

Sidekick or In Control?:

The Roles and Treatment of Female On-Air Personalities in Commercial Music Radio

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for Sara Taylor Morgan, with thanks for the idea,
and for the women whose time and candid comments made this paper possible

Introduction

“Radio reaches 80 percent of women in all key buying demographics weekly” (Merli, 1998: 34), and “females are the primary target for many formats” (Borzillo, 1993: 75). Yet women are grossly under-represented in radio as on-air personalities¹ and in other capacities. According to the most recent survey conducted by the Radio-Television News Directors Association (RTNDA) and Ball State University, only 31 percent of the people in radio news are women², and only 28 percent of the news directors are women³ (Papper and Gerhard, 1998b). Kamins (1992) notes that only 50 of the National Radio Association of Talk Show Hosts 900-plus members are women (p. 29) – only slightly more than five percent. And although two-thirds of the Christian radio audience is female, the on-air personalities are overwhelmingly male. In addition, only four of the National Religious Broadcaster’s 30-member board are female (Kennedy, 1997: 66). If these statistics are any indication, women are most likely very under-represented in music radio.

If women are under-represented in music radio, what roles do the women who work as on-air personalities on commercial music stations actually fill? Are they treated the same as their male colleagues in terms of salary, career opportunities, job responsibilities, and respect from management and the male on-air personalities? Research on the roles and treatment of women in society is abundant, but none of the research specifically looks at the roles and treatment of female on-air radio personalities.

Like any other medium, radio influences its listeners (Wood, 1994). According to Wood (1994), one of the ways that the media and images of gender interact is that the media reproduces the current cultural view of gender. “By defining ‘normal’, ... media

¹ This includes anyone who is actually on the air, whether as a deejay or a reporter. A disk jockey is always an on-air personality, whereas an on-air personality is not always a deejay.

² This is the same percentage as 1997, which was a three percent increase over 1996 numbers.

³ This is a five percent increase over 1997, which was a three percent loss from 1996 numbers.

suggest how we should be as women and men” (p. 231). If we do not hear women on the radio, or we hear them only as sidekicks or support, we may not think that women are capable of leading a radio show, and thus that women are not capable of leading in general.

Literature Review

A Brief History of Women in Radio

Historically, women have not played a large part in radio, and little has been written about the history of women in radio. Men and women originally entered radio in the 1920s “without an apparent sexual division of labor” (St. John, 1978: 31), but the myth arose and was accepted that people did not want to hear women’s voices (St. John, 1978: 32).

The earliest mention of a woman in radio was about an out-of-work writer named Mary Margaret McBride. In 1934 she auditioned for a radio show, was hired and rather quickly became an instant, nationwide success. Using an unrehearsed, ad lib approach, she interviewed many celebrities, talked about her life and was able to sell products to her female audience⁴. Despite her success, she was still stereotyped as a “chatter program.” In 1954, she ended her 20-year radio career⁵, and today, she is “all but forgotten” (St. John, 1978: 37).

After McBride’s career, there was little movement in the push for women in radio, and few mentions of it actually occurring. Of the 288 pages in Smith’s (1989) book The Pied Pipers of Rock’n’Roll: Radio Deejaays of the 50s and 60s, only five of the pages mentioned women deejays. In 1975, Russ Tornabene, a spokesperson for NBC, said that he had no women broadcasters on NBC radio (Riegle, 1975: 164).

Alison Steele, a women disk jockey at WNEW-FM (New York) in the late 60s and 70s, interviewed many of rock’s top stars and helped decide what music would get played on the air (Scelsa, 1995; Maeder, 1995; Stout, 1995; Novia, 1995). She is credited with “...break[ing] down walls that had kept other women out, and open[ing] the door for those who would follow” (McGuire, 1998: 56).

Academic Studies on Women in Radio

Academic researchers in many disciplines, including communications, women’s

⁴ In fact, McBride was often complimented on her sales ability (St. John, 1978: 33).

