. Day describes how young Irish people began turning away from the Church and conservative Ireland, leading to an increase in pirate radio stations, but she does not discuss how legal radio stations began using their own tactics to discuss progressive politics, namely women's issues. Women were, for the most part, at home during the day, as many did not or *could* not work. They could listen to the radio while doing

housework or caring for their children and this became their connection to women across the nation. Radio consistently changed and progressed with its listenership. The market was women and women's issues were what they wanted to hear. My research here expands upon Day's conclusion that Irish radio is constantly growing with its audience.

While Ireland was a changing nation during these years, there was still a lot of change to be made. My research has shown that Ireland was progressing towards equality, though there were still some inequalities. One drawback of my research is the small sample that I had to work with. Given a bigger archive, there may have been more to say about how some subjects were discussed and the progress that was still lacking. There were also other popular radio personalities during this time that I was unable to analyze, like Dr. Frankie, whom was influential on the airwaves. She, like Gay Byrne, was an agony aunt on the radio and used live phone-ins. Her show was explicitly for women, as each episode opened with "Welcome to a Women's Page, a program for and about you" ("A Programme For and About You"). I was unable to analyze her segments because her clips were not available in the archives, though there is a documentary about her on the RTÉ website that could be analyzed to fill in the gaps of her missing segments and help understand her impact on Irish radio.

Since I have first collected my sample of radio to listen to, RTÉ has added a few more radio clips, on the matter of divorce, particularly. More research would allow for these clips to be added in the analysis. I'm curious as to why these clips about divorce specifically have been added seemingly at the same time. As I have mentioned earlier, I did not find any particular pattern to the clips in the RTÉ archives. The meta-data and descriptions are fairly straightforward; they don't seem to be pushing a narrative, and out of the sample of clips I analyzed, I feel that RTÉ provides an honest overview of women's radio of the time.

Furthering this research might find interesting data in comparing newspaper articles from 1970-2000 to radio shows at the time. I suspect that there might be a correlation between the ideas being discussed on the radio to activism and law reformation. It would also be interesting to see if issues discussed on more prominent radio programs, like the *Gay Byrne Show*, seemingly cause more interest in political activism. This might also be compared to polls, data sets and political votes. While in this paper, I assess the properties that radio uses to open up the discussion on women's rights, this research would look into how effective these properties may be.

I cannot answer just how effective radio was in relation to political change, but it is obviously more apparent through this research that women's issues were talked about extensively on radio during second-wave feminism in Ireland. These conversations encouraged progressive thinking. The properties of talk radio from 1970-2000 contributed to the progress of women's rights. The shows were framed in a non-judgmental and inclusive way as the presenters created friendly and trustworthy relationships with their listeners. Talk radio used properties such as dispelling shame, forming a community of listeners, righting wrongs and encouraging political discussion among women to create an open and empathetic environment for women to listen and share. Women's voices were now being heard and understood on a public platform, creating (sound) waves for generations to come.

Appendix

| Clip Title | Date | Time | Series/Broadcast Title | Presenter | Description- According to the RTÉ Archives |
|--|-------------|-------------|-------------------------------|------------------|---|
| “Airey Takes Irish Government To European Court Of Human Rights” | 1979 | 2:58 | <i>The Pat Kenny Show</i> | Pat Kenny | “Josie Airey, the Cork woman who went to the European Court of Human Rights because she could not get free legal aid in Ireland, won her case on 9 October 1979.” |
| “Encouraging Women To Be Involved in Politics” | 1975 | 3:37 | <i>Women for Today</i> | Kevin O’Connor | “The Women’s Political Association works to increase the overall involvement of women at all levels of practical politics.” |
| “Inequality In The Workplace” | 1986 | 6:46 | <i>Morning Ireland</i> | David Hanly | “After steps had been taken to address inequalities in the workplace, it now seems that the trend is regressing.” |
| “Irish Women’s Movement” | 2000 | 3:05 | <i>Today with Pat Kenny</i> | Pat Kenny | “Nell McCafferty and Máirín de Burca tell Pat Kenny how things have changed for the Irish Women’s Movement.” |
| “The Hell In Which My Children And I Live” | 1986 | 4:52 | <i>Gay Byrne Show</i> | Gay Byrne | “Mary from Mayo writes to the ‘Gay Byrne Show’ about life with an alcoholic husband. She appeals to his listeners for help.” |
| “The Man Didn’t See It As Rape, But She Did” | 1979 | 2:43 | <i>Women Today</i> | Marian Finucane | “Groundbreaking radio programme ‘Women Today’ takes a look at the work of the newly-opened Rape Crisis Centre in 1979.” |
| “The Role Of Women In Ireland” | 1988 | 4:34 | <i>Morning Ireland</i> | David Hanly | “A report on the changing attitudes to the role of women examines the issues of abortion and divorce.” |
| “These Girls Are Getting Away With Something” | 1986 | 4:41 | <i>Gay Byrne Show</i> | Gay Byrne | “Gay Byrne explores attitudes to unmarried mothers in 1980s Ireland.” |

| | | | | | |
|--|------|------|--------------------|-----------------|--|
| “What Northern Women Think Of The South” | 1981 | 2:49 | <i>RTE News</i> | Conall O Móráin | “In 1981 IT Magazine (formerly Irish Tatler), commissioned a survey on the subject of what women from Northern Ireland think of life south of the border. The survey of 447 women was carried out by Ulster Marketing Surveys Limited.” |
| “ <i>Women Today’s</i> First Broadcast” | 1979 | 5:21 | <i>Women Today</i> | Marian Finucane | ““ <i>Women Today</i> ’, presented by Marian Finucane and produced by Clare Duignan, was first broadcast on 31 May 1979. In an extract from ‘ <i>Women Today</i> ’ Marian Finucane introduces an item on the subject of sex education in Ireland.” |

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