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Research Paper

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»Radio women in queer jobs«

The construction of women broadcasters in the American trade magazine *Broadcasting* 1931-1939

***Abstract*: For more than 90 years, the magazine *Broadcasting* (now titled *Broadcasting & Cable*) has been one of the most influential trade publications for American radio. A qualitative textual analysis of its coverage between 1931 and 1939, when radio became commercialized, found that the magazine rarely mentioned women working in radio production and management. Women who had such roles were framed as outliers. A quantitative analysis of the magazine's column »We pay our respects to« shows *Broadcasting* honored only seven women in its 194 columns during the 1930s, or 3.6 percent. Analysis of the column through 1998 shows that the number of women honorees in this column increased appreciably after the 1970s, though not rising above 11 percent of mentions until the 1990s. The author argues that *Broadcasting's* coverage of women broadcasters not only reveals the solidification of a gendered industry but that the magazine actively contributed to it – with lingering effects. To this day, the Federal Communication Commission (FCC) and the Radio Television Digital News Association (RTDNA) consider women in broadcasting a minority. This study provides insights into the intersection of culture and technology when new media emerge; these are particularly relevant for exploring the meaning of the internet for women.**

American radio trade press: A puzzle piece in women's experiences in a new medium

Ongoing contemporary discussions about how the internet serves women might benefit from a look into the past, when radio emerged in the United States and its

use was negotiated and institutionalized. This new medium had started out flexible, with disruptive potential, but soon solidified into the rigidity of a gendered institution. In the mid- to late 1920s radio started to become commercialized: Advertisers' influence increased; they established a firm grip on radio in the mid-1930s, turning it into a business (HILMES 1997).

As radio took off as a new industry during the 1930s, trade publications captured how this industry handled itself, mostly focusing on how to produce programs that would generate profits. Some early publications, such as *Radio Broadcast*, lasted only for a few years. Published by Sol Taishoff and Michael Codel, *Broadcasting* has been »perhaps the most influential of radio industry trade magazines« (STERLING 2004: 1411). It is most likely also the longest running broadcast-related trade publication in the U.S. with more than 90 years of continuous issues since its first issue on October 15, 1931 (after several name changes it is now known as *Broadcasting+Cable*) (HENRY, n.d). In the 1930s, the magazine published about 80 pages every other week, including feature stories, announcements on personnel, advertisement for new stations and programs, notes on the 1934 newly established Federal Communication Commission (FCC), news about technology and regulations, and classifieds – anything concerning the new industry and its use of the airwaves.

As the industry's foremost trade publication, *Broadcasting* provides evidence of both, how it negotiated the image of radio among employees in this new business and how the radio industry constructed the idea of women working in it. This is especially important as women producers have been »a category of person we are led by our history books to believe does not exist« (HILMES 1997: 30; see also SIMON 2007). This study focuses on the construction of women in the magazine's articles between 1931, when *Broadcasting* was founded, and 1939, when World War I changed the industry. To broaden the scope over the twentieth century, the study also includes a quantitative analysis of the magazine's column »We pay our respects to« between 1931 and 1998, the period of availability for the column in a database created by Michael Henry, Research Specialist at the Library of American Broadcasting at the University of Maryland.

An un-gendered space? Women and early radio

American women's remarkable push to conquer the public sphere on the ether is better understood by examining the role assigned to women in respect to technology at the end of the nineteenth century in the U.S., when technologies based on the discovery of electricity developed. For a »good« woman, technical ignorance was a virtue: it insured men the role as protecting women from practical problems and from precisely the same society-induced ignorance of technical

knowledge. Women's use of the telegraph or telephone was perceived as wasted time, given assumptions that women chatted on unimportant topics, whereas men's use of the same tools was perceived as efficient business talk: Women were seen as »parasitic consumers of men's labor« (MARVIN 1988: 24). The double-standard for the use of the telephone foreshadowed the struggle for women on the radio: »What had begun as a playful, often rather feminist engagement with the new technology, had given way to masculinist fantasy accompanied by moral panic over unregulated female expression« (SCHÖBERLEIN 2018: 14).

Johnson's (2000) analysis of postbellum etiquette manuals highlights the values idealized for white middle-class women after the American Civil War:

> »Capturing the deep cultural longing of the postbellum period for the icon of the American woman as angel of the hearth, this portrait deifies the quiet woman and demonizes the other possibilities: the enthusiastic woman, the talkative woman, the brilliant woman, and the babbling woman. The mild and mellow queen of the ›Court of Silence‹ is graceful, calm, and most important of all, silent. [...] By worshiping ›the quiet woman,‹ influential proponents of public opinions such as *The Ladies' Repository* reinscribed for a postbellum readership a definition of true womanhood that equated silence with feminine virtue and enthusiastic volatility with its opposite« (221).

The behavior of women, including outward rhetorical deportment, was seen as linked to their inner self: »character and the nature of one's rhetoric are mutually revealing« (JOHNSON 200: 222). Her voice stood for her character and looks (SCHÖBERLEIN 2018).