⁵ It is interesting to note that McBride tried to cross over into television, but was unsuccessful due to her “matronly” looks (St. John, 1978: 37).

studies, psychology and sociology, have all but ignored the subject of women in radio. Lont (1990) is the rare exception to this rule; she looked at how males and females on two Top 40 radio stations in Washington, D.C., were represented in the talk portion of radio programming that is dominated by music. Lont concluded that the nonmusic programming does affect listeners, partly because deejays are seen as “authority figures” (Lont, 1990: 662). Her findings indicate that men dominate as deejays, while females dominate as the audience. She notes, “Women as audience pattern the roles prescribed for women in music...as fans, audience, groupies, or front singers – all passive roles, while males in rock are given active, message-making roles” (p. 667). Lont did not interview on-air personalities, but merely analyzed the content of the radio programming.

Other Literature on Women in Radio

While other types of publications, including radio trade publications, have looked at women in radio, the literature is still rather sparse. Women have had a long history of not having a voice on the radio. Today, most women who are on the air have been relegated to the position of sidekick (Stark, 1997), and stereotyped as breathy phone-sex girls or trashy biker babes (Carter and Schiffman, 1998: 71). As McAdams (1995) points out, “It’s no secret that in radio, as in most industries, the balance of power has long been held by men” (p. 92).

Women are also relegated to the less lucrative dayparts. According to an unscientific survey conducted in 1998 by the trade publication Friday Morning Quarterback, of 233 women on the air at 106 stations, only 74 of them (31 percent) are in the morning and afternoon shifts (McGuire, 1998: 55), which are considered the best shifts because they command the largest audience and highest salaries. However, this survey did not differentiate between women presenting the news or weather, women in a sidekick or co-host capacity, and women leading the show. It also did not differentiate between formats.

Excuses for not having women on the air have ranged from there being no qualified women to tradition – “it’s just the way things are” (Riegle, 1975: 159).

Programmers, even those in the 1920s (St. John, 1995: 32), have also used the excuse that women’s voices are of low quality and thus people don’t like to hear them on the air (Borzillo, 1994: 85; Carter and Schiffman, 1998: 71; Isber and Cantor, 1975: 51; Riegle, 1975: 160; St. John, 1978: 31). Macdonald (1995) puts it this way: “Women,

thought to be more skilled in flaunting their bodies than their verbal wit, are still perceived to be ill-suited to the role of repartee leader” (p. 51). These myths have been used by program directors and other people in the industry as a way to not hire women personalities. But Borzillo (1994) emphasizes that “listeners don’t have a gender preference when it comes to radio personalities” (p. 85).

Due in part to the myth that people don’t want to listen to women’s voices, many stations will not program women personalities in back-to-back shifts. But that seems to be changing, albeit slowly (Borzillo, 1994).

If a woman is on talk radio, she is more likely to be offering advice rather than debating current events (Kamins, 1992: 29). “Nowadays, women’s ‘authority’ seems to be relegated to nurturing: women as therapists are big on radio” (Flanders, 1996: 74). Women in music radio often provide the traffic, weather or entertainment news (McGuire, 1998: 56).

In addition, female on-air personalities are often judged by their looks, whereas the male personalities are not (Kamins, 1992). Kamins (1992) notes that many print media profiles of female on-air radio personalities focus on their looks, which is a “...neat way to neutralize her thoughts. Regardless of what they have to say, women are constantly judged by their looks” (Kamins, 1992: 29). For example, a Texas entrepreneur created a 1998 pinup calendar of female radio personalities wearing revealing garments, and the calendar editor said he had to turn down some stations because their personalities “were not suitable” (Merli, 1997: 89). Novia (1995) adds, “Aside from nude shots in ‘Women in Radio’ pictorials, women are rarely brought to the industry’s attention as talents in their own right” (p. 28).

Roles of Women in Society

Of course, radio is not the only industry to side-line women into gendered roles – society in general tends to do so as well.

