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Women in Radio: A (Her)Story

By

Shaye DiPasquale

This thesis is submitted in partial fulfillment of the requirements for Honors in the Discipline in Communications and the Elizabethtown College Honors Program.

May 1, 2019

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Women in Radio: A (Her)Story

Shaye DiPasquale

Elizabethtown College

Abstract

Since the 1920s, women have been an integral part of the radio industry both as originators and as consumers, yet they have experienced near exclusion from histories and analyses on the subject. This thesis project explores the intersection of gender, sound and history through a cultural and historical analysis of female voices in American radio. The analysis includes an examination of the history of silencing women in the public sphere, the on-going conversation surrounding the suitability of female voices for broadcast and modern critiques of female voices. As more women's voices are heard on the radio, the ways gender hierarchies are heard and interpreted in sound environments change. This research seeks to address the following question: has modern radio programming helped to rework the gendered dimensions of the public and private space, and shape the perception of the female voice in the public sphere? The purpose of this thesis project is to explore the ways in which power and agency may be expressed by women in a traditionally gendered soundscape to breakdown gender biases in the radio industry. Women in radio are rarely given the platform to respond to the critiques and complaints made about their voices or to share their thoughts on the ideal "radio voice". To reclaim this conversation, interviews were conducted with female radio hosts and announcers to help illustrate their experiences and allow them to share their own narratives.

Table of Contents

Abstract	p. 2
Chapter 1: Introduction	p. 4
Chapter 2: Historical Analysis of Women in American Radio	p. 7
Chapter 3: Where Are We Now? The Modern Culture of Policing Female Voices	p. 33
Chapter 4: Changing The Narrative	p. 40
Chapter 5: Conclusion	p. 58
Appendix	p. 61
References	p. 64

List of Figures

Figure 1. Katie Mingle's email	p. 36
Figure 2. Tweet from @DrZirkon	p. 37
Figure 3. Tweet from @mpmemsoha	p. 38
Figure 4. Tweet from @mpmemsoha	p. 38
Figure 5. Tweet from @mpmemsoha	p.38

Chapter 1: Introduction

Our society often discusses the importance of seeing yourself represented by and in the media. But few people discuss the importance of hearing yourself represented. The human voice has more power and sway than most people realize. It is just as much a facet and a representation of who we are and how we are presented to others. Even when the voice is disembodied, it remains powerful and influential. As a young woman who has considered pursuing a career in radio, I always come back to one important question: Where are the women? I am alarmed by the lack of female voices I hear in radio and I wonder if there is room for more women on the airwaves. Women are underrepresented as on-air talent in the radio industry, just as they are in many professions that operate heavily in the public forum. Yet, female visibility in radio has come a long way since the emergence of radio nearly a hundred years ago. Perhaps the more important question is: What does it mean to hear women's voices on the radio?

As with most areas of history, women have been all but left out of the narrative on radio history. Since the 1920s, women have contributed to the radio industry both as originators and as consumers, yet they have experienced near exclusion from histories and analyses on the subject. From Wikipedia pages on “Women in American Radio” (“Women in American Radio, n.d.) to books and anthologies chronicling the emergence and growth of the radio industry, women are barely mentioned. When women are highlighted, the breadth of their impact is severely underrepresented or glossed over in a brief section specifically discussing female contributions to radio. Sterling’s *Biographical Encyclopedia of American Radio* offers entries on some of the most influential American radio personalities and voices, past and present. The book includes a brief but separate section dedicated to women in radio, noting how women have been an integral part of the industry since the 1920s. Sterling (2011) acknowledges the need for this additional

consideration in his book as women have experienced “a near-exclusion from most standard histories of the medium (p. 418).”

The emergence of radio in the early twentieth century as a medium for sharing information transformed ideas surrounding human communication. The modern platform drew upon the ancient traditions of oral storytelling and communal listening, bringing a revitalized focus to the human voice (Ong, 1982). Throughout history, female voices were often restricted from entering the realm of “signal”: sounds that are actively listened to as they convey important messages (Schafer, 1993). Whose voice is heard and whose voice is considered credible defines who holds power in society (Beard, 2014). The voice opens a wealth of opportunity for the individual: the ability to participate and express one’s self, to consent or dissent in conversation, and to interpret and narrate one’s own stories. Female voices were limited to the private sphere with little leeway to move into the public forum. Publicly constraining women’s voices reflects a more profound cultural anxiety about whether women have a right to speak out at all (Beard, 2014). Radio was one of the first media to allow for and encourage the public expression of women's voices, needs and concerns (Douglas, 1999). By allowing for the growth of female visibility, radio helped to reorder the strict boundaries of the public and private space.

This thesis project explores the intersections of gender, sound, and history through a cultural and historical analysis of female voices in American radio. By employing feminist theory, these intersections can be explored through the actual experience and language of women. Feminist theory recognizes that many conceptions and philosophies of female sexuality, psychology, and roles in society derive from men's opinions and beliefs about women, reinforcing social values rather than challenging them. Feminist theory recognizes that the problem lies not only in particular theories, but also in the scientific method and principles used

to determine what is considered worthy of study. By removing traditional lenses, the application of feminist theory to various areas of study can help generate new concepts (Rosser, 2005). The analysis in this project includes an examination of the history of silencing women in the public sphere and the on-going conversation surrounding the suitability of female voices for broadcast.

Gender norms and societal standards tuned people's ears to listen to and engage with certain voices differently, based on notions of credibility, assertiveness and power. The gendered soundscape repeatedly creates an environment that silences women while allowing men to be vocal. As more women's voices are heard on the radio, the ways gender hierarchies are heard and interpreted in sound environments change. This paper provides insights on modern critiques of female voices and the concept of policing female voices to help address the following question: has modern radio programming helped to rework the gendered dimensions of the public and private space, and shape the perception of the female voice in the public sphere? The purpose of this thesis project is to explore the ways in which power and agency may be expressed by women in a traditionally gendered soundscape to breakdown gender biases in the radio industry. Women in radio are rarely given the platform to respond to the critiques and complaints made about their voices or to share their thoughts on the ideal "radio voice". To reclaim this conversation, interviews were conducted with female radio hosts and announcers to help illustrate their experiences and allow them to share their own narratives.

Chapter 2: Historical Analysis of Women in American Radio

The Beginnings of the Women's Rights Movement

Before women were fighting to have their voices heard on air, they were fighting for the right to freely express their opinions in the public sphere. In societies where men hold the power, it is not uncommon to find a cultural fear of authoritative female voices. This fear manifests by omitting women from public office, denying them access to education and restricting them from practicing law. Throughout history, American culture has valued conformity, tradition and the social status quo in which women are subordinate to men and relegated to the domestic sphere. This led individuals to continue to view women as passive, submissive and obedient beings, traits traditionally associated with female gender roles. Women were expected to get married, maintain the household and raise children. They were not to own property, to become highly educated, to vote nor to participate in court ordeals. To pursue any semblance of liberation, women had to step outside of their compliant roles and begin to actively participate in civil society. First-wave feminism in America heavily focused on earning equal property rights for women, opening opportunities for women and opposing male ownership of married women. By the end of the 19th century, the movement's primary concern was to earn women the right to vote (Grady, 2018).

First wave feminism began with a large-scale gathering of American women to change their second-class status at the Seneca Falls Convention, held July 19-20, 1848 in Seneca Falls, New York. One of the key organizers, Elizabeth Cady Stanton, wrote the "Declaration of Sentiments, Grievances, and Resolutions," which outlined grievances about the inequality between the sexes. The early women's rights movement that grew out of the convention focused on earning women the right to vote (Mead, 2018). With the ability to voice political opinions and

participate freely in public life, female reformers would be able to address all other social, cultural and institutional barriers threatening equal rights and opportunities for women. Opposition to the women's movement arose immediately, but the activists did not shy away. Empowered to elicit change, reformers addressed audiences in small-town forums and city halls, passionately talking about the importance of women's equality. The ceaseless crusade manifested in numerous campaigns including petition drives, lobbying, street demonstrations and speech-making (Eisenberg & Ruthsdotter, 1998). A surge of volunteerism from middle-class women in the 1880 and 1890s helped propel the movement forward, as more women pushed to expand their sphere of activity outside of the home (The Women's Rights Movement, 2007). As women campaigned for their right to vote, they experienced small wins in other areas of public life, including gradual improvements in educational opportunities and the ability to enter the paid workforce in small capacities (Eisenberg & Ruthsdotter, 1998).

The ratification of the Nineteenth Amendment on August 26, 1920 finally gave women the right to vote. While this achievement satisfied one phase of the Women's Rights Movement, the fight to secure female representation in public positions of power and leadership was just beginning. The right to vote did not automatically guarantee women other political rights, such as serving on juries or running for public office, nor did it eliminate other discriminatory practices rooted in the law (Mead, 2018). Many were still uncomfortable with the idea of women making public addresses and openly voicing their opinions. Following the passage of the Nineteenth Amendment, the first wave feminism movement began to splinter. Without a unified goal of achieving suffrage, the movement stagnated until the second wave began in the 1960s (Grady, 2018). Female enfranchisement may not have guaranteed all women full equality and freedom from sexist stereotyping, but it did identify women's rights to self-representation and to

access a public forum (Mead, 2018). This advancement sparked a permanent cultural shift in society which provided the framework for future women's liberation achievements.

The 1920s and Female Announcers in Early Radio Broadcasting

Even with great societal change for women in the 1920s, the decade was still defined by longstanding social attitudes against women in public life. Women who pursued non-traditional careers faced many of the same challenges working women experience today. Working in the radio industry was acceptable for a woman, as long as she stayed behind the scenes and did not try to publicly assert her thoughts. For the same reasons people didn't think women were fit to be public leaders or prominent voices in politics, many people considered women too emotional to work in broadcasting. The thought of hearing a woman's voice broadcasted across the airwaves was disconcerting to some.

Radio was the first medium to bring the broadcasted human voice into the homes of listeners nationwide. After years of research and experimentation on wireless telegraphy by various scientists, in 1906 Dr. Lee De Forest developed the "Audion," an oscillating vacuum tube that made it possible to transmit the human voice instead of telegraphic codes (MacDonald, 1979). This invention made it possible to conduct conversations similar to those had on the telephone through a wireless transmitter, which is why radio was originally referred to as "the wireless telephone" (MacDonald, 1979). The onset of World War I delayed the development of a standardized radio industry, as the United States government confiscated all wireless equipment during wartime (MacDonald, 1979).

Commercial radio programming was born at a small station, KDKA in East Pittsburgh, Pennsylvania on November 2, 1920. KDKA hosted the first scheduled, non-experimental, public

program – an evening broadcast of the results of the presidential election between candidates Warren G. Harding and James M. Cox (MacDonald, 1979). Radio quickly garnered public and commercial interest in broadcasting as the public realized messages could spread much faster over the airwaves than through newspapers (Sivulka, 2009). People began buying receivers for their homes and regularly tuning-in to their favorite programs (MacDonald, 1979). The success of radio programming was a result of the technological advancements in producing radio and the growing commercial interest in the medium. Station programmers and directors focused on developing the types of shows and on-air personalities that would retain listeners, solidifying radio as an electrical communicator of news and important information.

Early Debates on the Suitability of Females Voices On-air

In the first few years of radio broadcasting, females were generally welcomed into the realm of radio broadcasting. Jobs for women were versatile, with many women working in engineering, programming and on-air. Eunice Randall, one of the first female announcers in the United States, started out as a “drafts lady” for AMRAD (The American Radio and Research Corporation), creating technical sketches of radio receivers. By day, she worked with other employees to produce and repair the receivers and at night, she was able to run test broadcasts over AMRAD’s experimental station, 1XE. By 1919, Randall’s experiments on 1XE and passion for amateur radio spiraled into a full-time radio job, making her the first woman radio announcer in Massachusetts (Halper, 2008). Her on-air presence was generally well received, with several newspapers praising her voice and diction (Sterling, 2011). While most programs on the station were voluntary and unpaid, Randall was one of a few announcers who were able to bring in some money. A children’s magazine sponsored Randall to read bedtime stories at night to help parents

put their children to sleep. Her role as a “story lady” was considered appropriate for a woman on the radio (Halper, 2001).