Early radio magazines reflected how a new un-gendered technology, and its public space beyond physical boundaries in the form of free airwaves that anyone could use, presented a threat to binary boundaries of public vs. private, active vs. passive, men's roles vs. woman's roles. Between 1922 and 1924 several included articles, cartoons, and pictures that played with gender interpretations of radio and portraying women operating the new technology competently (BUTSCH 1998): »The brief effort to re-gender radio technology was more disturbing, part of the discourse questioning past gender order and exploring new arrangements« (560). But soon radio magazines followed the new industry's effort to shift a framing of radio away from an exciting new technology toward a piece of furniture in living rooms and entertainment consumed at home:

> »Assertations of women mastering radio technology on an equal footing with men had faded. With that fading the traditional images of domesticity and romance reappeared. Women could use radio, but radio was now a domesticated appliance, not new and exciting technology had just been a few short years before.« (BUTSCH 1998: 569)

But women and girls liked the wireless for the same reasons men and boys did: the romance of invention and the possibility to communicate across time and space. Using Morse code before voice transmission was developed, the wireless provided an anonymous un-gendered space (HILMES 2007). Girls and women

used it to experiment to receive signals: For instance, Abbye White won third place in a set-building contest sponsored by the early trade magazine *Radio Broadcast* for her original design to receive signals on five different circuits, and her entry stated: »Rather fearfully I enter into your contest, for I do not know if we of the fair sex are allowed in or not. But your rules say nothing against it – so here I am« (quoted in HILMES 1997: 133).

At least a few women worked as professional wireless operators, although no exact numbers are available (HILMES 2007; HALPER 2001). Before World War I, women found jobs as wireless operators in New York City department stores. With the U.S. entering the war, hundreds of women operators trained men to use wireless communication at sea (HILMES 1997) and served the miliary as wireless operators themselves, several rising to the rank of captain (HALPER 2001). And American amateur radio flourished from radio's beginnings in the late 19th century until in April 1917, when the United States declared war against Germany and forbade its use. Women built radio sets, enjoying operating ham radio as a hobby (HILMES 1997). Despite war time restrictions on amateur radio as public two-way communication, many amateurs continued, over 10,000 licensed ham operators existed in the U.S. by 1921, over 46,000 by 1934 (HILMES 2007). Yet, the U.S. government and Navy did not allow women to get advanced technical training or to operate ship-to-shore stations; and, despite women's participation in amateur radio, it was mostly perceived as a boy's hobby (HILMES 1997).

Print media at the time used young men to present the new hobby (DOUGLAS 1987). »The ›boy engineer,‹ resourceful, innovative, and clever, quickly became a familiar character in books ... as well as in magazines. [...] [G]irls, if portrayed at all, were typically shown watching in as brother and father build something« (HALPER 2001: 11). In turn, early radio history mostly omitted or underemphasized the contributions of women to the development of radio. For instance, Annie Jameson was crucially responsible for getting her son Guglielmo Marconi into the physics classes of Professor Auguste Righi, who introduced Marconi to the works of Heinrich Hertz, and then helped him set up a home laboratory, acted as his mentor, insisted he learn English fluently, and discussed the progress of his »tinkering« (DOUGLAS 1987: 16). Another example of a woman's work being ignored was the early work on voice transmission of Nora Stanton Blatch, the first woman to receive a civil engineering degree from Cornell University, who was also a suffragist. Later she collaborated with her husband Lee De Forest. Her mother, Harriet Stanton Blatch, financed his technical tests of the radiophone (DOUGLAS 1987), and was major a suffragist and daughter of suffrage leader Elizabeth Cady Stanton. Similarly, Sybil Herrold experimented with broadcasting together with her husband already in 1909 (HYDE 2008: 389). And, Donna Halper (2001) laments the omission from histories of broadcasting of Eunice

Randall, an engineer, licensed ham operator, and the first woman announcer in New England radio.

As the U.S. Constitutional amendment enfranchising women at the federal level was debated around the turn of the century, women's defiance of traditional gender roles contributed to social anxiety that extended into broadcasting (HILMES 1997). The decades-long women's suffrage movement had brought women's voices into the public sphere and the ratification of the Nineteenth Amendment in 1920 was a seminal event:

> »Many of the assumptions on which our nation was founded – the separation of public and private spheres, the gendering of labor, the control of reproduction, the ownership of economic assets, ideas about men's and women's essential differences – were thrown into disarray by the very idea of women exercising their opinions in the public space of politics. To admit women to the polling booths was not a mere Progressive reform; it opened the door to the idea that beliefs underlying many aspects of American life might need to be reconsidered.« (HILMES 2007: 19)

In this context, women's voices on radio as a new medium furthered the challenge to a separation and gendering of space: public for men and private for women. Radio became a canvas for a continued debate of the role of women in American society, providing women's voices a »new public life« (HILMES 2007: 20).

The initial opportunities for women in radio as a new genderless medium, where everyone at a station had to do what was needed to keep it going, included women reading news headlines (HALPER 2001: 7). But such possibilities were narrowed down with commercial radio establishing itself: between 1920 and 1945, women producers were primarily funneled into woman's programs (CHAMBERS/STEINER/FLEMING 2005). Only because in its beginning radio was not viewed as sufficiently profitable, business owners interested in the new technology allowed some women to build programs suited to their talents (O'DELL 2005; HILMES 1997). »[I]f a particular written work was good, the matter of gender was a non-issue« in the pioneering days of radio (O'DELL 2005: 2). Except for talk programs, everything else needed lots of writing and »women could write their way into the important positions within the industry« (O'DELL 2005: 2). Similarly, Halper (2001) argued early radio provided chances for »anyone, male or female, who had a good idea« to fill the hours (17). At the same time, practical considerations shaped these chances: »It was not because radio was inherently egalitarian that the new medium welcomed female participation. ... Early stations had small budgets with which to pay for talent«; women (and men) were asked to perform for free (HALPER 2001: 13). As radio became increasingly commercial starting in the mid-1920s, and even more so during the Depression (HALPER 2001: 59), fewer women made it into higher positions, which became better paid, and pay discrimination against women was rampant (HOSLEY/YAMADA 1987). When women

made it into positions with authority, they were framed as outliers in radio industry discourse, as the following analysis of coverage in *Broadcasting* between 1931 and 1939 demonstrates.