Juni and Grimm (1994) define a sex role as “...the public expression of an individual’s private understanding” (p. 102) and Holt and Ellis (1998) define it as “... the expectations which are held about appropriate personality characteristics for each sex” (p. 929). Harris and Firestone (1998) define gender role attitudes as “generally conceived opinions and beliefs about the ways that family and work roles do and should differ based

on sex” (p. 239). However, “gender is not totally determined by sex, allowing both men and women to internalize dimensions of both the masculine and feminine gender roles” (McCreary et al, 1998, p. 90).

Among other things, males are supposed to exhibit authority, control and assertiveness, traits that are considered necessary for a leader (Leonard, 1998: 74), while women are not supposed to have or display these traits. People in management are expected to display masculinity (Leonard, 1998: 71), which is characterized by independence, competitiveness and self-confidence (McCreary et al, 1998: 82). A man’s primary family role has been to provide economic support, while a woman’s has been to provide emotional support and a well-kept home (Simon, 1995: 186). Studies suggest that females rate person-oriented values higher than males do; and while males look at the status and economic aspects of an occupation, females are more likely to look at the chance to work with others (Eccles, 1987: 150).

Attitudes toward the roles women are supposed to take in society are changing (Loo and Thorpe, 1998: 903). Loo and Thorpe (1998) report “...a significant liberalization in attitudes for both genders since the mid-1970s and a narrowing of the gender gap in the 1990s” (p. 903). They note that this trend is for both men and women (p. 910). Harris and Firestone (1998) concur that there has been a shift toward more egalitarian gender role attitudes (p. 239). They add, “...public acceptance of nondomestic roles for women has increased substantially” (p. 243).

Just what this slow slide toward a more egalitarian society means for women in radio remains to be studied. Indeed, there is much to be learned about the roles and treatment of women in radio. Are they truly only filling sidekick positions? Do they feel they are pigeonholed into one stereotype or another? Do they hold the same career opportunities and options? Are they allowed to be assertive, and do they hold any power?

Methodology

This pilot study attempts to answer these questions and discover the roles and treatment of female on-air personalities in commercial music radio through in-depth interviews with female on-air personalities who are on morning shows at classic rock or rock stations in four of the top five markets, which are (in order): New York City, Los Angeles,

Chicago, San Francisco, and Philadelphia (Arbitron Market Rankings, Fall 1998). These formats have been chosen because rock and classic rock are very similar in scope and content, and both formats are targeted primarily to males ages 25 to 54 (Radio and Records). Thus, this study looks at how women are faring in this male-oriented environment.

This study focuses on females who work on morning shows because that is the most prestigious time slot with the largest audience, highest revenues and highest potential salaries. In addition, it is expected that shows in the nation's largest markets will be more progressive and more given to equality in salaries and job duties than shows in smaller markets. The top markets are also spread across the United States, which allows this study to transcend any geographic biases.⁶

This study explores the status of female on-air personalities, the roles they play at their stations, and how they feel they are viewed by management, other disk jockeys and their listening public. By interviewing women in the top shifts at the top markets, this study can also look at the steps they took to "make it," as well as how they feel they are treated compared to their male colleagues, and if they feel they experience any gender discrimination while working in a male-dominated field.

Most radio stations have websites with background information about the on-air personalities to be interviewed. These websites were used to help shape the questions in the research instrument so that they more accurately reflected their specific situations.

Participants were asked about their history of working in radio, as well as information on their current position. They were asked to describe their job tasks and responsibilities, and to compare their job tasks to those of their male counterparts. They were also asked questions pertaining to how they feel they are viewed and treated by management, the male disc jockeys at the station, and by the listening public.

In-depth, moderately scheduled interviews were conducted by phone and audio taped between April 5 and April 16, 1999. In all but one case, the women were at their homes when the interviews took place. One interviewee was at her second job as a retail store manager but was able to sequester herself in her office and was not interrupted.

About the participants

⁶ This study does not look at race but rather attempts to discern how women in general are treated.