Another female radio pioneer, Bertha Brainard turned a voluntary position on-air into a career. The experienced theater critic signed up to do a program on theater reviews called “Broadway Broadcasting” at WJZ in Newark, New Jersey. As the first woman on-air at WJZ, Brainard gradually gained respect from others at the station, except from her boss, program manager Charles Popenoe. He adamantly disapproved of female announcers, claiming women lacked the proper skills for broadcast. Brainard remained gracious in the face of his disapproval and criticism. When NBC took over WJZ in 1926, her new bosses were so impressed with her competence they promoted her to program manager for the NBC Radio Network (Halper, 1999).

By 1924, nearly every major city in the United States had acquired their own professional radio station (MacDonald, 1979). With the shift in radio from a dominantly amateur medium to a professional platform for the dissemination of information, critics were more willing to step forward with complaints. Despite the number of respected female announcers who graced the airwaves, the voices of women on the radio did not sit well with everyone. It was not long before women who took jobs in radio were told they should stick to being secretaries or consider playing instruments for miscellaneous radio segments (MacDonald, 1979). They were not encouraged to speak on the air. Those who believed radio was a man’s industry were highly critical of women announcers. If a woman was going to be heard in a broadcast, she was expected to be hosting a program on cooking and maintaining a home. Many people were not used to hearing female voices in a public position of authority or leadership. Women were cautious about the way they presented themselves on-air, based on their own perceptions of what the radio industry expected of them. Early radio shows hosted by women focused on

entertainment rather than news or politics. Listeners likely found it less intimidating to hear female voices discussing these lighter topics (Halper, 2008).

Published columnist and critic Jennie Irene Mix was one of the first people to publicly address the debate about female voices on-air. Her August 1924 column of *The Listener's Point of View* entitled "Are Women Undesirable Over the Radio?" opened a discussion on the suitability of women's voices for radio transmission. After a reader wrote in to the magazine to denounce female voices on-air, Mix decided to examine the claim that the voice of a woman is "displeasing" and "undesirable" (Mix, August 1924, p. 332). Intrigued by the reader's assertion that the public was uninterested in listening to female voices, Mix presented examples of two stations, WOR of Newark, New Jersey and WGY of Schenectady, New York that often featured women speakers. If the public adamantly objected to the presence of female voices on the radio, Mix believed these stations would have pulled women off the air. Mix did concede many women sounded "patronizing" and overly "precise" when their voices were reproduced on-air, a statement very much in line with general perceptions about the amplification of female voices at the time (Mix, August 1924, p. 332).

In the following month's edition of the column, Mix continued the discussion, interviewing various station managers and collecting their thoughts on the topic, "For and Against The Woman Radio Speaker." While many station managers dismissed the idea of differing broadcast capabilities between females and males, others openly critiqued the female voice, calling it "monotonous," "overly emotional," "lacking personality," or full of "too much personality" (Halper, 2001a, p. 40). Martin P. Rice, manager of broadcasting at WGY felt it unfair to condemn all female voices as unfit for radio broadcasting:

Women, as a class, have not had opportunities to adapt their voices to varying audiences and auditoriums. An insistent high-pitched voice may readily develop unpleasant characteristics, but this is just as true when she addresses a large audience by radio (Mix, September 1924, p. 392).

J.M. Barnett, director of WOR in Newark was wary of letting women announce on the radio:

I have absolutely nothing against a woman's announcing, but really do believe that unless a woman has the qualifications known as 'showman's instinct,' it really does become monotonous. As a general thing, a woman's voice is considerably higher pitched than a man's voice and sometimes becomes distorted (Mix, September 1924, p. 393).

M. A. Rigg, manager of station WGR at Buffalo, stated opinions on announcing voices are "concerned chiefly with the individual and not with sex" (Mix, September 1924, p. 394). By the end of her series on the suitability of female voices for radio, Mix drew her own conclusions on the topic: "Women as microphone entertainers have come to stay, although they are not at present considered the equal of men in this capacity chiefly because of the defects in their voice" (Mix, September 1924, p. 394). Little did Mix know that her observations about attitudes towards female radio hosts would remain true for the next 100 years.

When Mix passed away in April 1925, her column was taken over by colleague John Wallace, who briefly resurrected the debate on female announcers. In 1926, Wallace interviewed Charles Popenoe of WJZ, who claimed "men are naturally better fitted for the average assignment of the broadcast announcer" (Wallace, 1926, p. 45). Popenoe's main piece of evidence for this assertion was a 1926 WJZ survey that seemed to indicate listeners disliked women announcers. By modern market research standards, the survey was not conducted in a credible manner. The survey was distributed to 10,000 "active listeners," who had had previously written to the station to express their likes and dislikes about the programming. These selected participants paid more attention to radio than the average listener and held strong opinions about how broadcasts should sound. Today, the credibility of the data collected would be diminished

because not everyone who actively listened to the station had an opportunity to express their opinions.

In his interview, Popenoe offered his own opinions on why the female announcer's voice would be unpleasant to listeners:

Perhaps the best reason suggested for the unpopularity of the woman's voice over the radio is that it usually has too much personality. A voice that is highly individual and full of character is aggravating to the audience that cannot see the face and expression which go with the voice. We resent a voice that is too intimate on short acquaintance, and the woman announcer has difficulty in repressing her enthusiasm and in maintaining the necessary reserve and objectivity. The bane of the radio voice is a certain patronizing quality which gives the effect of a teacher talking to children or of Columbus instructing the Indians. It is difficult for women to avoid the patronizing note in their effort to speak effectively over the radio (Wallace, 1926, p. 45).

Unfortunately for women in radio, Popenoe's views and opinions were not uncommon among radio executives.

In the 1920s, the range of voices that transmitted well on-air was limited by primitive technology. Early electrical reproduction of voice was imperfect and soprano voices presented early radio engineers with difficult technical problems. Early sound apparatuses were able to record up to 4,300 cycles, which worked well with deeper male voices but not very well with women's voices. Voices with a higher pitch were often distorted when converting soundwaves to signals (Lacey, 2013). In 1928, Dr. J.C. Steinberg of Bell Laboratories told *Scientific American*:

The speech characteristics of women when changed to electrical impulses, do not blend with the electrical characteristics of our present day radio equipment... the demand of the radio public for radio equipment to meet their aural fancy has led to design of equipment that impairs the reproduction of a soprano's voice (Rider, 1928, 334).

The first audio-technology was designed by male inventors to record the male voice. The equipment designers likely did not foresee a time when a female voice would be broadcasted on-air and thus, the equipment was not tested to see if female voices were able to be reproduced clearly. This technical limitation turned into a commonly used excuse for why female voices were unfit for broadcasting. Poor transmission was blamed on the woman and her voice, rather than on the equipment being used. Critics claimed female voices were “unmodulated” and too harsh for radio commentary (Ehrick, 2010, p. 75). Even after the resolution of the reproduction of women's voices by radio equipment in the 1930s, a general dislike for women’s voices on-air continued to be blamed on technical deficiencies.

The 1930s and Women’s Shows

The start of the new decade marked a more sophisticated era of radio commercialism and a popular trend towards “radio for women” in retail and programming strategies (McKay in Kramarae 1988). To sell products, ad agencies began writing and packaging complete programs and series to be aired on the radio (MacDonald, 1979). In-house network and agency data indicated daytime audiences were comprised of 70% women (Sterling, 2011). Advertisers saw this as an opportunity to cater programming to female consumers (Halper, 2008). A successful radio program created a strong bond between listeners, on-air hosts and sponsors (Sivulka, 2009). To appeal to the female market, station programmers shifted schedules and filled daytime slots with shows produced and hosted by women. Station managers and advertisers realized they could channel the female voice to sell products and services to female audiences. These shows generally covered topics assumed to be of interest to the average housewife — childrearing, cooking, and maintaining the home — and were packed with advertisements aimed at selling products to female listeners. The shows’ female hosts were viewed as role models for their

female audiences, offering free advice and a sense of companionship to women who were home alone (Sterling, 2011). Program managers cared less about the subject of these “women’s shows,” treating the programs as light listening that did not require substantial content.

Networks also designed a new entertainment format to entice housewives to listen in during morning and afternoon hours, the soap opera. These daily serials were named after the soap manufacturers who originally sponsored the programming. Female writers were hired to write material and social commentary that specifically targeted the concerns and interests of other women (MacDonald, 1979). With this format, broadcasters achieved high ratings and advertisers captured the ears of homemakers by integrating subtle product placements into the dramas. The characterization of female voices in early soap operas served to reinforce stereotypes about housewives to the benefit of advertisers (Sivulka, 2009). With female leads whose lives spoke to the commonness of the American experience, these programs made it easy for female listeners to identify with the fictional characters. By 1940, the focus of daytime serials expanded to deal with contemporary values and changes in American society. Many network soap operas began featuring career woman in prominent roles such as lawyers, doctors, business owners and reporters. The voices of woman heard on air were beginning to portray authoritative female characters who were leaders in the public sphere (MacDonald, 1979).

While more positions were opening for women on the air, their voices were often limited to “acceptable arenas” and programs designed to primarily influence other women. Radio critics did not have many complaints to make about women’s shows or soap operas. Women announcers were universally viewed as suitable to discuss “women’s issues” on-air and to voice entertainment programs with a primarily female audience (Halper, 2008). Discussions of hard news and scholarly topics were reserved for nighttime programming when it was assumed men

would be home from work and the radio audience would be more “masculine” (Sterling 2011). While female announcers had formerly been included in nighttime broadcasts, the trend towards midday women’s shows created a distinct separation in daytime and nighttime scheduling by gender. The standardization of the broadcast schedule excluded female announcers from nighttime programming and marginalized them into the “daytime ghetto” of women’s programs (Sterling, 2011; Hilmes, 1997). By limiting how and when female voices were able to be heard on-air, no one had to worry about threats to the gendered soundscape (Suisman & Strasser, 2010). Scholar Anne McKay asserts "that when women used the new technology in support of the goals and activities of established institutions, they were applauded at best or ignored at worst. When they attempted to use it in ways that would lead to change in the traditional order and in women's customary roles, their right to use it at all was challenged" (McKay in Kramarae, 1988, p. 188). While it was appropriate for women speakers to discuss subjects pertaining to women, a venture into a position of widespread authority as an announcer or anchor could lead to public backlash. In the eyes of many, female voices did not carry enough authority to address the entire nation.

The Mid-1930 to 1940s: Women in the Workforce and The Daytime Takeover

The 1940’s saw a record number of women join the workforce (Hartmann, 1982). American involvement in World War II is credited with stimulating this increase due to the number of available positions vacated by drafted men and the widespread propaganda used to encourage women to join the labor force during the war. A federal agency, the War Manpower Commission was tasked with recruiting women into employment necessary to support the war effort. The commission had to create messaging to overcome men’s attitude towards women in the work force and to change women’s perceptions about their roles outside of the home (War

Manpower Commission, 1943). In their husbands' absences, wives had fewer domestic responsibilities to tend to in the home and an increased investment in earning wages to support themselves and their families. Along with increased education for women and strong sentiments of American patriotism, the need for women to assume roles previously held by men diversified the face of the workforce. Unfortunately, American society did not reach the amount of fundamental attitude changes in the public needed to sustain this transformation. While women were welcomed into the workforce, they were not seen as permanent participants in the public sphere (Goldin, 1989).