Who is who? *Broadcasting* honorees in »We pay our respects to«

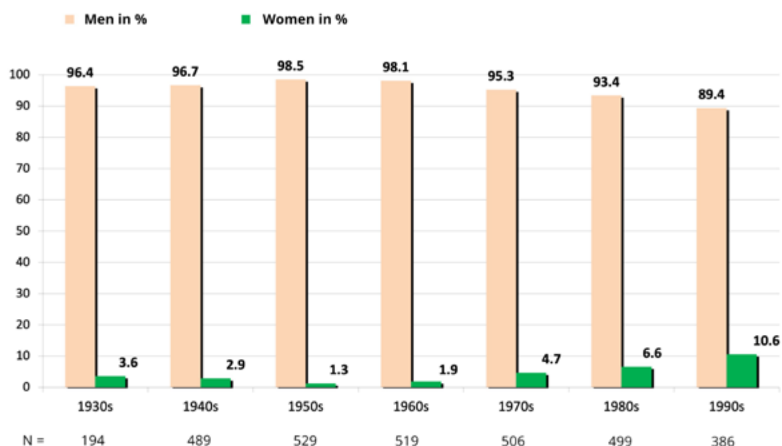
Since its first issue on October 15, 1931, *Broadcasting* has included a column titled »We pay our respects to,« (later named »Fifth Estater«) about a person in the radio industry; a large photo accompanies each short biography. Between October 15, 1931 and November 23, 1998, a total of 3,118 columns were published, based on a database compiled by Michael Henry, Research Specialist at the Library of American Broadcasting at the University of Maryland. Analyzing this column provides insights into the positions and visibility of women in the radio industry over time.

Between 1931 and 1939 *Broadcasting* honored seven women in 194 columns, or 3.6 percent. It took the magazine almost two and a half years before it paid respects to a woman for the first time: in the issue of February 15, 1934 it honored Margaret Elisabeth Jessup, a radio executive for the advertising company McCann-Erickson. In 1935 and 1936, it again featured one woman per year: Anne Schumacher Ashenhurst, vice president of Blackett-Sample-Hummert Inc., »one of the most important leaders in broadcast advertising« (*Broadcasting* Apr. 1, 1935: 31), and Helen Wilkie Wing, director of radio for the advertising agency Needham, Louis & Brorby Inc. in Chicago. In 1937 it featured Bertha Brainard, commercial manager of NBC and Regina Schuebel, radio director of Biow Co. advertising agency, in 1938 Anne Director, time buyer for advertiser J. Walter Thompson Co., and Hyla Kiczales, general manager of International Broadcasting Corporation operating WOV, »one of the country's leading foreign-language stations« (*Broadcasting* Oct. 15, 1938: 41).

In the following three decades *Broadcasting* celebrated even fewer women in this series (Figure 1), reaching its lowest point in the 1950s with only 1.3 percent. Perhaps coincidentally, during the Second Wave in the 1970s, the percentage increased again, to 4.7 percent, and rising to 6.6 percent in the 1980s and 10.6 percent in the 1990s. Surprisingly, the 1940s, which included the World War II years for the United States, yielded fewer women honorees despite more women getting opportunities due to the absence of men who had to fight (HALPER 2001). This was perhaps owed to a new column, »Meet the Ladies,« which ran from 1939 to 1945. Its headline was decorated with the sketch of a gentleman bowing and taking off his hat in a gesture for introduction. Its first honoree was Edythe Fern Melrose, commercial manager of WJW, Akron, OH starting in December 1938 (*Broadcasting* July 15, 1939). For the scope of this study, however, this column could not be included but would certainly merit a detailed analysis. Its creation showed

a further ghettoization of women, called »ladies«, who are set apart from the regular industry column »We pay our respects to.«

Figure 1
Percentage of women honorees in »We Pay our Respects« between Oct. 15, 1931 and Nov. 23, 1998 in *Broadcasting*.



Percentages do not necessarily add to 100% per decade due to rounding and columns that featured a non-gendered entity such as groups. N = 3,118

Most notably, five of the seven women featured in the 1930s worked for advertising companies, the main underwriters of programming in radio at the time; two worked for stations directly. Only one was a general manager. Crucially, none of them were announcers, program hosts, or news reporters.

Women at the top? The juxtaposition of gender and leadership

For the qualitative textual analysis part, all 197 *Broadcasting* issues of the 1930s were analyzed, starting with Oct. 15, 1931, the first issue, up to the end of 1939, when World War II changed the industry, either as the print version in the Library of American Broadcasting at the University of Maryland or as a digital copy in the extensive archive on davidgleason.com.

Most notably in the 1930s, *Broadcasting* introduced its only longer report on the state of women broadcasters in nine years with a compliment wrapped in a warning: »Deadlier than the male may be the female of the species – but they do

make good radio station managers, we are told on competent authority« (*Broadcasting* July 1, 1936: 82). The caption of the feature's collage of seven photos read »Feminine side of radio.« The text included markers such as »lady,« »fair,« or »woman,« making it obvious *Broadcasting* understood radio's default modus to be un-feminine and associated with men.