Four female on-air personalities on the morning shows at radio stations within the top five markets were interviewed. The fourth largest market, San Francisco, is not included in this study. After repeated attempts to contact the female host of the morning show, and even a scheduled interview time, the interview never took place. Information on her is thus not included in this study.

The women who participated were all promised anonymity. Three of them stated that they were afraid of repercussions if they spoke frankly. Their names have been changed to provide anonymity, and the cities they work in have not been identified. Without a promise of anonymity, the women would likely not have been as open and willing to talk. They are:

1. Tracey, a comic who has been in radio only four months. She is a co-host and is billed with her partner.
2. Deanna, who has been in radio three years. She does traffic for the classic rock station she has worked for during the past a year and a half. However, she is not employed by that station but by a broadcast service. She also does traffic, news and sports for several other radio stations.
3. Cheryl, who also works for a traffic service. She has been in radio for 10 years and says she has done “everything” in the business. She has worked with the radio station on and off since 1995, and has been in her current capacity for a little over a year.
4. Lara, who is a traffic reporter, works directly for a radio station. She has been in radio for six months. Her background is in doing voiceover work.

The Interviews

The interviews ranged in length from 20 minutes to one hour and fifteen minutes, for a total of three hours of interviews. All interviews were transcribed and then analyzed for patterns and trends concerning general characteristics, career opportunities, how the women feel they are viewed and treated, and the roles women play in radio.

General Characteristics

The women ranged in age from 28 to 41 years old. None of the four women have children, and it appears that all four are white.⁷

⁷ This is based on pictures and information on the station websites.

Because none of the women have moved around in their careers – all four of them have always worked in the same market – the question of how they made it to a top market was not applicable. The length of time the women had been in radio was directly correlated to the length of the interview – the interview with the woman who has been in radio only four months lasted twenty minutes; the interview with the woman who has been in the business the longest amount of time, 10 years, lasted one hour and fifteen minutes.

The women essentially work the same hours: Tracey and Deanna work Monday through Friday, 5 a.m. to 9 a.m.; the shift for the remaining two women is 5:30 a.m. to 9 a.m. The only exception is that Lara also works the afternoon shift of 4:30 p.m. to 6:30 p.m., and Cheryl also works early morning shifts on Saturday and Sunday⁸.

All four stations are targeted toward males in the same general age group, although the ranges varied – New York is targeted toward ages 18 to 49; Los Angeles targets ages 25 to 54; Chicago, 35 to 54; and Philadelphia’s station targets males ages 25 to 45.

All four stations also have more male than female on-air staff. The station in Philadelphia has over twice as many men as women, while the other stations have two or three more male than female air staff.

Career Opportunities

Several factors must be considered when looking at career opportunities for women in radio, including their job titles and salary, whether they do outside promotions and if they feel they have the opportunity for career advancement.

Titles - With the exception of Tracey, who is a Morning Talk Show Host, the women are essentially doing the same job, but their titles differ. Deanna is called a “broadcaster” and Cheryl is a “Morning Traffic Reporter.” These titles are very general and not gender specific. However, Lara is called her station’s “Traffic Reporter/ Traffic Babe⁹.”

Salary - In all cases, the women feel they are being paid less than what a man employed by their station would make. Tracey, who is a co-host, felt that it was fair for her co-host to make more money than she does because she hasn’t been in radio very long. She pointed out, “The guy that I work with has been working on radio for like 20 years, so

⁸ Cheryl is required to work on Saturdays by the service. She also works as a jock for the same station on Sundays to make extra money.

⁹ Lara stated that this is her title, and she is listed as “Traffic Babe” on the station’s website.

he obviously makes more money than me, and he was the one who brought me to [this city].”

Both females working for the services said they get paid much less than the deejays who work directly for the radio stations. Deanna said, “They make so much more money than me, it’s unbelievable. ... The two guys that are the top guys, they make really great money.” Cheryl said, “It is very maddening. We don’t get as much money as we should be paid.” She mentioned that at one of her previous jobs at a radio station, she did all the work, yet the hosts of the show were paid significantly more money than she was.