The messaging used in propaganda material from World War II highlights how working women were largely viewed as a temporary fix for wartime vacancies. *Womanpower*, an opinion study document used by Labor Mobilization and Utilization to garner public support for women in the workforce, states:

Womanpower is a headache because... it involves a complete dislocation of normal routine. Consequently, most women neither understand it nor like it... men even less. Therefore, it is essential to establish the fact that not only is it necessary for women to work, but it is an entirely normal procedure under a wartime economy, and to convince men as well as women that the more women at work, the sooner we'll win (War Manpower Commission, 1943, p. 1-4).

Many of the jobs offered to women during the war were taken away from them once men returned home. If women had not already been present in an industry before the war, they were expected to retreat and allow returning soldiers to resume their positions. Even though women had proven themselves capable and useful members of the workforce, they were still seen as placeholders filling jobs that belonged to men. Fortunately for women working the radio, their crucial role as members of the industry was solidified long before the onset of war.

By the mid-1930s, radio sought to establish a national reputation by recruiting recognized personalities to voice programs and appeal to the listening audience. With prior success in musical and news programming throughout the 1920s, the medium began developing as a source of entertainment for the American public, experiencing its greatest acceptance as comedians inundated broadcasting. Early comedies established patterns and practices that would endure in radio programming for decades, including the use of a comic foil to elicit a laugh out of listeners. Programmers realized it was difficult to capture mass audiences with a monologue delivered by a single comedian. Comic foils, often called “stooges” were brought on to accompany the main personalities. In some instances, stooges served as the butts of the comedians’ jokes, but they also added variety to the programs, delivering punchlines and setting the stage for the main star.

Many radio comedians used their wives as their on-air sidekicks – Irene Noblette for Tim Ryan, Portland Hoffa for Fred Allen and Mary Livingston for Jack Benny (MacDonald, 1979). Female stooges often found themselves embodying stereotypes common in female characters: ditsy, empty-headed and scatterbrained. Scholar J. Fred MacDonald suggests “the fictional stupidity of Gracie Allen added charm and understanding to the low-key sobriety of George Burn’s character” (MacDonald, 1979, p. 121). Radio situation comedies became popular in the 1940s. In this format, more women began to be featured as central characters though they were still relegated to stereotypical roles. Marie Wilson played dizzy blond secretary Irma Petersen on *My Friend Irma*. Eva Arden portrayed the role of Connie Brooks, a woman obsessed with finding a husband on *Our Miss Brooks*. An interesting exception to the typical characterization of females on sitcoms was Maisie Revere of *The Adventures of Maisie*, played by Ann Sothern. This radio series presented a lead female character who was liberated, assertive and independent (MacDonald, 1979).

Along with entertainment programs such as serial dramas and soap operas, talk shows became a key feature of female daytime shows. Programs began to move away from domestic topics and transition to interviews and news coverage. One of the most famous innovators of this new format was Mary Margaret McBride, who pioneered a unique, unscripted interviewing style in her broadcasts. With experience in journalism and magazine writing, McBride's interviewing skills allowed her to successfully craft ad-lib commentary shows on NBC and CBS, attracting millions of regular listeners (Sterling, 2011). A variety of "breakfast shows" soon populated the airwaves, giving female announcers a platform to report on the news. Female reporters and journalists were limited in their ability to commentate on the news in print journalism. On the radio, their shows were often framed as "news for women." Kathryn Cravens became one of the first female radio commentators with the launch of her program, "News Through A Woman's Eyes." Throughout her career, Cravens covered hard news stories from a women's point of view on a variety of topics including war relief, education systems and pacifism (Godfrey & Leigh, 1998). Her "low, warm voice" helped her win over her audience (Godfrey & Leigh, 1998, p. 104).

Pauline Frederick is often referred to as "the first female network news analyst and diplomatic correspondent in American radio" (Godfrey & Leigh, 1998, p. 170). Frederick conducted her first on-air interview for NBC in 1939. She interviewed the wife of the Czechoslovakian minister just after Hitler invaded the nation. Frederick continued working part-time for NBC doing occasional on-air interviews. She later joined the news staff at ABC, becoming the first woman to cover "hard" political news for the network. Frederick appeared 5 days a week on the radio to cover her beat on the United Nations. She returned to NBC in the

1950's to host a 15-minute national and world events program, *Pauline Frederick's Reporting* and later commented on international affairs for NPR (Sterling, 2011).

The 1950s: Women Announcers Are Here To Stay

By the late fifties, many radio programmers were convinced females listeners prefer to hear male voices on the air. Female homemaker hosts who were once used to target middle class housewives were swiftly replaced by disk jockeys, initiating a shift away from programs that solely targeted female audiences. This change in programming pushed many women announcers off the air (Keith, 2000). Fortunately, some radio revolutionaries were willing to go against the grain, believing in the power and success of female voices on the radio.

Edythe Meserand was a key advocate for women in radio in the 1950s. After working for a few years in the press and promotions department at WGBS, the radio station of the Hearst Organization, Meserand earned her first on-air job as the station's "Musical Clock Girl." She popped on-air every hour on the hour to give the time of day. While at Hearst, she also produced several musical, dramatic and talk show programs including a daily women's news segment. Meserand later joined WOR-New York, the flagship station of the Mutual Broadcasting System (Early Women in Broadcasting, 2015). This accomplished woman is credited with many broadcasting "firsts," including creating the first radio documentary and founding the first modern radio newsroom (Eggleston, 1978). Her most notable achievement was serving as the first president of American Women in Radio and Television (AWRT). This organization was founded in 1950, following the National Association of Broadcasters' (NAB) decision to disband its women's division. A group of female members of the NAB feared female voices in the radio industry would go unheard without a division specifically committed to addressing the concerns of women. For over 60 years, AWRT has served as an advocate for women working in

broadcasting by providing members with networking opportunities, job information and professional development workshops. AWRT honors the work of Meserand by annually selecting a recipient for the "Edythe J. Meserand Distinguished Broadcaster Award" (Early Women in Broadcasting, 2015).

While the 1950's is not often recognized as an important time period for women's liberation, the decade did establish some building blocks for female advancement in the radio industry, including the introduction of stations featuring all-female announcing staffs. WHER, the first all-female radio station went on the air in Memphis in 1955. After selling Elvis Presley's Sun Studio contract, record producer Sam Phillips had the idea to launch a new radio format that highlighted women as more than on-air novelties and sidekicks to male co-hosts. Phillips did not tell any of the announcers he hired about his plan to construct an all-female announcing staff. Each woman believed she would be the only woman on air, similar to the makeup of most announcing staffs at other stations. Phillips hired a few experienced female deejays, but most of the women selected for WHER had little to no experience in radio broadcasting. Some were actresses, telephone operators or young mothers in need of a job. This diversity in experiences and backgrounds brought a variety of perspectives to WHER (Kitchen Sisters, Podcast).

With an all-female announcing staff known as "jockettes", the WHER team became broadcasting pioneers. All programming was run professionally with news on the hour. In the first few years, the content of the shows was lighter and geared towards women with segments on fashion and homekeeping. Programming became increasingly hard news-oriented in the sixties, with reporting from local protests and interviews with resident celebrities. Many were

still hesitant to take the station seriously. As one WHER deejay told the Kitchen Sisters¹ in an interview for the episode, WHER: 1000 Beautiful Watts: “We were not known to be sharp broadcasters, we were lady disc jockeys.” Reluctant as the public may have been, people soon turned to WHER for informative interviews and reports during times of protest and social upheaval. While the station later transitioned to a format in the mid 70’s, the revolutionary all-female format proved to be a success (The Kitchen Sisters & Radiotopia, 2015).

The 1960s and Sexpot Radio

The mid-sixties christened a new radio format that brought female voices back on air in full force: “sexpot radio.” Instead of marketing women’s voices to a predominantly female listenership as had been done in the past, programmers hoped to use female announcers to attract the attention of a male audience. On sexpot radio, female announcers were meant to be objects of male desire. They deepened their voices for broadcasts, speaking in sultry, bedroom voices to appeal to listeners’ sexual fantasies. “In some respects, the short-lived format was revolutionary. Women had found their way back on the air. But in another way, it promoted an image of the sexy-sounding female that would linger into the nineties” (Johnson, as told to Keith, 2000). How accepted were female voices on-air if women were mainly asked to portray gender-specific personas?

America experienced a major shift in popular culture and views on sexuality in the sixties. Women were still expected to get married, have children and preserve the ideals of the nuclear family, but it was becoming more acceptable for females to be sexually charged before settling down. Early rock n’ roll music had captured the hearts of baby boomer teenagers in the

¹ The Kitchen Sisters are Davia Nelson and Nikki Silva, two NPR producers. The Kitchen Sisters have produced over 200 stories, chronicling parts of history and interviewing subjects who have shaped the cultural landscape.

late 1950's, with lyrics and messages that conflated love and sex. Music challenged conventional values of females sexuality and made women hyperaware of their public appearances. From Elvis' gyrating hips to the women' movement for sexual liberation, sex became a discussion topic with public visibility. Many women abandoned their struggle to fit the stereotypical, modest housewife role and started to embrace their sexuality. Unfortunately, these feminist acts of rebellion came at a price. As idolizations of women's bodies became central to pop culture, the objectification and exploitation of female sexuality grew. Female celebrities were viewed as the personification of femininity and sex appeal – men wanted to be with them and women wanted to be like them (Hatton & Trautner, 2013).

This fixation on female sexuality carried over into male fantasies regarding the disembodied female voices on the radio. “Women as on-air deejays were rare and were treated as kind of a gimmick, usually being relegated to late-night and a sexy announcing style” (Larry Miller, as told to Keith, 2000). AM radio and Top 40 stations were still resistant to putting female announcers on the air, but album rock formats on FM stations began to search for “chick deejays” (Halper, 2012). In 1966, New York's WNEW launched a new FM station with the intention of hiring an all-female air staff. According to the station, the unique format was “designed to appeal to a wide segment of adult listeners with contemporary music, news... and special features (WNEW FM , 1966). The women chosen to pioneer this radio programming experiment included Margaret Draper, Ann Clements, Arlene Kieta and Alison Steele. In an interview with The New York Times in 1971, Steele said: “They auditioned 800 girls to find four, and I was one of them” (In the World of Radio, 1971). While the venture lasted little more than a year, WNEW-FM retained Steele as an on-air DJ when the station transitioned to a

progressive rock format in 1967. Steele was placed in the overnight “graveyard shift” and developed a new on-air personality as “The Nightbird”.

Steele’s distinct soft and sultry voice garnered her over 78,000 nightly listeners, most of whom were males between the ages of 18-34 (*In the World of Radio, She's a Rare Bird*). As “The Nightbird,” Steele’s voice embodied the sexual fantasies of her male listeners. Without knowing what she looked like in person, listeners were able to envision Steele’s appearance to their personal liking. They fell for her voice and the idea of a sexy, late-night radio host. While many female deejays like Steele found great success working in rock radio, they were ultimately being pigeonholed into very specific roles in the industry. “There seemed to be some stereotypical thinking that said “chicks” should sound sexy or do late-night shifts only.” (Donna Halper, as told to Keith, 2000). While there were many female hosts on rock radio, women were not as widely welcomed on the format as it may have seemed.