In 1936, *Broadcasting* added »Managing Miss. Virginia Lowrey Directing KIUL, Garden City,« KS, to its count of women station managers, and half a year later, under the heading »lady manager,« Vernice Boulainne of KVI, Tacoma, WA (*Broadcasting* June 15, 1937). *Broadcasting* always rhetorically marked women as women, constructing them to be notably different than the »regular« station managers, which *Broadcasting* constructed and understood to be a (white) man, but who were not labeled as »man managers« or »gentleman manager.« The Northern states in which these women worked indicate where they could find more favorable conditions: Vermont, New York, New Jersey via Ohio, Illinois, Wisconsin, and Montana, to Washington, Oregon, and Alaska. The only state touching the Southern half was Nevada.

Two of the first women in American radio to manage to attain the rare position of station manager were Judith Waller for WMAQ, Chicago, in 1922, and Gwen Wagner for WOP, Memphis, TN, who in 1921 not only served as station manager but also as writer, announcer, program director, and talent scout for the then two-hour evening program (HILMES 1997). Before 1927, when the Radio Act allocated frequencies, most American stations were not broadcasting continuously but only for several hours throughout the day and evening with a mix of programs. Women still had the opportunity to work in all roles (HALPER 2001). Fifteen years later, *Broadcasting* (July 1, 1936) counted among the station managers of the 630 stations operating at the time in the U.S. 13 women or two percent, based on a survey for its 1936 yearbook (and acknowledging that there might be a few more). Several women, *Broadcasting* noted in the article, also owned their station, but named only »Mrs. W. J. Virgin« as owner and manager of KMED in Medford, OR. A year later it reported Ruth Goggins, third wife of President Franklin D. Roosevelt's second son Elliott, gaining stock control over KFJZ, Fort Worth, TX. (*Broadcasting* July 1 1937).

Characterizing these station managers, *Broadcasting* wrote: »Most of them are married, and happily, according to our reports« (July 1, 1936: 82). The magazine emphasized their »womanliness« despite their perceived odd work, constructing them along traditional gender roles at that time, and happy with their husband, family, and home. The juxtaposition of gender roles in nineteenth century ideology still rang true: »Woman could not achieve success in public life because they could not embody masculinity except in the perverse sense« (JOHNSON 2000: 223). Emphasizing their marital status continued to tether them to the domestic space. *Broadcasting* summarized, without concrete numbers, the token women

able to continue to work in radio production in the 1930s, albeit restricted to certain roles:

> There are, of course, quite a few women commercial managers – and mighty good sales executive they are, too, we are told. And there are even more women program directors but only a handful of regular announcers are females for the peculiar reason that, except for specialty programs, they don't seem to click with the American audiences as they do in Europe« (*Broadcasting* July 1, 1936: 82).

Broadcasting (May 1, 1938) went on to highlight some of them, featuring Bonnie Scotland, »the beauteous Scotch lass« (32), the commercial manager of KIDO, Boise, ID and »one of the few women holding such a post in broadcasting« (32). A year later, *Broadcasting* marked the start of Edythe Fern Melrose as commercial manager at WJW, Akron, OH in December 1938: »[W]ithin a few months she increased the station's business to profitable proportions. Now she is station manager, one of the best known in the broadcasting field« (*Broadcasting* July 15, 1939). Probably the most well-known commercial manager (because she worked for NBC) was Bertha Brainard. First announcing for WJZ in 1922, rising to become its first program director and then station manager, Brainard was one of the few women executives who was not assigned to women's programs (HILMES 1997). *Broadcasting's* »We pay our respects to« column honored her 15th anniversary in radio in a way that cast her as a perplexing exception in transcending typically constructed gender roles at the time:

> »[I]t's a man-sized job to manage the commercial program department of NBC. Miss Brainard is five feet two, and intensely feminine. But in business she's neither woman nor man; she's a competent executive who has come up the ladder in and with radio. Miss Brainard's ability to think quickly and calmly under the fire of modern business is one of her best assets. With that, there's judgment, authority, responsibility, the capacity and the willingness to make decisions and to carry them through. These qualities are, of course, supposed to be typically masculine. Yet she has them – and in her, they're not masculine; they're Miss Brainard in action« (*Broadcasting* Sept. 1, 1937: 45).

Brainard was one of only seven women honorees of the 194 columns titled »We pay our respects to« published in the 1930s. It took *Broadcasting* almost seven years to feature her: The magazine also had marked her with a big photo when Brainard was selected for the »12 most successful young business women« of the Sales Executive Club on June 29, 1935 (*Broadcasting* July, 15, 1935). The magazine praised her for creating high standards in radio and detailed her upbringing as a daughter of a newspaper man and her career. According to the magazine, after training to be a teacher, traveling the world, driving an ambulance, and managing a resort hotel she took a job at the *Daily News Record*, a dress industry trade paper. Listening to experimental WJZ on the newly assembled crystal radio in the evenings, »she was fascinated by its newness«: »Here, she thought, was something of the future, something which was bound to grow and develop; here

was a great entertainment medium and here was the career she was seeking« (*Broadcasting* Sept. 1, 1937: 45). She convinced Broadway stars to step up to the microphone and to write scripts for her first series *Broadcasting Broadway* (Radio Broadcasting, Sept. 1, 1937). Apart from a short biography that noted her father's influence, the magazine focused on juxtaposing her gender with her radio jobs, describing her as »intensely feminine,« but also describing her as »in action,« an »authority,« but ultimately in business »neither woman nor man.« *Broadcasting* literally grasped for language to make sense of her, a woman *and* leader in radio *outside* woman's magazines.