Lara said emphatically that she gets paid much less than the deejays. In fact, she said she cannot live on her salary and has to work a second job, where she works less hours but is paid more.

Deanna said that her salary is comparable to the males working for the service: “If we’re talking about the males that I work with within my company, yeah, it would be comparable ... really it doesn’t matter between male and female what people make.”

Outside Promotions - Only two of the four females do outside promotions. Tracey has the “added advantage” of being a comic, so she is requested and often does “stand up on the weekends.”

Lara said that while she does outside promotions for the station, there are restrictions on the kind of promotions she can do. “They (management) figure me to be an intelligent, good-looking traffic reporter, and because I am a reporter, especially with traffic, they don’t allow me to do any promotions that are sponsored by an alcohol company,” she explained. She said she is not allowed to do events that would be inconsistent with her image as a reporter.

All four said they would get paid the same as a male would for doing the promotions. Cheryl, who does not currently do any paid promotions because she works for a service, said that when she did them, “I was never underpaid what a guy made.”

Career advancement - While all four women are in top markets in the top time slot, none of them are in charge of the morning show. However, they hold differing views concerning their options for career advancement. Tracey feels that there is ample opportunity for advancement. She said, “If you’re doing your job and you’re doing a great job, and you really prove yourself, then sure, you could move up just like the guys.”

Deanna said she doesn't really think there's opportunity for a woman deejay in her market. Cheryl also said that she doesn't think "a woman has great opportunity for career advancement being a jock on a rock station."

Lara feels she has more opportunities for career advancement than a man would – she has had what she terms "a ton of offers" because she is a "good-looking woman."

How the women feel they are viewed and treated

Career opportunities for women in radio is just one aspect of their roles and treatment. How the women feel they are viewed and treated is another important area, and it is best discovered at the intersection between how they believe they are viewed by management, the deejays, and the listening public.

By management - Lara acknowledged that management treats her differently from the males she works with, but she is not sure why. "I don't know if it's just because I'm new, or maybe it's just because I have a very sweet and innocent exterior, but I think that they're much tougher on the guys. ... When management wants to criticize me, he takes me aside, he'll close the door, he puts on the kid gloves." In addition, management puts more restrictions on her, in what she can say or do and how she can act, and which events she is allowed to be part of, but she said that is because she is a reporter, not because she is a woman.

Lara also said that when she first started working for the station she was "exploited" by them. "They would make me use that sexy voice and they would say on the air what I was wearing, or they would purposefully draw the conversation so it would have sexual undertones." However, she said it alienated some female listeners, so now "what they want to do is make me look and sound as cool as possible and like anyone would want to meet me, but still sound responsible like a reporter should and not offend anyone."

Tracey said that management does not treat her differently and that she feels very equal to her male partner. She added that management views her and her partner in the same light, as equally responsible to bring in ratings and revenue.

Deanna and Cheryl agreed that the managements at the services did not treat them any differently from the males working for the services. Deanna feels that she hasn't been treated differently in a negative way, and that it's nice to be the only female on a morning show with three males.

Cheryl said that she is not being treated differently by her current management because she is a woman, but has been in situations where she was treated differently. She said that there have been instances when the importance of her job was lessened just because she is a woman, but could not give any specific examples.

By the male deejays - In all four instances, the women agreed that the male deejays are the ones with the most power. Deanna said she thinks that the male host “genuinely likes the other women” who work for the station. Lara, who is a traffic reporter, said that the male deejays love her because she’s perceived as everyone’s sister, but that they hate the one female deejay on the station because “she’s a bitch. She’s really hard and brassy and she thinks she’s the shit.”

The other two females said that the male deejays treat them with respect. “They treat me just like one of the guys,” said Tracey.