While sexpot radio branded female announcers with sexualized personas, black women worked to break down gender barriers in the industry, particularly for women of color. Throughout the 1930s and 1940s, black women in mainstream radio programs were mainly portrayed in stereotypical roles as domestics. They were rarely highlighted as main characters in dramas or featured as voices of authority in newscasts. By the 1950s into the 1960s, more women of color were offered the opportunity to host radio programs. Hattie Leeper, known on-air as “Chattie Hattie”, was the first female African-American radio broadcaster in Charlotte, North Carolina. She remembers the discomfort of her male colleagues when she was first hired at WGIV-AM, the only black radio station in the city at the time. “There were mixed emotions there, me being the only female. There were some die-hard men there that thought, ‘Well, you know females should be home having babies, or in the kitchen cooking. This is not an industry

for female” (Leeper, in Nelson-Strauss & Vanden Dries, n.d.). In the face of backlash from ale colleagues, New York City's first female deejay in prime time radio, Vy Higginsen found support from fellow women during her time with WBLS-FM.

Since there hadn't been any women, I was afraid that the woman's reaction might not be positive hearing a woman on the air. But, I was so wrong about that. The women were so supportive. And the sisters were so proud that it gave me courage (Higginsen, Nelson-Strauss & Vanden Dries, n.d.).

Higginsen set the stage for other women in her market to find the confidence they needed to go after on-air positions. In response to the climate women were facing at the time, feminist Betty Friedan released her first book, "The Feminine Mystique" in 1963, igniting the contemporary women's movement and forever altering the social fabric of the United States. Friedan stressed the importance of career-oriented independence for women and helped found the National Organization for Women to help win political victories for feminism.

The 1970's: Equality in the workplace and women on NPR

By the seventies, the country was in the heat of the resurgence of Second Wave Feminism. Women across America demanded access to male-dominated industries and professions. They were earning degrees in record numbers and negotiating for higher-paying jobs once reserved for men. Women were unwilling to be pushed out of the workforce and relegated to the domestic sphere as they had been when men returned home from World War II. They wanted to ensure they would be treated as equals in the workplace. The National Organization for Women (NOW) was founded in 1966 following the failure of the Equal Employment Opportunity Commission to enforce Title VII of the Civil Rights Act of 1964 and end sex discrimination in employment. Women's rights advocates were afraid these legal changes would not be enforced and upheld without a pressure group. They created NOW to

mobilize women to put pressure on their employers and on the government to promote full equality in the workplace.

NOW and other women's groups began to put pressure on radio stations to become equal opportunity employers and allow for female and minority participation in broadcasting. "Even into the seventies, program directors were telling a woman job candidate that the station did not want women on the air" (Halper, as told to Keith, 2000). In January 1971, NOW petitioned the Federal Communications Commission (FCC) to include women in affirmative action programs for radio and television stations as a stipulation of approval for broadcast license renewals (The Feminist Chronicles, 2014). The FCC decided to investigate whether stations were participating in discriminatory hiring and promotions processes. The organization took note of how few women were employed in non-stereotypical roles in radio and decided to require stations to seek out women for jobs other than secretaries and women's show hosts. The adoption of these new policies led to an influx of females as part time, overnight and weekend announcers (Sterling, 2011). Unfortunately, women were still seldom allowed to host top morning programs. They were more often hired as sidekicks to laugh at the jokes made by their male co-hosts (Halper, 2012).

Important changes did happen for women in radio who were working as reporters and news anchors. In the United States, public radio was built on the voices of women. From its beginnings, National Public Radio (NPR) gave women the opportunity to write, announce and narrate news and cultural programming. Established as the result of the Congressional passage of the Public Broadcasting Act of 1967, NPR was incorporated by 90 charter stations to deliver national news programming in 1970. Donald Quayle was hired as the organization's first president and under his leadership, NPR aired its first broadcast on April 20, 1971. A month

later, NPR launched its afternoon drive-time news program, *All Things Considered*, providing listeners with a mix of the day's hard news, feature stories and cultural reviews. In the words of NPR's first director of programming, Bill Siemering, NPR was founded to represent "many voices, many dialects." Since its debut 47 years ago, *All Things Considered* has consistently featured female hosts and anchors. More than half of the program's weekday hosts have been women (History, n.d.). One of the most notable weekday hosts of *All Things Considered*, Susan Stamberg, was the first woman to anchor a national nightly news program. As a host of *All Things Considered* from 1972 to 1986, Stamberg helped to define the sound of public radio.

With a voice considered unprecedented for a national anchor, Stamberg challenged the persistent discriminatory practices against females in authoritative roles on network radio. In an interview with Laura Hambleton of the Washington Post, Stamberg acknowledged a time when she would manipulate her voice to sound more like her male colleagues. "I thought that's what you do. You speak authoritatively when you anchor the news; you lower your voice" (Hambleton, 2013). Stamberg eventually returned to an announcing style which utilized the unique aspects of her voice, curating a sound many have come to associate with NPR. Jack Mitchell, *All Things Considered*'s first producer, disclosed that his selection of Stamberg as a host for *All Things Considered* was very controversial among station managers nationwide.

I chose to use two hosts instead of one and made one of the two a woman, Susan Stamberg. I heard from Quayle almost as soon as I announced my choice. Quayle first protested that we could not afford two hosts and then that co-hosting was not a good use of Stamberg's talents. I assumed that his objections reflected the prejudices of the male buddies with whom he had surrounded himself as well as of the traditionalists who managed most public radio stations. My nomination of Susan Stamberg came at a time when women did not anchor news programs. In addition, Stamberg had a pronounced New York accent, "too New York," said at least one Midwest station manager, a comment I interpreted to mean "too Jewish." My choice, however, delighted Siemering. After all, he had written that NPR would speak with many voices, many accents, many regions. Surely, a female who sounded like she came from where she did- the Bronx by

way of Barnard College – fit his philosophy exactly, even if it did prove a bit off-putting in public radio’s Midwest heartland... (Mitchell, 2005, p. 69).

Evidently, Mitchell’s choice to follow his gut was a good decision. Samberg’s voice defined a generation of public radio in America.

The concept of producing radio programming with an all-female announcing staff was revisited briefly in the seventies. Robert Herpe purchased a Top 40 station, WCDQ-AM in 1978 with the intention of adopting a format specifically targeting women (Sterling, 2011). He applied for a change of the station’s call letters to WOMN, hired an entirely female staff and asked his broadcasters to identify the station on-air as "WOMAN Radio". Herpe hoped WOMN would become a platform to disseminate news coverage from a woman’s point of view and to strengthen communication between men and women. While WOMN gained national attention with features in *Vogue*, *Ms.* and *Business Week*, the new format only lasted a year as it was unable to garner enough advertiser support. All on-air references to WOMAN radio were dropped by 1980, when the station transitioned to an album-oriented rock format (Riding the Airwaves).

The 1980s- 2000s: Shock jocks, jockettes, and nighttime DJs

The early eighties marked a mass listener migration from AM music formats to the high fidelity sound of FM radio. As ratings slumped, many AM stations in large cities throughout the country made the switch to talk radio formats. Deejays on talk radio were more intimate on-air, providing more personal commentary on culture and politics. Talk radio gave rise to “shock jocks,” deejays who are notorious for pushing the limits of on-air decency regulations with numerous sexual innuendos and taboo humor. These shock jocks were not limited to the AM band. Political shock jocks like Rush Limbaugh populated AM radio, while comedic shock jocks

like Howard Stern made their name on FM radio. Shock radio garnered the attention of audience's nationwide because it was interactive. Listeners from a predominantly male audience could call in with their opinions, discuss with the deejays and feel that their voices were being validated (Douglas, 1999). Many shock jocks use crude stereotypes of women in their routines, ranging from overt sexualization of the female body to degrading remarks on women's personalities. The persistent popularity of deejays and shows that feature such sexist commentary indicates there is a listening audience that doesn't object to women being insulted.

Station programmers sought female commentators to add their perspectives to such shows and to balance out male shock jocks. (Sterling, 2011). Many women began to take on roles as the sidekicks to their male counterparts. In 1981, Howard Stern's morning show sought an on-air newscaster to riff with him on current events. Robin Quivers, who had previously held newscasting positions in Harrisburg and Baltimore, was hired for the job. In 1992, Los Angeles Times staff writer Claudia Puig described Quivers' role in Stern's broadcasts: "She delivers "newscasts" that provide the essential jumping-off points for Stern's provocative comments and often politically incorrect, sometimes brutally honest opinions about celebrities, public figures, criminals and the current state of society" (Puig, 1992). Decades later, Stern and Quivers remain co-hosts on The Howard Stern Show, now exclusive to Sirius XM radio.

Many females deejays who had been sidekicks to shock jocks in the eighties transitioned to hosting their own shows in the nineties, assuming the roles of "shockettes." Shockettes emulate male shock talk on sex, politics and pop culture, but from the female perspective (Stange, Oyster & Sloan, 2011). Considered America's first female shock jock, Karin Begin (known on-air as Darien O'Toole) set her sights on being the next big name in the male-dominated morning radio market. As a host on San Francisco's KSAN, Begin promoted herself

as “The Antidote to Howard Stern” and the “Morning Beyotch.” After her death in 2008, Dwight Walker, former general manager at KSAN described Begin’s legacy. “She was a pioneer for female broadcasters to speak their mind and not hide anything about their lives. She was not a shock jock – just someone who spoke the truth” (Berton, 2008). Other influential female shock deejays include Leslie Gold, New York’s “Radio Chick,” and Wendy Williams, the first African American shockette.

Strong, non-shockette female personalities soared on the airwaves during the late eighties and nineties, including Robin Breedon, one of the highest-ranking deejays in the Washington metro survey area. On her coveted morning drive shift, Breedon made it clear she was committed to her local community by discussing the issues directly affecting its members. *The Washington Post* praised Breedon’ ability to connect with her audience. “Even at 5:30 in the morning, Breedon has enough energy to power a generator. On the air, her voice is breezy, insistent, colloquial” (Rosenfeld, 1991). Nighttime personality Delilah Rene Luke, known on-air as Delilah, is famous for putting a modern spin on the traditional, advice-giving radio formats made popular in the fifties. With a radio career spanning four decades, Bloomberg Businessweek calls Delilah “the queen of FM radio” (Boudway, 2016). In 1983, Delilah was working at a soft adult contemporary station, KLSY in Seattle. She was put on the air at night for a 7 p.m. to midnight shift to play music and intermittently read the time and temperature. Listeners started calling in for the sake of having someone to talk to late at night. Delilah recorded some of these conversations and presented the clips to management to pitch an evening call-in-dedication show.

Her show was an immediate success, with listeners calling in for Delilah’s advice and anecdotes about love, relationships and families. “I wanted to do something that nobody else was

doing. I didn't have a mentor. There were no other women on the radio" (Delilah, as told to Boudway, 2016). After bouncing around to various stations across the country, Delilah began syndicating her show, *Delilah After Dark* in 1996. The show's title has since been shortened to *Delilah*. Her nightly broadcast is carried on 171 radio stations in North America and IHeartMedia streams the show online. According to the Radio Hall of Fame, Delilah is currently the most-listened-to-woman on U.S. radio. People are drawn to Delilah's warm, soothing and "buttery" voice (Boudway, 2016). "And at the end of the day. I'm their companion. I'm there to say, you know what? You're going to make it through this (Delilah, as told to Greene, 2016)." Her raw vulnerability and sharing of personal stories have made her a trusted voice in many households across the country.

Conclusion

Women have been present and active in the radio industry for over 100 years, but most histories on radio fail to adequately include women in this narrative. Conducting a historical analysis on women in American radio allowed for the creation of a mouthpiece for their stories and their contributions. In the 1920s, following the emergence of first wave feminism, it was a woman who first shined a light on the discussion surrounding the suitability of female voices for air and brought the debate to the forefront of mass media. Throughout the 1930s and 1940s, women proved they had more to offer the radio industry than just playing stooges to their male counterparts and selling products to housewives. They had the capabilities to become well-respected radio commentators and news correspondents during the World War II era. The 1950s, a decade not generally associated with the advancement of women, became an experimental time for women in radio. Station managers and programmers toyed with the concept of all-female announcing staffs, believing in the power of the female voice.