A question of voice? Women as radio announcers

A debate over women's voices came to epitomize the immensely awkward status of women in radio news and the challenge to traditional gender roles. Already a prominent issue in the mid-1920s, women had been turned away for on-air assignments, conjuring up earlier fears when radio was still called wireless, and women first protruded into the public sphere (HILMES 1997). The 1930s debate revived notions of late nineteenth manuals instructing women to be quiet, to not assert themselves, and to »enjoy« the power of their voices solely in a domestic context while leaving voiced confidence outside the home to men (JOHNSON 2000). The debate specifically about the voices of women as radio announcers had started with a 1924 comment in the magazine *Radio Broadcast* and grew into a public debate about women's voices. (HILMES 1997). Between the early 1920s and 1930s the announcer was the most prominent position in radio, a celebrity leading from program to program. Whereas in the 1920s many women worked as announcers, in the 1930s when programs became more categorized, women could only be heard on woman's programs during the daytime and as artistic performers in the evening (HILMES 1997; HALPER 2001). A poll among station managers in 1924 (all men), initiated by *Radio Broadcast's* Jennie Irene Mix for her column »The Listener's point of view,« mostly yielded comments arguing against women working as announcers: The managers said women's voices had no distinct »personality« or »body,« were too »affected,« »stiff,« or »monotonous.« In 1926, WJZ, Chicago, polled 5,000 listeners leading to the same result: listeners preferred men's voices, although for different reasons. This time, poll participants said women's voices had too much »personality« and were too »individual,« »full of character,« and too »intimate.« Another argument led away from the idea of a problematic voice to a more general understanding that men were »naturally better fitted for the average assignment of the broadcast announcer« (quoted in HILMES 1997: 143) including in sports, shows, concerts, operas, and big public meetings, that is, in the public sphere. From no personality to too

much personality, women and women's voices had no chance to fit into the new understanding of radio announcing. What united both surveys' participants was the claim that not seeing a woman, only experiencing her as represented by her voice, lead to losing her otherwise existing appeal (HILMES 1997). Yet, in early radio days it did not matter what a woman looked like, as Halper (2001) argued, only that she was able to relate to the audience: »A warm personality, a sense of humor, and the ability to hold the listener's interest resulted in popularity« (7).

Simultaneously, the »aural experience« that voices could conjure up for listeners was held against women, even when they spoke with a lower voice and hence conformed more with a masculine connotation of voice (SILVERMAN 1988). This was perhaps best exemplified by the scandal surrounding singer and actor Mae West on December 12, 1937. Her performance of a skit on the radio, that had been performed before on air, was a widely discussed controversy, ultimately revealing a double standard: »West's femaleness made all the difference: the consternation aroused among the reform-minded had as much to do with the sex of the speaker as with the ribald content of her words« (MURRAY 2000, 4). As a result, West did not appear on radio for 15 years. In the wake of the scandal, *Broadcasting* dedicated a story to one of the reform organizations' leaders who had attacked performances such as West's. The chairwoman of the Women's National Radio Committee, which promoted »Christian values« and campaigned against alcohol commercials, was given space to mark the success of restricting programs that portrayed or implied »nonnormative gendered sexuality« by mid-1938 (MURRAY 2000: 271).

When women became announcers, *Broadcasting* highlighted it, again noting the rarity of the occasion: »Defying the taboo that has for years kept NBC Chicago announcing staff an exclusively male group, Martha Linn has stepped in and is now announcing *Tuneful Topics* on WMAQ and *A Musical Revue* on WENR« (*Broadcasting* Oct. 15, 1936: 42). The magazine also reflected the industry's awareness that such occasions were infrequent, reporting how on December 19, 1934 that NBC introduced its first woman announcer, Elsie Janis, in a special on-air ceremony, including a welcome by NBC officials, a mock audition, IQ test, and »gentle hazing by NBC announcers« (*Broadcasting* Jan. 1, 1935: 31). *Broadcasting* offered no critique of these harassing practices.

Evidence from *Broadcasting* indicates that audiences were not always unhappy about women's voices outside the narrow confine of woman's magazines. »First Lady in Radio Sports,« (14) ran a headline in 1934, covering how the brewery company Sunrise Beer hired Marge Wilson to announce sports on WHK, Cleveland, OH (*Broadcasting* May 1, 1934): »[T]here were more than the usual number of skeptics with their inhibitions. For after all – what could a *woman* know about things athletic?« (14, italics in original). The two-column feature detailed her background as a football coach's only daughter who »is not strictly a broadcasting anomaly. She really knows her sports« (14). The article noted that, younger

than 18, she had convinced her fans who »like her breezy style, her love for the underdog, keen wit and word-picture analysis« (14). Moreover, 80 percent of her fan mail was sent by men who initially were not »sold« on the idea of Wilson as a woman sports announcer (*Broadcasting* May 1, 1934). Similarly, in the issue of Aug. 1, 1937, *Broadcasting* described the positive response of baseball fans and listeners to an unplanned woman announcer for KFAB, Lincoln, NE: They »were so pleased with the performance of the first lady baseball announcer that they cabled, wired and wrote for more,« and the sponsor, General Mills, »approves the feminine angle, and has authorized a repeat broadcast« (63). A Feb. 1, 1939 article in *Broadcasting* indicated an overall tolerance developing toward women's voices in radio, exemplified by KVOO, Tulsa, OK, whose general manager W. B. Way reportedly said that »women's activities in radio are not confined to the model kitchens and the style sections.« He praised his increasing openness toward women's voices as a new approach:

> »We started what we believe is an innovation in the use of a woman's voice in various program activities, and as a result, have found a very favorable acceptance on the part of the listeners, who enjoy hearing a woman's voice occasionally on broadcasts where it was believed heretofore that only men's voices were acceptable.« (Quoted in *Broadcasting* Feb. 1, 1939: 55)

KVOO thus employed a woman news announcer, Dorothy McCune, on three programs during the week, although two of them were geared to women: *Facts for the Feminine Ear* and *Peggy Grey, Your Personal Shopper*. Only the news program *Between the Headlines* appeared to be an »innovative« setting for a woman's voice. McCune also announced special events such as election night and the dedication of a new memorial. Way reflected:

> »We have found the use of Miss McCune's voice on the air on special events pleases our listeners, especially the women listeners. ... We have found that her pleasing voice personality adds a long needed touch to some types of special events broadcasts, which have heretofore used only masculine, rapid-fire types of voices« (*Broadcasting* Feb. 1, 1939: 55).