By the listening public - Each female is perceived very differently by their listening public. Deanna said she is viewed as an “everyman” and that the public has responded to her jokes and brevity. Tracey said she is viewed as “someone who doesn’t take shit” because she can “stick up to” her partner and not be overpowered. Cheryl feels that she is characterized as the “likable little sister.” She noted, “I know that I’ve had listeners who’ve followed me from frequency to frequency.”

Lara said she is seen as “a sex object with a brain” and gets “hundreds of e-mails a week for dates.”

The roles women play in radio

According to these four women, females in radio tend to be pigeonholed into one stereotype or another.

Lara said that men in the business generally have to be very knowledgeable about the music, but that they could have any persona. However, she felt that females had to be a certain type: “Either really knowledgeable and almost like a guy, like it could be anyone’s sister or next door neighbor that drinks a lot, listens to rock and roll, wears tattoos and rides a Harley, or it’s that really good-looking babe that you just want to drool over, the one that you always see in Playboy that you’ll NEVER get, but it’s just nice to know they’re there.”

Cheryl agreed, and said “Women [in radio] are the single chick, who’s totally wild and crazy and will do anything.”

The women indicated that the roles for men are very different than the roles for women. Tracey said, "a lot of the women that I've heard in radio are kind of arm pieces to the men that they work with." Cheryl said, "I don't think women get as much of a shot as guys do. ... They feel that we are easier to be intimidated." She added that a station would put a woman on the air during the midday shift, but never as the main person on the morning or afternoon drive. Deanna agreed, and added, "they want a man in the morning and in the afternoon, and they want a woman for midday." For traffic, she said a station wants a female for the morning and afternoon drives.

The woman's role is also to be smart and have an opinion, according to Cheryl and Tracey.

The actual positions

All four women said that their job is to gather information, stay informed, and make sure they deliver the information in a way the listener wants to hear and can understand.

Job tasks and responsibilities - The women were varied in their responses to the question of whether their job tasks were the same as the male deejays'. Cheryl and Tracey said it was the same - everyone gathers the information and then presents it.

Lara said her job is much easier than that of the male deejays. "The other people ... they sometimes get there hours before their shift to prepare for their shift. I can literally walk in ten minutes before my shift begins and be ready to go ... whereas these guys gotta come up with something new and exciting and different to say every time that mike goes on, and I don't have to."

Because she works for a service, Deanna said she works much harder than deejays who work directly for a station because she is physically on the air for much more time than they are. She added that if she worked directly for a station doing traffic, she feels the male deejay "would definitely have more pressure, more responsibility, more stress involved, and more work" because he would be responsible for doing the entire show for four hours, while she would just be responsible for delivering the traffic report once or twice an hour.

Stress - Three of the four women feel that their jobs are stressful. Only Tracey, the co-host, did not feel her job was stressful. "It's not stressful to come into work every day and to talk about what's going on with the world. To me, it's like sitting down and having a good conversation," she said. Lara said her job was stressful only at times when

management was putting pressure on everyone to do a good job and bring in ratings.

Both Cheryl and Deanna feel the job is stressful because the radio business is very competitive and women are easy to replace. “This has sorta happened to me three times in the past three years – you go on vacation and you come back and you don’t have a job,” said Cheryl. “I am watching my back,” said Deanna. “You just never know. You can be let go in a second, and the next person’s in line for your job.” In addition, the job is stressful to her because “something always goes wrong,” such as a mike or a computer not working, and she does the traffic and news for so many stations “without a breather.”

How they look

Three of the women say the way they look has not affected their career in radio. Deanna said that she would not let the station put a picture of her on the website because she “would rather be anonymous.”

“The cool thing is that being – it’s weird to say – but being on the radio, it doesn’t matter too much [what you look like],” said Cheryl. She added, “I’m sure, if I was a size five, that wouldn’t hurt.”

Lara was hired specifically because she is attractive. “One of main reasons I got the job was because of the way I looked. They were looking for somebody who was attractive. It was hard to find somebody who was attractive, intelligent, and had a nice voice.”

