

Girls Get a Voice on Regional Radio: A Rockhampton Case Study

Rockhampton, Central Queensland, has three major 'players' in the FM radio stakes. These are Triple J (commenced broadcasting into Rockhampton in 1996), Sea FM and Hot FM (commenced broadcasting into Rockhampton in 2000/2001). These three stations currently attract the vast majority of Central Queensland's radio audience in the 17 - 39 year age bracket.

Triple J was overwhelmingly popular as the only youth/rock oriented FM station in the Rockhampton and Gladstone area (Ames 1997). However, Triple J's traditional alliance with rock/masculine, influences how its presenters interact with their predominantly male audience. The approach by commercial FM stations is very different, and based on a content and discourse analysis of breakfast shows of all three stations, this paper discusses the significance of the 'female voice' and associated representations in local commercial FM stations.

The paper examines the relationship between announcer and audience, and the ideologies that influence this exchange. Where female voices are less evident in regional print media (Macklin 1995, p. 295), this research to date suggests that the introduction of commercial FM stations into the Rockhampton and Gladstone area has provided significant opportunity for a higher female profile in a regional media context.

Kate Ames

Central Queensland University

“...it is the message inherent in daytime radio - the seemingly inconsequential chat, the lyrics of the music played, the relationship of the (mainly male) presenter to the audience, and the depiction of women in the commercials - that reveals radio's true perception of and attitude towards the female listener” (Barnard 2000, p.228)

Stephen Barnard, in his book *Studying Radio*, discusses the representation of women in daytime radio specifically from the perspective of the 'housewife'. He argues that the daytime presenter is at the 'frontline of radio's domestic ideology', but he also acknowledges a shift in the public persona of women during the late 1990s (2000, p.229).

It is Barnard's reference to 'seemingly inconsequential chat' that is of most interest to my study of the representation of women on breakfast radio on regional commercial FM stations. Breakfast radio in this context is not talkback; rather, it relies on 'banter' or informal dialogue between its hosts and with the audience. It is this dialogue, or 'chat', that reflects the power relationships among presenters, and between presenters and the audience. In a networked broadcasting environment, where presenters are not responsible for programming, it is through dialogue that the relationship between the virtual site of the radio station to the physical site, and location of the audience, becomes apparent.

Barnard recognises the difference between daytime and night-time radio (2000). Daytime radio provides a background for the daily routine, while night-time radio tends to be selectively chosen, where the listener selects to move into a virtual world where they foster a specific relationship with the presenter and other listeners. Our interest here is the normalcy of the daily routine, and the dialogue that goes with it, in the context of commercial radio in a regional environment.

Commercial FM stations in the rock/pop music format are a relatively new phenomenon in Central Queensland, with the arrival of Sea FM and Hot FM at the same time in 2000 making an instant and significant impact on the local radio broadcasting scene. Sea FM, owned by RG Capital Radio, and Hot FM, owned by DMG Radio, are now broadcast into Rockhampton and Gladstone, and target listeners aged 18 - 39. The two Central Queensland cities have very different demographics. Rockhampton, the larger of the two, is primarily an agricultural, business and education service centre. In contrast, Gladstone is one of the main industrial centres in Queensland. The area is considered 'regional' rather than rural because the populations cluster around the two cities; however Mules et al argue that 'there is a widespread self-perception in the community of rural identity' (1995, p.241).

Women have a reasonably high profile in Rockhampton and Gladstone. The city councils have a number of high profile female councillors, and the Rockhampton City mayor is female. Other prominent women in the

area include a local Federal Member for Parliament, an independent State Member for Parliament, the Vice-Chancellor of the local university, the president of the local Rockhampton Chamber of Commerce, and Central Queensland tourism associations. Women are also well represented in local media outlets as journalists; however, senior management of all local media is male. If, as Mules et al argue, the community perceives itself as 'rural', and rural is equated with the 'man on the land' (1995, p.254), then the issue of gender in the public sphere via media representation in this context provides an area of potential conflict.

There has been much discussion of gender representation in relation to media, particularly with regard to magazines, television, and print. However, research into gender representation in radio as a medium is still comparatively rare in relation to its media cousins, which is interesting given the significant amount of attention given to gender and music. Work that has been done that is specific to radio includes studies of gender representation in advertising (Hurtz & Durkin, 1997; Furnham & Thomson, 1999), and discourse analyses of Triple J's Helen Razer (Cook, 1999). Wollman (1998) argues that gender studies have tended to focus on the visual, and that studies of the 'aural' in terms of media production are rare. In Australia, this is compounded by the rarity of research of gender representation in regional media.

Very few studies have specifically addressed how women are represented in regional media in Australia, with the possible exception of Macklin (1995), and Ewart, who has done some work on use of women sources in the print media. Radio, it could be argued, is possibly the most targeted of all media, with programming being driven by demographic segmentation, far more so than print or television. Gender is an actively addressed issue within the sphere of commercial radio, and station programming is usually specifically designed to attract a specific gender. However, most radio stations base any programming decisions on qualitative market research done on their own listeners, or quantitative market research in a given environment, and these approaches are arguably flawed. Indeed, Wollman's study (1998) revealed significant gaps between station 'background' research, the direction pushed as a result of this research, and the impact on listeners and presenters that this appeared to have. The introspective nature of the research in Wollman's study resulted in programming choices that were successful in targeting a specific group, but resulted in overall audience

dissatisfaction. This has some relevance in the Rockhampton area, where Sea FM's decision to target males was reversed after a fairly short period of six months.