By the 1960s, sexpot radio was in high demand due to the surge in the sexualization of women by the media. Fortunately, the decade was also marked by strides for women of color in radio and by the onset of second-wave feminism. In the 1970s, radio stations become equal opportunity employers, allowing for more female and minority participation in broadcasting. NPR gave female voices, and other unconventional voices, a prominent space to engage with and inform the public. Throughout the 1980s, 1990s and to the early 2000s, women moved from their roles as sidekicks in talk radio into more public roles as hosts themselves. Women's role in American radio has been nothing short of dynamic. It's about time their stories and achievements are recognized and remembered in their entirety.

Chapter 3: Where Are We Now? The Modern Culture of Policing Female Voices

This historical and cultural examination of female voices in radio may cause some to wonder, “Where are we now?” and “How much progress has been made?” The answers to these questions are complex. Despite the hardships female DJs have faced in the industry, radio has undergone significant cultural shifts allowing for the success of many women in the past few decades. Every year, *Talkers Magazine*, a trade publication focusing on talk radio in the United States, compiles a list of the most-listened-to radio talk shows in the United States. This list is based largely on Nielsen data regarding weekly cumulative listenership. In 2018, five out of the top twenty-two most-listened-to radio shows featured female hosts. These programs include NPR’s *All Things Considered* hosted by Audie Cornish, Mary Louise Kelly, Ari Shapiro and Ailsa Chang Delilah, which was ranked as the #1 most listened to radio show, *Delilah, Fresh Air* hosted by Terry Gross, *The Kim Komando Show*, and *The Lia Show* hosted by Lia Knight (Talkers Magazine, 2018). While these rankings are indicative of huge victories for women in radio, they do not reveal that all sexism and discrimination have erased from the industry. As is true of many aspects of public life, further progress towards equal treatment for women is often by stunted the refusal of many to recognize there is still more work to be done.

The practice of policing female voices remains strong. In some ways, criticism of the female voice is less blatant than it was fifty years ago; people are less likely to outright say they find female voices specifically unsuitable for the air. Instead, people have come up with new justifications for why certain voices are unfit for air, wielding terms such as upspeak and vocal fry against women. These critiques are just as deliberate and intentional as ever: make women aware they do not belong on the radio.

For years, women were told their voices were too high pitched for radio (see Appendix 1). Today, women are told they try too hard to pitch their voices lower. Vocal fry, or glottalization, is characterized by a low, faltering vibration during speech, produced by a slow quivering of the vocal cords. This occurs when speakers lessen their vocal pitch, reaching for the lowest register they can produce. Since the 1960s, vocal fry has been documented as the lowest of the three main vocal registers, including falsetto and modal – the normal speaking register. Vocal fry is most apparent at the ends of sentences or phrases. While these low, creaky vibrations are often associated with young female speakers, vocal fry is not limited to one gender. Both male and female voices can exhibit elements of vocal fry in normal speech, but vocal fry is perceived more negatively among women than among men (Anderson, Klofstad, Mayew, & Venkatachalam, 2014). As *Time* puts it, vocal fry is the “the vibrating, world-weary tone heard throughout popular culture” (Rhodan, 2014).

Upspeak, also known as rising inflection or high rising intonation, is another vocal pattern common among young people and women. Ladd (1996) characterizes upspeak as declarative sentence clauses marked by a high pitch which rises in frequency until the end of the sentence, where falling-pitch is used. In simpler terms, upspeak takes all sentences and makes them sound like questions. This vocal pattern is most often associated with conversational purposes rather than standard professional speech. Many feel upspeak makes a speaker sound unsure of themselves, as though they are wary of making a declarative statement and are seeking reassurance.

There are varying opinions on whether vocal fry and upspeak are a problem that need to be fixed. Some speech pathologists say there are professional standards that influence how people present themselves. Vocal fry and upspeak are distracting and too conversational for

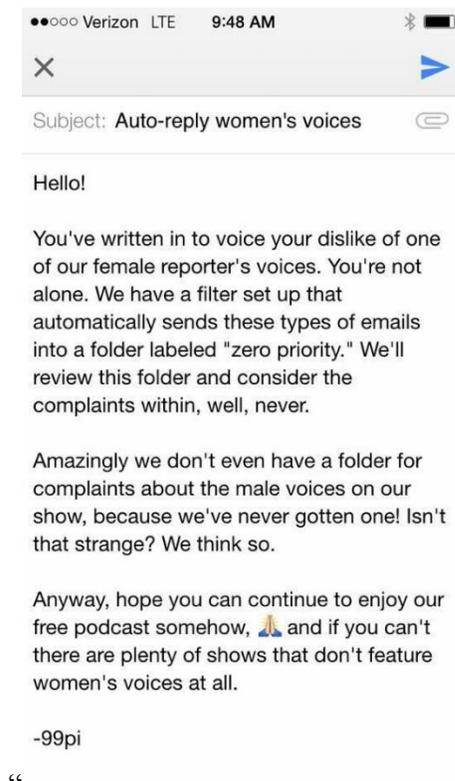
professional settings. They insist these vocal patterns makes people sound less mature or less educated. In the face of this argument, it is important to remember there is a generational difference in people's perceptions and expectations of voices. As culture changes, preferred speech patterns change, especially for women. It is important to accept and understand the wide diversity in the way people speak, from minority dialects and the use of street vernacular to vocal fry and upspeak. The diversity of accents and dialects heard nationally on public radio represent the hard-fought battles and historical struggles necessary for diverse voices to make their way on-air.

Perhaps the issue is less about eradicating certain vocal patterns and abiding by universal standards, and more about changing expectations for what is deemed acceptable. This idea raises the question: who is qualified to dictate the appropriate way for other people to express themselves? Who is the authority on what a woman should sound like and how she should speak? Traditionally, the people calling the shots have not been women themselves, but rather the dominant party – white men. Whatever speech standards the white man deemed suitable at any given time in history dictated the expectations of what all other people should sound like. This is the process through which dominant radio voice culture was shaped and reshaped over the years. By complaining about and policing the way young women talk, critics intentionally and unintentionally reinforce archaic societal expectations for what constitutes acceptable female behavior. These unachievable standards make it so there is no way for women to sound sophisticated and feminine, proper yet sensual. They can never meet the impossible double standards set forth for them.

In 2015, Ira Glass, host of *This American Life (TAL)* addressed the hate mail his female colleagues receive in regard to their voices on air. As a radio host with an unconventional

broadcast voice himself, it only seems fitting Glass would cover this topic. In the episode, “If You Don’t Have Anything Nice to Say, SAY IT IN ALL CAPS,” he discusses comments that have been made about colleagues Chana Joffe-Walt, Miki Meek and Alix Spiegel. “These are some of the angriest emails we ever get. They call these women's voices unbearable, excruciating, annoyingly adolescent, beyond annoying, difficult to pay attention. So severe as to cause discomfort,” (Glass, 2015). The *99% Invisible* podcast, another prominent show featuring a mainly female cast, receives a high level of complaints about women’s voices. Producer Katie Mingle was so fed up with the number of people writing her to complain about her reporters that she crafted a special an auto-reply email to handle the volume of people writing in to grumble.

Figure 1. Katie Mingle’s email



In light of these stories regarding complaints raised about female hosts on prominent radio programs, a small case study was conducted regarding NPR. NPR is known for featuring untraditional voices on-air, raising the question of whether their radio hosts receive voice coaching. Jessica Hansen, the voice of NPR's funding credits, serves as the in-house voice coach at NPR, training new and seasoned hosts on how to best utilize their voice on air. Hansen's voice is very smooth, even and pleasant to the ear. People often criticize NPR hosts for their unconventional voices. With a more conventionally pleasing voice, would Hansen's voice be more well received by listeners? A quick Twitter search for "Jessica Hansen voice" revealed her voice was not free from criticism. People are entitled to their own opinions about the type of voices and the sound of voices they prefer to hear on-air but taking to social media to offer public complaints indicates a severe aversion to a particular voice. People who are indifferent to a voice are less likely to make a post online or take the time to publicly express their views.

Figure 2. Tweet from @DrZirkon



This Twitter user found Hansen's voice to swing and conversational. To this user, Hansen's voice is not professional enough to be used by NPR.

Figure 3. Tweet from @mpmemsoha

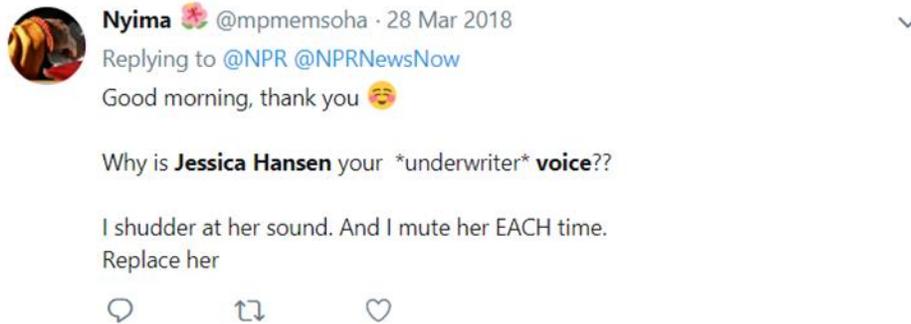


Figure 4. Tweet from @mpmemsoha



Figure 5. Tweet from @mpmemsoha



Another user took to Twitter on three separate occasions between March and May 2018 to usher complaints directly to NPR about Jessica Hansen's voice. After offering dramatic comments begging NPR to remove Hansen from the air, the Twitter user finally offered up one actual

critique in justification of Hansen's removal- "Her inflective voice is sickening." But what makes an inflective voice sickening? How do we objectively designate a voice as "inflective," or sickening for that matter? In most cases, people would agree an inflective voice helps emphasize the important parts of a conversation. This small case study further highlights the range of strange complaints people make about female voices on-air and the incessant nature with which these complaints are made.

Conclusion

No matter how high or low a female radio host's voice is, some listeners will always find a way to object to its sound and complain that the voice is unfit for air. Whether a woman's voice employs upspeak or vocal fry does not really matter. Both vocal patterns will be equally criticized and called out. If women are wrong when they lower their voices and wrong when they raise their voices, is there any right way for a woman to speak? Perhaps the answer is not at all. The complaints lodged against female voices go beyond sexism and ingrained prejudice. Critics claim that if women just learned to talk correctly on-air, their voices wouldn't be a problem, but that's not true. The critics fail to consider that the vague irritation they pin on the voices of female speakers may have more to do with living in a society that trains people to resent women holding positions of power and influence.

It's not socially acceptable for someone to come right out and say they think women should talk less or be less. Instead, they must come up with irrelevant reasons for women to feel self-conscious about their voices – too shrill, too manly, too childish, too sweet, too husky. These critiques are not simply isolated complaints made by one individual to another: they are part of a systemic pattern that devalues women's worth and belittles their need to speak up and be heard. Instead of learning how to listen to and accept women in power, it's much easier to bully women

into shutting up. If every woman who received a complaint about her voice cowered and submitted, progress and change would never occur. Thankfully, many women have caught on to this game, acknowledging that these complaints cannot and will not stop them from moving forward in their careers and endeavors.

Chapter 4: Changing The Narrative

Over the decades, journalists and radio scholars repeatedly asked station managers, program directors, radio announcers and select members of the listening audience for their opinions on women's voices on-air. The demographic consistently left out of this conversation were female DJs themselves. Women in radio are rarely given the platform to respond to the critiques and complaints made about their voices or to share their thoughts on the ideal "radio voice." Twenty female radio hosts from around the country were contacted to be interviewed regarding their experiences as women in radio. Fourteen respondents answered questions and offered anecdotes about working in the radio industry, the perception of authority in broadcasted voices and expectations for the female radio host's voice.