Still, KVOO was one of few stations implementing such »innovations«; another one was WGY, Schenectady, NY, where Rosalind Greene was an announcer and »people liked [her voice] so much that she won several awards during 1920s« (HALPER 2001: 58-59). Italian American Lisa Sergio was also among these few women news announcers; the *New York Times* remarked on her beautiful voice and openly speculated on whether her example would open the microphone to other women announcers (SPAULDING 2005). *Broadcasting* also noted Sergio's stay in the U.S.: »A guest announcer of NBC. Famous European Announcer to Broadcast here.« Contrary to concerns over domestic women announcers, the article praised Sergio as the »Voice of 2RO,« her home station in Rome. During her guest appearance on NBC she announced the Robin Hood Dell Symphony concerts and a daily 15-minute newscast for European audiences (*Broadcasting* Aug. 1, 1937).

Hence, criticism of women's supposed »non-authoritative« voices rested mostly on stereotypes, despite an early discrimination built into the technology. The development of early recording equipment for the human voice was based on the recording the voices of men (LAWRENCE 1991). Early microphones distorted higher pitched voices, so women were advised to keep their voices in low- to mid-range to »sound good on the air« Halper (2001: 7). Yet, Halper also argued that the audience did not care as long as women announcers sounded »pleasant.« Articles in *Broadcasting* on enthusiastic fans and mixed surveys confirm this. Rather than the voice itself being a problem, men editors did not believe women journalists could cover the same topics as man journalists, such as politics and economics nor write in their style; women were accepted only to contribute a woman's angle, a different approach to journalism which later evolved into human-interest stories (CHAMBERS/STEINER/FLEMING 2004). The »quiet woman« of the nineteenth century still lingered on the mind of Americans: Women's audible expressiveness was constructed to be undesired on subjects for which men were constructed as authorities.

Where else do they (not) fit in? »Radio women in queer jobs«

As with executives and announcers, women working in other jobs outside women's programs in the 1930s were marked as exceptions in *Broadcasting*. Most exemplary is a feature story headlined: »Radio women in queer jobs. They sit at executive desks, cry like babies, bark with canine fidelity and wake you up« (*Broadcasting* March 15, 1936: 10). Among others, it featured – again – radio executive Bertha Brainard, director of NBC's commercial programs, NBC's director for children's programs Madge Tucker, and Helen Merchant of WINS, who announced the time for the *Musical Clock* in the morning. While two voice imitators, Madeline Pierce, for children's noises, and Elsie Mae Gordon, »whose forte is being a radio zoo all by herself« (10), might count among rare jobs within radio, other positions were not constructed as »queer« when a men wrote, directed, or cast a program, acquired talent, or announced the time and other items. Only by being done by woman the task was seen as queer.

Especially when technology was directly involved, the magazine intensified its juxtapositions of woman versus job. For instance, in 1936, *Broadcasting* featured a »pretty girl radio engineer« (March 1, 1936: 32), Eleanor Thomas, »a mathematical *genius for a girl*, excelling in the intricacies of wave lengths and kilocycles« (32, italics added). She had just graduated from college and worked as assistant engineer at W9XBY, Kansas City. At age 18 she was said to be the youngest woman to pass the »difficult FCC examinations for a first-class license« (32) and thus was allowed to operate any American broadcast station. *Broadcasting* introduced her

thusly: »Another field once dominated by man has been conquered by woman« (32). Already the previous year, *Broadcasting* had already invented an entirely new »species« to find words for a woman who worked as an engineer and was in control of technology, in a portrait of Barbara R. Sprague, »that rare species, a woman radio engineer« (*Broadcasting* July 1, 1935: 16). Similarly, titling »Feminine touch at controls. Little Miss Sprague, operator and announcer, puts in a busy life at KGIR, Butte,« *Broadcasting* noted her difficulties landing her first job »since no one wanted a girl operator« (16). When she finally found work at WKBS, Galesburg, IL, the station went bankrupt, and she had to fight to have her due wages paid to her. Afterwards she worked for two more stations, WPAD and KGIR. Because Sprague »sounds about 50 on air, she is not allowed to make public appearances due to her youth.« Her domestic skills were likewise noted: »being a good cook, she often feeds advertisers and prospects for her housekeeper's program.« But she had also been a licensed amateur operator running a ham station (*Broadcasting* July 1, 1935: 16). Yet, again *Broadcasting* rhetorically tokenized a woman with words such as »feminine touch« and »little Miss« to construct her gender as being at odds with her work, offering no critique of the idea of having to hide her youth or appearance.