Broadcast Services

Two of the four women are employed by broadcast services rather than by a station. The services provide traffic, news and sports for a number of stations in the area.

According to Cheryl, “even big major market radio stations are having traffic services do their news.” She said that these services are filling a need for radio stations because of corporate cutbacks. “The reason why we’re employed is because not only does it make sense that one company just gathers all the information, but it makes sense for one company to ... have one reporter who can do that job on five radio stations for morning drive.” The problem, she feels, is that since women generally fill traffic spots, and services can use one woman to do the job for several radio stations, it reduces the number of jobs available to women. She also feels it compounds the problem for women in radio

because if working for a service is “the only way that a woman is gonna be able to get a job [in radio], there is no way that we’re gonna make money, because these companies don’t pay shit.” She said that stations are using the services as an excuse to reduce the number of on-staff positions and as a way to save money in the form of salaries and benefits.

Deanna agreed, and said that people who work in the radio business would much rather work for a station than for a service. “The pay scale for the lowest rung on the union scale is almost double what you make at [the service],” she said. She also stated that the station wants to have her actually on site, but doesn’t because then she would have to be paid union wages.

The services are also perpetuating a kind of dishonesty to radio listeners. Deanna pointed out that the listener does not know that she is not employed by the station. She said: “The [listener] thinks I’m right there in the room with [the host]. ... And we want them to believe that. [The host will] make comments like ‘Oh, what are you giving me that look for?’ and we’re 12 miles away and we can’t see each other. And I’ll say, ‘What look? What look am I giving you?’ I don’t even know!” She feels the show loses something that way: it would be better and more fun if she could be in the same room with the person she’s interacting with, she explained.

Key Phrases

Some common themes ran through the answers to the interview questions. The phrases included in this discussion were used by at least two of the four women; in most instances they were used by at least three of them.

Bitch - The word bitch was used by two of the women to explain what they are called when they stand up for themselves. Cheryl repeatedly mentioned this. She said that in situations where she should stick up for herself, and in fact has “every right to,” “somehow it’s gonna come back and bite me.” It is acceptable for a male to stick up for himself, but when a female does it, she’s considered a bitch. She also said, “If you are too strong of a personality, or too strong of a character, ... you’re risking being called a bitch.”

Lara called the one other female at the station, whom she does not work with, a bitch, because that is the reputation that female has with the male deejays at the station. This reporter, who just started at the station in November, also said that everyone likes her because they don’t yet know how much of a bitch she can be.

Boy's Club/Man's World - Three out of the four women indicated that radio is a "boy's club" or a "man's world".¹⁰ Deanna and Cheryl specifically used the phrase "boy's club", while Lara used the phrase "man's world."

Cheryl, who has the most experience in radio, used the phrase the most often. She indicated that the boy's club is very much alive and that females in radio have to compete in that environment. She said, "It is a boy's club. And it's still extremely hard to break that barrier."

Deanna used the phrase to indicate that management liked to include women's voices on the air. She said it otherwise "just doesn't sound right, it's like the boy's club."

Lara said that rock 'n' roll and the radio business, which she feels is an extension of rock 'n' roll, is a man's world, and that it forces women who want to be in that world to "either act like a man or be something that a man would lust over to really get attention in this business."

Luck/Fortune - The same three women indicated that making it in the business is all about luck. As Deanna put it, "As far as I'm concerned, not to be crude, but it's kind of a crap shoot." She said that while she "pounded the pavement" and "paid her dues," she also "fell into something and there was a lot of luck involved too."

Lara admitted that she was "lucky" and that the position just fell into her lap; she was not looking for it. Cheryl also indicated that some luck was involved.

Ratings - Two of the women said that ratings are very important. Tracey said "it's all about ratings" and that she and her co-host are held equally responsible for keeping the ratings up. Cheryl mentioned that female on-air personalities in particular have to prove themselves with the ratings.

Voice/Personality - They all agreed that an on-air talent's voice and personality, whether male or female, was very important in the radio business.