On Complaints and Critiques about Female Voices

Critics have come up with many reasons to make women feel insecure about their voices. Women are told they speak too much or too loudly. Their voices are critiqued as being too high and too shrill. Perception of the human voice is impacted by societal beliefs and assumptions about how certain people's voices should sound. These expectations lead listeners to hear and interpret male and female voices differently. Women are criticized daily for the way they speak. While many millennial women tend to exhibit upspeak, vocal fry or another vocal tick in their speech patterns, these vocal qualities are not limited to one gender. People spend so much time policing female voices on-air, but few criticize male voices.

Leah Ramsey, an evenings & weekends host on CHMX-FM in Regina, Saskatchewan, Canada, said women in radio are much more likely than men to receive negative feedback from listeners.

I have heard many complaints and critiques about female voices on-air. In fact, I hear it way more often than I do with male voices. I've had female peers in the industry tell me about how they've received complaints for sounding 'annoying' and 'too cheerful'. When I was co-hosting on a morning show in rock radio, I strived to not just be a laugh track. However, when I did laugh, I had gotten a few complaints about that. I have been told my laugh is annoying. I rarely hear male hosts getting complaints for how their laughs sound (Ramsey, 2019).

Constantly hearing complaints about one's voice can be frustrating, especially when one's voice is an integral part of their job. Jessica Green is the operations manager for WZWZ-FM, WMYK-FM and WIOU-AM in Kokomo, Indiana. For the past eight and a half years, she has hosted the morning show on WZWZ-FM and worked alongside 5 different male co-hosts. Green expressed feeling frustrated when listeners focus on the sound of her voice rather than the information she is sharing in a broadcast. "When you work your ass off to keep your community informed, while barely getting any sleep, and then someone comments on a public post, "Her voice is annoying," it's really a kick to the guts" (Green, 2019). As for Green's male cohosts, internet trolls rarely leave comments complaining about their voices.

People are generally not shy about expressing their irritation with the way a woman speaks. As a morning show host alongside two male colleagues, Karianne Morley is no stranger to people critiquing her voice. "Listeners are more likely to complain about small random things, usually with no backing. 'I don't like the way she says this word!' or 'Her voice annoys me!'" (Morley, 2019). Morley works as a digital producer for iHeartRadio Portland and co-hosts the *Tanner and Drew* morning show on KFBW. She described herself as very outspoken on-air, often sparking debates with her co-hosts. "When listeners say negative things about my voice, you can usually tell it's not my voice they have an issue with, it's me. They just use my voice as an excuse to complain" (Morley, 2019). Morley finds that people making complaints will start by

commenting on her voice, but ultimately segue into critiquing her opinions or the content of what she says on-air.

Monica Brooks co-hosts *The Monica and Zack Show*, a morning show program on WXLK in Virginia. After working on-air for 12 years, she has heard several complaints about her female colleagues. “We usually have interns that we try to have on-air to introduce themselves. We’ll have listeners that complain about the females saying their voices are too high and too bubbly. They want to hear a sultry voice” (Brooks, 2019). The expectation that all female on-air personalities should speak in a sultry tone stems from the idea that women’s voices should please male audiences or else be relegated to late-night shifts. Eilish Sullivan, an announcer at CIKR-FM and CKXC-FM in Kingston, Ontario, was once told by a listener that he would prefer radio if he never had to listen to another female jock on-air. “I have seen higher pitched females get judged more harshly due to the tone of their voice, usually by listeners” (Sullivan, 2019). Ashley Elzinga, a night show personality on iHeartMedia Cleveland’s WAKS, also cited pitch as a major complaint listeners make about female voices. “I hear people mock girls’ voices all the time if they’re super high-pitched, which isn’t right” (Enzinga, 2019). According to Ramsey, listeners may object to female voices on-air due to negative associations people relate with high-pitched voices.

Not all women in radio experience regular critiques of their own voice or their female colleagues’ voices on-air. Loren Petisce is an on-air personality at WWBX in Boston, MA and a radio instructor at the Connecticut School of Broadcasting in Newton, MA. When interviewed, Petisce could not recall a specific instance in which she heard a female deejays’ voice being criticized. “I’ve occasionally heard complaints about female voices being annoying or laughing too much, but it’s not frequent and I honestly can’t remember who the complaints have been

about. I've heard more complaints about someone's personality rather than the sound of their voice, to be honest" (Petisce, 2019). Unfortunately, among the women interviewed in this study, Petisce was the only exception.

On "Women's Topics" On-Air

There are many unspoken rules about what women should and should not talk about on-air. As with other areas of public life, societal expectations establish appropriate topics for women to discuss on the radio. Topics that are classified as "appropriate for women" tend to lack substance or depth. Val Santos is an on-air personality on KPEZ in Austin, Texas. She talked about how women are often pushed into stereotypical roles on-air and expected to exude a certain type of persona instead of being allowed to just be themselves.

Women, when we first get into radio, and this happened to me to, we immediately get put in the position to say the gossip. 'Oh, women want to gossip about celebrities'. They don't feel like women have something real to say on-air. I was told I could do the Hollywood beat in the morning and I'm grateful because that's what kept me on-air, but I hate that. I hate that women get put on a beat because they think women just like to jabber and then we get stuck there. That keeps in people's mind that gossip is all we have to contribute when it's not. It's all just still very sexist (Santos, 2019).

While many programming directors expect women will inevitably discuss celebrity news and fashion trends on-air, some female deejays purposefully avoid these topics for fear of being pigeon-holed. Women realize that some listeners will disregard deejays who talk frequently about lifestyle and soft news. Sullivan describes this expectation as 'the airhead argument'. "A woman who enjoys celebrity gossip, wine and makeup is viewed as somehow dumber than hosts who enjoy other things" (Sullivan, 2019). Women in radio strive not to be pigeonholed, but sometimes avoiding the fall into the trap is nearly impossible.

According to Morley, other ill-received topics for women to discuss on-air include feminism and female sexuality.

Usually when I get complaints about me being on air it's because I'm "too feminist" or "too outspoken. I have always been a very independent woman with my own opinions and I have never been afraid to express them. This rubs a lot of people the wrong way, and a lot of my female friends in radio have said similar things. For some reason, whenever we tend to snip out on our own, or fight against the popular opinion we can get demonized for it," Morley said. "Plus the general sexist things you see in the world contribute to why people don't like having a female voice. When I was single and talked about a one-night stand, or random hookup, people would call and call me a slut and a whore, and that I would be a better person if I stopped sleeping around. When my male counterpart would tell a very similar story, he would be praised for it. Even if my male co-hosts were supportive of my actions or more "promiscuous" endeavors, the listeners would usually rebel against me. Getting listeners on my side has been difficult (Morley, 2019).

Some expectations for female deejays have less do to with the type of content they present on-air and more to do with the amount of leniency they are granted by the listening audience. Women working in the public sphere are often placed on an unrealistic pedestal and expected to be perfect all of the time. According to Sullivan, gender-based bias in radio can best be seen in how mistakes are treated, and how mistakes impact a person's perceived authority or credibility.

I've seen multiple male broadcasters slip up on a name, date, fact, or detail (which happens to all of us, no matter how professional) and face what amounts to zero backlash. Meanwhile if I so much as gloss over one tiny detail in a story, someone will call to "correct" me. I remember one instance where I couldn't get a story on the air in time, as I wanted more details, and someone called to say that I wasn't credible for not immediately talking about it. This is something I believe many women face, even in their day to day lives; many of us women will tell a joke, only for someone to correct us on specific details (Sullivan, 2019).

In a profession where perceived credibility can make or break a host's reputation, double standards such as these are no laughing matter.

On Authoritative Female Voices

What has been deemed as the ideal authoritative voice does not inherently align with how women naturally speak. Women are coached to speak differently to command authority. Over the past few decades, women's voices have dropped significantly as they pitch their voices lower. Low voices are generally favored for people in leadership roles or positions of power. Enzinga

suggested such voices sound more confident and assured to a listening audience. “Deeper sounding voices hold more authority and we trust deeper, richer voices subconsciously” (Enzinga, 2019). It seems people associate lower voices with power because low-voiced men have traditionally been the ones to wield authority in society. Morley pointed out that more alerts and breaking news are read by males and not females. The most effective way to change how people perceive an authoritative voice is to give more women the opportunity to host programs and read hard news on air.

Ramsey acknowledged that few women are represented in primetime radio show positions, such as the afternoon drive and the morning show.

It’s not often that I hear women hosting afternoon drive shows and I rarely ever hear of women leading a morning show. I think the reason why men are hired for these positions over women is because Program Directors may think that listeners want to hear an ‘authoritative’ voice that a man might possess. However, I find the public perceives a male voice as more authoritative mainly due to men generally having lower pitches (Ramsey, 2019).

This raises the question of whether male voices are genuinely perceived as more credible and authoritative than females or if the listening public is just more familiar with hearing male voices in these roles.

On Other Women’s Voices On-air

While most interviewees expressed frustration regarding the judgment of females voices on-air, this does not mean women do not have problems with the way other women speak. Amy Menz is a promotions coordinator for WSIX-FM and WNRQ-FM at iHeartRadio Nashville. She admitted there are times when she finds certain female voices difficult to listen to. “There is [a] female voice that I hear locally and it just comes across as fake and it’s hard for me to listen because it just doesn’t flow right the way she speaks” (Menz, 2019). Other interviewees also

expressed their preference for hearing women speak in their natural voices rather than in a tone that sounds forced. Enzinga favors female voices who are not afraid to make their opinions heard on-air.

I personally hope like hell whenever I hear a female voice that she's not just another "laugh track" on the station saying whatever safe, cliché thing, but a real personality who commands the room with substance and talent that I can look up to (Enzinga, 2019).

To Enzinga, these are the voices that stand out and make an impact on their audiences, rather than just blending in and doing what is expected of them.

Lisa Simeone works freelance in radio as a host and writer. Throughout her career, Simeone has worked for many local and national outlets, including NPR in Washington D.C. She is annoyed by certain vocal qualities women tend to possess on air, but stressed that men are also guilty of these speech patterns.

When a grown woman sounds like an 8-year-old, that drives me crazy. Vocal fry drives me crazy. Up-talk drives me f***ing insane! But these qualities and bad habits apply to men as well as women. I don't see them as being divided by sex (Simeone, 2019).

Simeone added that if a radio talent's voice rubs her the wrong way, she will immediately stop listening.

I will turn off the radio in a heartbeat if I hear an annoying voice. That might mean the quality of the voice itself (for example, nasally), or the cadence (that ridiculous up-talk at the end of sentences), or vocal fry, or mispronunciations, or affectations, or pretentious over-enunciations, or if the person sounds like he or she is a child instead of an adult (Simeone, 2019).

While she is very particular about the characteristics that she does and does not like in others' voices, Simeone is adamant that it is unfair to critique certain qualities in female voices and not to critique these same qualities in male voices.

Morgan Nicholson is a morning show host of *Morgan In the Mornings* on WLTC-FM and a midday host on WKCN-FM. She explained how female voices should not be held to a gender-specific standard. "I think some people expect a woman to sound "sexy" so they come

across appealing, but I think if a woman is just her, has a smooth tone, and good delivery, there shouldn't be an expectation." Petisce argued that she is less concerned with what a woman sounds like. She judges her liking of on-air talent based on the persona a deejay presents. "If I don't like someone's personality, I'm not going to want to listen to their voice. If I like their personality, but their voice isn't pleasant or is somewhat annoying, I will likely still listen because I like them" (Nicholson, 2019). Santos is turned off by women who sound unintelligent on-air.