A radio kingdom for the queen? On women's magazines on the radio

While all these jobs were portrayed to be in juxtaposition with the status of being a woman, woman's magazines became constructed as the domestic space allotted to women on air, with »[f]resh news, about women, straight from our U.P. wire; a gossipy Hollywood letter; the very latest styles and the people who are wearing them [...] And do those women like it! Here's an audience ready-made to carry your sales message« (*Broadcasting* Sept. 15, 1937: 22). Just as the postbellum American home was constructed to be the »kingdom of the queen« (JOHNSON 2000), radio programs about homemaking became the kingdom for the radio queens. Woman's programs were understood as program and commercials twisted together, targeting (white, middle-class) women with topics such as food, fashion, homemaking, shopping, and society gossip (*Broadcasting* July 1, 1939: 51). One woman's program director, Betty Parker of KYK's *Home Forum,* explained such programs were a »fertile field« for women working in radio advertising: »To offset the long hours and hard work in a radio studio there is the pleasure of being more or less your own boss. I report directly to no one person each day.... I come and go from the studio as I choose« (*Broadcasting* July 1, 1939: 52/53).

In a 1922 *Good Housekeeping* article Christine Frederick described radio as a solution to women's isolation, geographically and mentally, and in early 1920s programming geared toward women at home as a distinct audience began. For

Hilmes (1997), the program *Household Chats* of the U.S. Department of Agriculture set the precedent for these women's programs. Starting in early 1923, Anna J. Peterson hosted on KYW, Chicago the newly established »daily recipe talk« at 11:30 a.m. In 1926 »Mrs. Julian Heath,« president of the National Housewives League, hosted a women's half hour at 4:00 p.m. on WJZ, Chicago. And in September 1928, Ida Bailey Allen started a daytime show with a mix of music, beauty, decorating advice, lectures, skits, and drama on CBS (HILMES 1997). In the 1930s, *Broadcasting* frequently published multiple-page articles to highlight success strategies for women's programs, most notably in its Dec. 15, 1935 issue with the »Inside story of the *Woman's Magazine of Air*.« As was common with such stories, the article was written by a sales promotion manager, in this case by NBC's Roy Frothingham, and the woman magazine's business director, James Capen Eames. *Broadcasting* thus lent its pages to advertisers directly to voice their views, apart from plenty of advertising in each issue. The *Woman's Magazine of the Air* was established in spring 1928 after a long search for the perfect women hosts, who would not demand too much salary and had the right kind of expertise (*Broadcasting* Dec. 15, 1935). Five years into this NBC program on homemaking, its staff included two men, editor-in-chief Bennie Walker and business manager James Capen Eames, and three women, Marjorie Gray, health and beauty editor, Helen Webster, home science editor, and Ann Holden, domestic science editor. Whereas women were assigned competency in producing homemaking programs, they were not directors in this case. In contrast, other women were in charge of their woman's programs such as Virginia List, director of *Economy Kitchen*, which started in 1929 on WKRC, Cincinnati, OH (*Broadcasting* June 1, 1938); Florrie Bishop Bowering, director of the *Mixing Bowl* in Connecticut (*Broadcasting* Jan. 1, 1932); Janet Lyne, style authority of WFIL, Philadelphia (*Broadcasting* Jan. 15, 1936); Gretchen McMullen with her *Household Hour*; and Margaret Marable with *Modern Homemaking* (*Broadcasting* May 15, 1936). In this constructed domesticated realm for women on air, neither the question of voice nor personality appeared to be a problem. For instance, in an advertisement from WXYZ, Detroit, MI, for its *Women in the News* program, the station highlighted host Nancy Osgood's »pleasant voice and winning personality« (*Broadcasting* Sept. 15, 1937: 22). Yet occasionally women were even contested on the terrain assigned to them: In 1938, *Broadcasting* (Dec. 15) wrote, WAAW, Omaha, NE, decided that »male announcers click better on woman's programs than women themselves« (34), switching its show Classified Page of the Air from an unnamed »girl« over to Bert Smith. The article mentioned that ensuing fan mail from an exclusively woman audience jumped by about 600 percent.

Another man hosting a woman's program, *The Wife-Saver* (*Broadcasting* Oct. 1, 1932), Allen Prescott, offered what was seen as a novel approach to the format.

During his first show, aired on WINS, New York, then on NBC-WJZ, he gave housewives advice, wrapped up in condescending address and jokes, such as:

> Hello, girls! Well, here we are at the end of the week, which is just fine as far as I'm concerned. ... I start this thing in the solemn hope that you're still feeding the children, there being no point in having children unless you feed them. A hungry child can never be trusted. (By Allen Prescott as quoted in *Broadcasting* Oct. 1, 1932: 7)

Prescott delivered his »wife-saving jaunts« (7) at high-speed, with no waiting for laughter, *Broadcasting* wrote. Women indicated that they liked the program and without request sent a »flood of mail,« with suggestions for hints in an equally jokey manner accompanied by items such as a bug exterminator, feathered penholder, or buckets of soup and proposals« (*Broadcasting* Oct. 1, 1932). *Broadcasting* offered no criticism of his problematic address of women as »girls.«