Deanna spoke the most about both. She said that on-air staff are generally hired based on the strength of their voice and what they actually sound like: "You either have the voice or you don't have the voice, and it doesn't matter about experience." She added, "a station either wants a man's voice or a woman's voice. That's it." She also indicated that although the broadcast services might be more egalitarian when it comes to hiring male and

¹⁰ The female who did not mention it has the least amount of experience in radio.

female talent, “their hands are tied also. If someone wants a man, they want a man. ... The radio station gets what the radio station wants.”

Lara agreed. She said, “I think they’re just looking for somebody who has an interesting personality that they think their listening audience would want to listen to.”

Howard Stern/Robin Quivers - All but one of the women mentioned talk show celebrity Howard Stern and his on-air assistant, Robin Quivers, in their interviews. Tracey stated, “I don’t know if sometime in Robin’s life she’s ever gonna want to be the top banana on the show, and go and have her own show. I doubt it very much. I think that she really loves what her place is with Howard. And I couldn’t imagine her ever leaving to do her own thing. I think that if she wanted to, she most certainly could.”

Deanna mentioned the pair when she said that most females are sidekicks to a male lead. Cheryl said that women will never make as much money as men unless they’re in syndication, and that even that arena is dominated by a male: Howard Stern.

Discussion

The literature on women’s roles in society, and the sparse literature on women in radio, seem to be supported by the answers to these interviews. Three out of the four women are in positions that are less prestigious and with lower salaries. While three of the women said their looks had not affected their careers, Lara was hired specifically because she is an attractive female. The women also feel they are not allowed to display “masculine” traits, such as assertiveness, or they risk being labeled a bitch. They are all providing information to their listeners while following a male lead.

While these remarks are not necessarily generalizable to the entire population of female on-air personalities across all markets and formats, they do give some indications of the status of women in radio. For instance, the stereotypes of women in radio mentioned in the literature were echoed by the on-air personalities, from the focus on sexiness to the comments about the on-air females who are “trashy biker babes.”

In all cases, the women are in positions inferior to the men and are being paid less than the men they work with at the stations. The traffic reporters have even less power than sidekicks, especially in the case of the two women who work for traffic service organizations. While they may be contributing more than just traffic to the show in the form of jokes and

banter, they are not physically at the station, nor do they hold any true power over their jobs or how the morning shows are presented. Their roles are to provide the traffic and then move on to the next station, and then the next, and then the next. In addition, only women on-air personalities work for the services – all the male morning personalities work directly for the station.

By interviewing women in the top slots in the top markets, it was expected that these shows would be more progressive and more given to equality in salaries and job duties than shows in smaller markets. However, this study does not look at smaller markets and cannot say for sure whether or not the smaller markets are less egalitarian.

In addition, it did not appear that these shows were progressive or given to equality. With the exception of the co-host, all the women had negative comments about working in radio. The women make less money and are in lesser positions than the males they work with on the morning shows. With the exception of Tracey, the women also work harder and longer than the males. Even Lara, who said that her job is very easy, works two shifts instead of just one.

Thus, women are not faring very well in this male-dominated environment. And while none of them specifically said that they were a victim of gender discrimination, as a group they are making less money, are less likely than the men on their shows to be employed by the stations, and do not have the same opportunities for outside promotion work (another way to make more money), or for career advancement.

Conclusion

This pilot study is merely a step toward including women in radio studies. Because academia in general, across disciplines, has ignored the roles of females in radio, the area is ripe for future research. Quantitative studies could look at the number of men versus women in various job titles, and compare salaries earned by men and women. Another study could look at the number of females with multiple job titles versus the number of males. It would also be useful to compare smaller markets with the top markets.

Other research suggested by the findings of this study could look at the proliferation of broadcast services and explore the role of women within such services.

Studies such as these are necessary to document the status of women in radio.

Without this information, it is impossible to know the extent of the gains made by women in radio, as well as what changes must be made for women to achieve real equality on the air.