I hear 'Oh, she sounds kinda ditzzy', or 'Her voice is kinda high', or 'She sounds like an airhead'. I haven't heard that said about myself but I have heard it said about other female on-air talent. And I'll admit I've said that about some women - she sounds like she's not very smart and I hate that, like c'mon girl! (Santos, 2019).

While she does not support the rude comments and critiques that are made about female radio hosts, she notes she would be a hypocrite if she acted like she had never made criticisms about other women's voices herself.

On Regional Accents

Accents impact the listener's perception of the speaker, often influencing message effectiveness. Radio hosts with a regional accent may be perceived as warmer and more relatable, but to some listeners, regional accents may make the speaker sound less competent or credible. Terri Dee currently works for two local stations in Indiana. At WTLC, Dee is a talk show host on *Community Connection*, a public affairs, news and social interest program. She is also a newscaster on *All Things Considered* at the Indiana Public Broadcasting/NPR station, WFYI. As a radio host in a local market, Dee believes regional accents can sometimes cause strain on listeners' ears as they try to decipher what the host is saying. "Broadcasters are known for their distinct sound and style so I don't think there is a 'radio voice'. If I had to list

requirements, of course, someone without a strong accent, or a regional sound, who can be easily understood” (Dee, 2019). Many vocal coaches will advise radio hosts to lose their accent, as it may be distracting and take away from the content of what the host talks about on-air.

Brooks, who works in the Virginia market, explained that being a female radio voice with a twang does not always translate well with her colleagues or listeners.

I’m a Southern girl and I have a little bit of an accent that still crosses over on air sometimes. We’re in Virginia, so people say ‘Y’all’ but I would say certain slang words that were deep country so people were like, ‘What?’. My co-hosts at the time were from NY and Massachusetts and they were like, ‘What does that even mean?’. I had to work to remain who I am but at the same time realize I might need to adjust and change it up a little bit (Brooks, 2019).

Fortunately for Brooks, having a regional accent is not necessarily a bad thing. While her general audience does not always understand her slang terms, she works in a market that appreciates her drawl, which makes her voice sound familiar and homegrown to listeners.

On “Radio Voice”

When people think about the ideal radio voice, it only makes sense that they would envision a deep male voice. Listeners have been conditioned to associate the voice of a radio host with a male-sounding voice. That is the type of voice they are used to hearing most frequently on-air during their commute to work or over the speakers in a public space. “I dislike the idea of the ‘radio voice’, simply because it always conjures up this image of a deep voiced, resonant guy behind a microphone. It’s limiting for everyone in the industry” (Sullivan, 2019). As Sullivan suggests, placing such value on a stereotypical sound for deejays only further isolates women. If women are not given any airtime, their voices are not being heard and they cannot influence the public’s perception.

Many of the women interviewed felt that the concept of a “radio voice” was outdated. Santos described the former expectations for voices heard on-air. “Back in the day, there was a certain, particular “radio voice”- smooth, deep and geared towards men. Now, it's changed a lot” (Santos, 2019). The preferred sound for on-air talent has shifted over the decades, from polite and mild-mannered, to bold and charismatic, to loud and outspoken. Nicholson associated the term “radio voice” with shock jock culture from the 1980s.

That's old school. You don't want to ‘puke on the mic.’ It isn't 1980 anymore where you have to sound like an announcer. You want to sound like a normal person, to have a conversation and talk with someone, not at them (Nicholson, 2019).

As Santos pointed out, pukey voices are not yet a thing of the past.

Some of the more old-school guys still have a very pukey voice. That’s not the ‘in thing’. People are trying to get away from the pukey voice and move towards more natural and conversational voices with tones and delivery. That's what people are more drawn towards now (Santos, 2019).

Some interviewees suggested listening audiences are less concerned with how a deejay sounds and care more about the personality they present. According to Brooks, people relied heavily on the principles of a “radio voice” in the past, but now people are more interested in a radio personality they can relate to. “People don't necessarily have a voice for radio, people have something they are passionate and want to speak on” (Brooks, 2019). Enziga expressed her belief that the concept of traditional “radio voice” dissolved in the early 2000’s. “Radio now is all about relating to people, entertaining, being a performer instead of just a voice. All of that requires you not being fake, which is incredibly important to me” (Enziga, 2019). Ramsey was torn over whether she believes in the concept of “radio voice” and the impact such standards would have on women getting hired.

While I would like to think people don’t get hired for their voice over their personality, I know that it’s not always the case. I’d say some qualities that would define a radio voice is one with great articulation, enunciation, tone and energy (Ramsey, 2019).

Whether or not the notion of a “radio voice” exists, most interviewees agreed there are certain favorable characteristics that on-air talent should possess.

In Morley’s opinion, people are not born with or without a voice for radio – they can be taught best practices for speaking on air.

Lower voices tend to be easier to listen to. Other than that, I believe most people can be trained to have a radio voice. Personally, the only difference between my “radio voice” and “real voice” is that I tend to talk more fluidly and coherent, I mumble less, and talk more concisely (Morley, 2019).

Many radio hosts are advised to meet with vocal coaches to learn how to train their voices to project well on-air. The goal of these coaches is not inherently to make all radio hosts sound the same, but rather to enhance individual voices for the air. Simeone suggests expectations for a radio voice differ depending on the speaker’s role.

If your role is a reporter, then I think there’s more leeway in how you sound. The paramount concern is your journalistic ability, obviously; although I still think you should sound like a rational adult and not like Minnie Mouse. But you don’t necessarily have to have a beautiful, sonorous voice to be a reporter. To be a host, or an announcer, then you do need a beautiful, sonorous voice in my opinion, or at least a non-grating one (Simeone, 2019).

Not all on-air talent sounds the same nor should they. For most women on-air, individuality is what makes their voices memorable and familiar to their listening audience.

Menz pointed out that voice expectations for radio hosts often depends on the specific music market they work in.

Different genres of music take a certain type of voice... you can definitely notice it when you hear them talk regular versus their radio voice. For our country stations, they are literally the same person on and off the radio. Their voice does not change. For our classic rock station, we have a female voice who is deeper and men can really relate to that rather than hearing a high-pitched voice. It kind of goes with the music (Menz, 2019).

Adjusting the tone of one's voice to match with the music being played is a suggestion many of the interviewees have received from programming directors. The challenge lies in finding a way to balance expectations while maintaining one's authentic voice.

On Her Own Voice

When asked to describe and discuss their own voices, most interviewees were honest without being overly critical. Simeone said she never wanted her voice to come off sounding pretentious. "My voice is naturally deep, and my style is professional but down-to-earth. I'm not stuffy. I sound like a real person. You can do all of this without sounding either sloppy or hoity-toity" (Simeone, 2019). She believes the key to being a relatable voice for her audience is to be authentic and natural on-air. When Dee was first starting out in radio, she was not sure if her voice was cut out for the job. "I was nervous and wasn't sure if I had the 'authoritative, no nonsense sound' often heard from the evening news anchors" (Dee, 2019). The more she spoke on air and engaged with her audience, the more confident Dee became in her voice and her abilities. Santos believes constructive criticism from colleagues helped her craft her radio voice. "My first program director was not shy. He said you kinda sound a little too sexy. I didn't want to sound too fast so I would slow down it down, but he said to bring it up a little" (Santos, 2019). Similar to Dee, Santos was nervous that her voice would not fit the radio mold. But after receiving feedback from her boss, she realized she could bring her natural energy and bubbly personality to the airwaves and really connect with her audience.

Nicholson used to talk very fast on-air, which would raise her pitch and leave her sounding a little "yelly" when she got excited. By working through those habits each day, she has achieved a more neutral pitch that she describes as being easier on her audience's ears. "Every jock has their critics, but over the years I have found my voice and the natural sound just

comes with experience” (Nicholson, 2019). Nicholson feels like her voice has shifted and developed a lower register over the years but does not think her voice fits the “standard” radio voice. She just strives to sound like herself. According to Brooks, people always judge voices differently.

I’m not a girly girl, but there are some people who don’t want to tune in because they say, ‘She seems like she’s being more of a dude on the show in her character and her voice than a girl.’ They think it seems like a man’s show even though the target audience is women. I don’t like to talk about girl stuff on air, and some people don’t relate (Brooks, 2019).

These critiques have never stopped Brooks from being authentically herself on-air. If anything, they have motivated her to let her true personality shine through even brighter.

On “The Boy’s Club”

It’s no secret that radio is still a heavily male-dominated industry. According to the Women’s Media Center’s *Status of Women in the U.S. Media 2019* report, fewer women and people of color are employed in radio news than men and women make up only 17.4 percent of general managers of the nation’s AM and FM stations (Women’s Media Center, 2019). Women working in the profession have lots to say about their experiences in “the boy’s club.” For Green, working in rock radio has taught her how to build her own voice and remain authentic to who she is.

I think radio was a man’s world for so long that it has taken time to change that stereotype. I think it’s getting better. Where I work, we have a full-time staff of twelve and eight are women. I think it also has a lot to do with how women have been perceived on the radio. My first boss told me before he put me with a co-host that he didn’t want me to just be a laugh box. He told me it was important for me to have a unique voice. At 22, that was a huge boost to my on-air confidence (Green. 2019).

Many interviewees talked about the unfair standards they face, particularly from male colleagues. Santos suggested the hardest part of being a woman in radio is toughing it out and proving your worth in the face of criticism.

You have to work really hard for certain male figures to take you serious without calling you emotional. If you fight back when they are giving you a hard time because they think they can say what they want and you show strength back, there are some guys who don't like that. They'll do what they can to try to ruin your career (Santos, 2019).

It's alarming that women's jobs as on-air talent can still be put into jeopardy because people view women as too sensitive to take part in the public forum. Enzinga recalled numerous incidents where she felt unwelcome on-air. "I've experienced people desperately committed to keeping me off the air because I'm not easy for them to control or they don't want me around because they're threatened by an ambitious young woman" (Enzinga, 2019). Working in an atmosphere where one feels out of place or unwanted is not only uncomfortable, it's unfair.

What can be done to change this toxic environment that many women face? According to Brooks, the composition of staff members and executives at radio stations needs to shift dramatically.

Men dominate the field. We need more program directors that are female, more women in different positions so they can really see the talent in other females. When you have an industry dominated by men, they tend to seek out other guys. If you have women as program director and in promotions and other positions, then it opens the door for women even more (Brooks, 2019).

Dee echoed these sentiments, acknowledging that men are currently the ones making most of the decisions in boardrooms and behind the scenes. "Until the decision maker acknowledges the contributions of women both in front of the mike and behind the mike, conditions will not improve very much" (Dee, 2019). After years of men overseeing the radio and TV industries, someone recognized that negative attitudes towards women as leaders in media are deeply ingrained.

It's going to take a while to change those attitudes. But there are so many women on the air nowadays, and the people who find them objectionable for whatever reason are dinosaurs. In all things, the world moves forward and leaves behind whom it leaves behind (Simeone, 2019).

While the number of women on-air is growing, interviewees largely objected to the narrow range of positions women are being hired to fill. Meaghan Taylor is a producer at WIOD in Miami, Florida and the owner and founder of Women In Radio LLC, an organization dedicated to the advancement of women in the radio industry through networking and collaboration. "All of our advertising and music is catered to women, so it would only make sense to have women everywhere - but unfortunately that's not the way it is" (Taylor, 2019). Taylor pointed to radio's historically male-dominated show spots, such as morning shows and expressed her desire to see more women filling these roles. Ramsey also voiced her wishes to see more gender boundaries broken down in radio. "I feel like a lot of the reason why women are hired for midday positions is because program directors want that warm, friendly and inviting voice to guide listeners through their work day" (Ramsey, 2019). It's fine to utilize female voices to engage and please the audience, but not at the expense of pigeonholing women into rigid roles, as was done in the sixties.

Why are women still so underrepresented on primetime radio shows? Menz suggested it all has to do with ratings and women's inability to move up in positions.