In 1932 more than 20 homemaker programs aired during the day. They dwindled toward the end of the 1930s when serial dramas (later called soap operas) populated daytime radio (HILMES 1997). Yet, even at that high point, they comprised only a tiny portion of overall on air content. For instance, in 1935, a total of 17,151 hours of programming aired on NBC, of which 265 hours were woman's programs, or 1.5 percent. In comparison, music ranked highest with 10,714 hours, or 62.4 percent, followed by literature with 2,454 hours, or 14.3 percent, and lectures with 1,181 hours, or 6.9 percent (*Broadcasting* Dec. 15, 1935). Still in the late 1930s new woman's programs were introduced, sometimes funded by department stores such as *Women's World* in May 1938 (*Broadcasting* May 1, 1938). Some emphasized a news angle, such as *Women Are News* with announcer Bernice Chandler on KFWB, Hollywood debuting in February 1938 (*Broadcasting* Feb. 1, 1938) or »featuring women in the news« with announcer Helen Sawyell on KNX, Hollywood, in Aug. 1938 (*Broadcasting* Aug. 1, 1938) as well as *Edited for Women* with announcer Judith Abbott on WNEW, NY in Oct. 1938. *At Your Service* offered »personal service and advice for women« from Helen W. Dana, starting on WOR, Newark, NJ in Nov. 1938 (*Broadcasting* Dec. 1, 1938). In 1939, *Broadcasting* marked several women program directors with portrait photos and brief descriptions. These included Dorren Chapman, home economist for WDAY Fargo, ND; Caroline Cabot for WEET, »whose morning shopping service has many stores as participants and who has been broadcasting for 14 straight years« (14); Eleanor Hanson, director of women's activities of WHK-WCLE, Cleveland handling 12 programs weekly; Verona Hughes, director of women's activities and in charge of *Homemaker* program at WCKY, Cincinnati, OH; and Isabel Manning Hewson of WEAF, New York, who started her program *Petticoat of the Air* in 1932 and in 1939 hosted the *Morning Market Basket* (*Broadcasting* Aug. 15, 1939).

Conclusions: American radio as a gendered space and new technologies

The American trade journal *Broadcasting* in its 1930s issues not only reflected but also aided in the construction of the American radio industry's narrow definition of jobs for women in radio. It contributed to a shift from wireless as an un-gendered space until the early 1920s to radio as a new mass medium and industry that became highly gendered with a rigid hierarchy in place by the end of the 1930s. This shift was shaped not only by a discourse about women's voices and roles in radio, but also an increasingly tightening grip of advertisers on radio in the 1930s and a divide between daytime programming for women and night-time programming for men (HILMES 1997). The coverage of *Broadcasting* in the 1930s confirms these three arguments. The magazine paid repeated attention to women executives and announcers, portraying them as rare cases; when women's voices were a success with the audience, it merited a story written to run counter established believes. *Broadcasting* contributed to the construction of women in leadership positions in 1930s radio in the United States as outliers and tokens, marking them repeatedly as »lady,« »Miss,« or »married«. The latter seen as especially advantageous for women running homemaker shows (HALPER 2001: 54). It signaled women's proximity to men and constructed them as still »feminine« while doing a man's job, having a husband and family, tethered to constructed ideals of the (white, middle-class) American woman as best placed in the domestic sphere to be a »good« woman. Halper (2001: 64) argued that *Broadcasting* »did not regard what women were doing as especially noteworthy.« While coverage of men outnumbered that of women, however, I argue that Halper's argument needs to be qualified: When *Broadcasting* wrote about women working in radio, at least in the 1930s, it did so to explicitly note their gender being at odds with their profession unless working in ghettoized women's programs. The magazine took pains to construct women as tokens and outliers to harden a dominance of men in a new, economically successful industry. The number of radio stations in the U.S. increased more than a hundred-fold, from five in 1921 to 765 in 1940; radio advertising expenditures grew exorbitantly, from $4.8 million in 1927 to $215.6 million in 1940 (SCOTT 2008). When in January 1935 already 70 percent of all American households had a radio (*Broadcasting* March 15, 1935: 9), the percentage had risen to 82 percent by 1938 (HALPER 2001: 89). Another symptom was that *Broadcasting* talked *about* women, but seldom *with* them beyond their personal story of making it against the odds. It asked women neither about their views on important issues in radio or society, as Halper (2001: 79) also found. This was a pattern throughout the 1930s in *Broadcasting*.

To this day, women – white women and women of color – remain a minority in American broadcasting in terms of ownership, leadership, and as journalists.

In 2017, across different categories of television and radio stations, women held a majority of voting interests only for 5.3 to 9.3 percent of stations; for racial minorities this ranged from one to 12.5 percent (FCC 2020: 6). In 2021 a survey of the Radio Television Digital News Association found women made up only 39.5 percent of the work force in American radio, 25.3 percent of radio news directors, and 26.7 percent of general managers; white people made up 93 percent each of news directors and general managers each. (RTDNA 2021). The same survey found that 48.5 percent of radio stations had at least one woman among their news staff, meaning more than half had none; men outnumbered women among white, Hispanic/Latino, and Native American radio staffers. Interestingly, while people of color remain a minority – white people made up 84.5 percent of radio news staff – among African Americans and Asian Americans in radio news, women outnumbered men (RTDNA 2021).

This study and the above numbers evidence a throughline in the history of American radio that includes fewer women than men, especially in higher positions (some exceptions occurred during war times), a pattern since the earliest days of American radio. Moreover, this closer look at the early days of American radio offers parallels to the ongoing proliferation of internet-related technologies and discussions around gender in the United States: white men-dominated ownership and leadership, initial hopes for new spaces with fair chances for all genders, the free/low-paid labor of women, spaces of domestication within the new medium, and the use and gendering of voices. The last issue has drawn scholarly attention, especially regarding voice assistants of big technology firms, such as »Siri,« »Cortana,« and »Alexa« which use women's voices to receive commands and service individual users, to perform affective labor (BERGEN 2016). In contrast, men hosted 79 percent of the most downloaded podcasts in the U.S. in 2020 (AMORE 2020). Again, women's voices are welcome in a domesticated space within a new medium, in the sphere of homes to provide artificial intelligence-based aural care work, while information and discourse directed at the public sphere in the form of podcasts is dominated by men's voices. Early American radio offers a cautionary warning and clear example that women's voices, literally and metaphorically, are constructed to be desired, or not, and tend to bend toward white, patriarchal hierarchies.

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