To get high ratings, there are certain times of the day that people will listen to: mornings and afternoon drive. For one of our stations, we have a female on during midday so she's going to get the people that are at work from 10 to 4 [p.m.], which isn't the same amount of people in the morning or afternoon. So right off the bat, she's losing listenership and because of her ratings she can't move to a new time slot. With that being said, the time slots before and after her are males so why would you bring in a female when the males are doing well? (Menz, 2019).

This stunted cycle traps many women, making it hard for them to work their way up the ladder in radio. When women do make it on to primetime shows, they are rarely given a show of their

own. Often, they are brought on as a co-host for a male lead host or as the female voice on an otherwise all male show. In January 2013, Kelly Ford was the first live voice heard on Nash FM 94.7 WNSH New York. Serving as the station's first midday talent when the station debuted, Ford later joined the syndicated *America's Morning Show* with Blair Garner and most recently, the *Ty, Kelly & Chuck* morning show. Ford was suddenly let go from the *Ty, Kelly & Chuck* in November 2018 and the morning show was quickly rebranded as *The Ty Bentli Show*, even though Chuck remains a co-host. Many fans of Ford were outraged, taking to Twitter to voice concerns about sexism in the radio industry.

Ford originally agreed to be interviewed for this research paper and was quite excited to provide her insights. But a week before the scheduled interview in mid-January, Ford reached out to apologize and explain that she could no longer be interviewed because an announcement regarding a new job would soon be released. In her email, she said: "It should be a great victory for women in the industry. Can't wait for you to hear about it" (Ford, 2019). A week later, the news broke. Kelly Ford would be returning to Nash FM as the host of her own morning show, *Kelly Ford In The Morning*. Ford's story is inspiring and historic; she is one of a select few women in radio to achieve their own primetime show.

The industry needs more game changing moments like this and many women in radio are willing to push back and ask the tough questions. Brooks shared a story about a female colleague who is sick of women being cast as the radio side-kick.

We had a convention one year and a friend asked, "Why don't you have shows with two females or an all-female show? I think people hear it and think it sounds like women are just nagging. But its a valid question. You don't really have shows that are predominantly female, but it should be like that. They hire according to the voices. They want to have the male there and have a balance. But who is to say that two women, three women couldn't carry the whole show?" (Brooks, 2019).

Brooks' story brings up a great point. When asked, not a single interviewee could think of a radio show she had grown up listening to that was hosted by two or more women. There stereotype in the industry seems to be that one woman on a show is plenty. Two women on a show will only lead to gossip and irrelevant conversation on the air.

Beyond the initial fight to earn a position as on-air talent, Morley talked about how age discrimination ultimately chases middle-age women off the air.

If you flip around your radio dial and your local TV news, here's what you'll find: men on air doing high profile jobs well into their 60's, and they are always paired with a young, attractive woman. Tell me about the last time you saw a woman in her 60's leading a news cast, or hosting a morning show? I can't think of one. Women are shut out of the industry at a much younger age because of their appearance, while men are not. Sexism and age discrimination are massive problems in the media industry (Morley, 2019).

Many are under the impression that ageism and beauty standards don't impact the jobs of female radio hosts, because they are not a public face, rather a public voice. Unfortunately, women in radio are not strangers to these types of discrimination, which have the potential to greatly impact their job security.

On Progress for Women in Radio

The radio industry isn't perfect. There are ingrained prejudices and stereotypes against women that can make the workplace seem unwelcoming and uncomfortable. In the face of these negative attitudes, most interviewees seem hopeful that progress is being made for women, slowly but surely. Dee pointed to well known female broadcasters such as Barbara Walters, Carole Simpson, Ann Curry, Oprah Winfrey, Jane Pauley and Connie Chung as examples of women actively changing the face and voice of media. "I don't think people would object to female voices on air. Actually, I think there would be more objection if there weren't any female

voices on air” (Dee, 2019). In Dee’s opinion, she has seen a lot of growth for women in radio since the 1980s and 1990s.

Nicholson also noticed that things are shifting in the media and entertainment world.

Now, women have a voice and people are doing more than just listening, they are reacting.

Most station formats’ target audience is female. There is no better way to connect with a female than having female talent, I think now more than ever being a female on air is an advantage, there aren't a ton of us, but our community is growing, and we are needed, and wanted...I just think it was dominated by men for so long, just the music industry in general. Females were seen as sidekicks back in the day, but now there are female morning show hosts, not just cohosts. I can't tell you how many job openings I have seen that need female talent. The industry sees how valuable we are, and how much the audience wants to hear what we have to say. We aren't sidekicks anymore, we are it! (Nicholson, 2019).

Women in radio are here to stay. These insights and anecdotes from a diverse range of female on-air talent highlight the unique experiences women have while working in this industry. Their tenacity and resilience in the face of gender barriers and discrimination is inspiring and eye-opening. While the radio industry has come a long way, there is a lot of work that still needs to be done to create a fair and equal space for female voices.

Chapter 5: Conclusion

The contributions of women to the radio industry over the past 100 years should not be underestimated. As pioneers and as prominent voices, women carved their own space in the public forum using radio as their medium of choice. The study of radio history should not be kept separate from the study of women's history. Radio serves as an important repository for investigating women's experiences and agency. While radio is often a repressed area of study within the larger realm of media studies, the programming and cultural practices of radio are relevant and valuable academic enterprise. In many broadcasting archives and histories, mentions of women's work and contributions to the media industry are scarce and rendered nearly invisible. There is a gaping hole in our understanding of how American broadcasting functioned, much less how gender shaped and continues to shape American broadcasting. Michele Hilmes, Caroline Mitchell and Donna Halper are among current researchers in the field of gender, audio and history who are dedicated to changing the narrative on women in radio history.

This body of research unearthed voices of women in radio who have been lost to history. Women undeniably shaped American media, even in spaces and places where their voices were silenced. Gendered hierarchies were entrenched in early radio, directly leading to women's programming hosted by women and the daytime ghetto of radio. Gendered identities were amplified and manipulated to create profitable relationships between advertisers, audiences, and broadcasters. Radio produced many gendered representations of women, resulting in few female voices that were taken seriously. Yet, women continued to assert themselves in the industry and challenge stereotypes in the face of backlash.

Early conversations about the suitability of female voices for radio from the mid-1920s continue to trickle over into modern discourse. People still argue that women have no place on-air and that their higher-pitched voices do not resonate with listening audiences. This begs the question: When will we move past this discussion and these criticisms? In short, we likely never will. There will always be critics and people resistant to change. But society can begin to reframe the conversation and allow other voices into the dialogue. This shouldn't be a discussion solely held by men. Women should be guaranteed the opportunity to respond to critiques and complaints made about their voices and to provide input on the standards of what distinguishes a voice as a "radio voice."

This paper specifically looks at the contributions, achievements and experiences of women in radio in a broad sense. Future research should examine the specific critiques and criticisms of the voices of women of color. Racial prejudice often motivates resistance to certain regional accents and the use of street vernacular in professional and public forums. Members of the LGBT community in radio, particularly those with effeminate or gender-ambiguous voices have their own set of critics. Many transgender people struggle to find a voice that they feel matches their gender identity, gives them confidence and prevents harassment. The last thing they need to worry about is whether their listening audience is overanalyzing the sound of their voice on-air. Research on women in radio and the discourse surrounding the suitability of female voices on-air can also be expanded to other countries, both in the Western world and beyond. It would be interesting to examine the hardships women face in non-English speaking countries or under oppressive governments. In many developing countries, radio is used as a tool of empowerment to bring female voices into the public forum and work towards achieving gender

equality in society. The ways in which conversations surrounding women in radio are framed around the world could offer interesting insights for the American discussion of the topic.

As previously stated, the purpose of this thesis is to explore the ways in which power and agency may be expressed by women in a traditionally gendered soundscape to breakdown gender biases in the radio industry. Going forward, the stories and histories compiled in this paper could be transformed into a book or a documentary to help educate people on this overlooked but important subject area. This paper serves less as an analysis or a critique on the radio industry and the way the public engages with the medium. Rather, it serves as a narrative about the women who came before and the women who are shaping modern radio. These stories, past and present, are a way to fill in the gap in the history books and provide a fair representation, for all women, of people who not only look like them, but of people who sound like them.

Appendix 1

Vocal quality or timbre is essential to the art of the radio broadcaster voice. Like faces and fingerprints, every voice has its own specific traits – no two are exactly alike. No matter the pitch or the volume, the sound of each individual’s voice is distinctive. The voice is biologically controlled by the thickness and length of the vocal folds, the variations of the muscles in the lips, mouth and tongue and the diverse bone structures that result in differently shaped resonating chambers in the throat and nasal cavities. The endless variations and combinations of these biological features makes it possible for no two voices to ever be the same (Karpf, 2006). According to the National Institute of Deafness and Other Communication Disorders (NIDCD), the voice at the most basic level is simply noise created by the vibration of the vocal folds in the larynx. The physical production of the human voice is not a linguistic phenomenon. Rather, various paralinguistic features present in the voice, such as pitch, volume and tempo, work with verbal language to express meaning (Schueller, B., et al., 2013). Listeners obtain a distinct impression of the personality of the speaker based on the features present in the voice (Smith & Patterson, 2005). According to The National Center for Voice and Speech, some vocal features can be described by well-defined categories, such as intensity and fundamental frequency. Other traits can be organized into a general set of characteristics known as vocal qualities. These characteristics are hard to define because they present on a continuum, such as nasality, resonance and tightness.

From a young age, individuals learn which auditory characteristics accompany male and female voices (Smith, Grabowecy & Suzuki, 2007). When the radio presents listeners with a previously unknown and unseen speaker, the audience quickly develops an impression of whether the speaker is a male or female. These immediate judgements are made based on various

acoustic and vocal cues (Smith & Patterson, 2005). Ko, Judd, & Blair (2006) assert that similar to visual cues, vocal cues signaling gender are used by listeners to categorize a speaker's gender, leading to gender-stereotypic inferences. Assumptions about the different ways men and women speak are not just built out of society's ideas about masculinity versus femininity, they also serve to uphold these ideas.

The voices of male and female speakers are sexually dimorphic. Most variability between male and female voices lies in the mass of the vocal folds and the length of the vocal tract (Fitch and Giedd, 1999). The glottal-pulse rate (GPR) and overall vocal-tract length (VTL) are two important components of voice quality (Smith & Patterson, 2005). The glottal-pulse rate refers to the rate of opening and closing or the vibration of the vocal folds, determining a speaker's fundamental frequency and perceived vocal pitch. The fundamental frequency of a sound is inversely proportional to the size of its source. Adults males tend to have voices with a low fundamental frequency, perceived as a low pitch, while adult females tend to have voices with a high fundamental frequency, perceived as a high pitch. While frequency is an acoustic feature that can be measured objectively, the perception of pitch is affected by volume, judgment and other subjective factors (Karpf, 2006). The vocal tract filters sound produced at the larynx. The length of the vocal tract regulates various aspects of speech signal and varies greatly among speakers (Lammert & Narayanan, 2015). Adult men have the longest VTLs, children have the shortest, and women have intermediate VTLs (Fitch and Giedd, 1999). Smith and Patterson (2005) measured the interaction of GPR and VTL in listener categorization of speakers according to sex (male or female) and found both influence the perception of speaker sex.

Biological differences do not explain all the variances between male and female voices. Vocal production is also shaped by social and psychological pressures that dictate how men and

women should speak and sound. Men often breathe from the abdomen, producing a deep voice and rich tone while women are prone to constricting their voices in an upper range that leaves them with little control (Karpf, 2006). A fault commonly ascribed to women is that they speak too much and too loudly. This critique becomes a way of silencing and policing how women speak.

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