Wollman argues that radio relies on "the same active/passive, male/female dichotomies so often observed in visual media; commercial radio can thus work similarly to reinforce existing gender stereotypes, as well as to contribute to the creation of new ones, both in the popular music we listen to and in culture at large" (1998). This paper aims to test this statement by looking at how breakfast presenters on Sea FM (Nelly and Aaron) and Hot FM (Smithy and Trace), Central Queensland's two commercial FM stations in the contemporary rock/pop format, interact with their audience. It will show that the female voice has a high profile on the commercial stations, and one that is less role-specific than other media in a regional context. In particular, the paper will address the concept of 'stereotype' by showing that while the term is often used quite loosely in a media context, issues involved are relatively complex and contradictory.

Methodology

This paper is based on a content and discourse analysis of Sea FM and Hot FM over four one-week periods in March, May, July, and October 2003. This analysis examined the nature of interaction between presenters and audience, defining this interaction as being related to the following categories that emerged during the sample: competition (where a listener has phoned in to win something), storytelling (where a listener has phoned in to tell a story about themselves, or give an opinion that is not related to competition), promotion (where a member of a local company is on air with announcers), or community (where a member of a non-profit organisation is talking about an event or issue on air). The analysis aimed to ascertain whether interaction with audiences was opinion-based, and if this opinion was related to an issue of local relevance, issue of wider national relevance, personal issue, or music. These opinions may ultimately reveal a trend in personal or worldviews in the region.

The time period selected for monitoring was 7.15 - 8.45 am. The primary reasons for this time slot were that breakfast programs have a greater commercial, and therefore broadcasting, 'value' (Adams and Burton

Methodology

1997, p. 12), and that both Sea FM and Hot FM are broadcast locally from their respective locations in Quay Street, Rockhampton during that time. Both stations are network-fed later in the day - HOT FM after 10 am, and Sea FM after 6 pm. Samples were taken in week blocks (to a total of 30 hours for each station) over the course of a year, and the main intent was to establish a 'normalcy' of programming.

Limitations were associated with this method of sampling. Different programs during the day have different demographics, and therefore results for a specific segment should not be seen to be representative of the station's approach as a whole. Interaction with listeners on radio is also selective because the production process includes possible screening of callers. Importantly, the targeted age demographics may also not be reflective of the listening population in a regional area, due to the limitations in choice for listeners.

The primary aim of this sampling was to establish whether common patterns of interaction were evident, and whether this had an influence on the role of women's representation. It sought to establish how presenters interacted with their listeners from a gender-oriented perspective. The paper will discuss the quantitative aspects of the sample result, but will use discourse analysis (Van Dijk 1991) to discuss representation as part of audience interaction.

Using Stereotypes

Does, as Wollman suggests (1998), radio rely on 'the same active/passive, male/female dichotomies so often observed in visual media'? Does commercial radio 'reinforce existing gender stereotypes, as well as to contribute to the creation of new ones, both in the popular music we listen to and in culture at large'? How does the regional environment in which the listeners are physically situated contribute or react to this? We will examine these questions in discussion of results of the study.

In terms of profile, women were found to be significant contributors to the breakfast shows of both Sea FM and Hot FM. Overall, there was more interaction between presenters on the two commercial FM stations and female listeners than between presenters and male listeners (See Table 1).

Using Stereotypes

Table 1: Total Broadcast Interaction Between Presenters and Listeners 2003 – By Instance

	Sea FM	Hot FM
Male Listeners	54 (40%)	68 (44%)
Female Listeners	80 (60%)	88 (56%)
Total	134	156

Table 2: Total Nature of Contacts between Presenters and Listeners 2003 – By Instance

	Sea FM	Hot FM
Competition – Male	23	35
Competition – Female	38	48
Storytelling – Male	19	23
Storytelling – Female	36	31
Promo – Male	10	9
Promo – Female	6	7
Community – Male	2	3
Community – Female	1	2

Much of this interaction was related to competitions; however, the nature of the competitions allowed audience opinions to be expressed, which resulted in a ‘female voice’ (by instance) receiving a high profile over the course of the study overall.

Macklin research, which analysed gender profile in a regional newspaper context, argued that a lower profile for women “reflects and reproduces their subordination in the political, economic, civic and recreational spheres of ... community life” (1995, p.295). Does this translate, therefore, that a higher profile in regional radio may reflect a greater role for women in social and civic life? Certainly, in opposition to Macklin’s research that identified that women were rarely featured in non-traditional roles, and “when this occurred, their actions tended to be trivialised” (1995, p.296), this radio study revealed that the number of women’s voices heard

during the breakfast programs helped to normalise their role as participating members of the 'working' Central Queensland community. Segments on both Sea FM and Hot FM featured women representing organisations, and women were overwhelmingly the callers in for competitions. However, studio guests who represented voices of authority (represented by 'Promotion' and 'Community' in Table 2) were more frequently male. This representation of women in a rural context raises some interesting points. In an area where rurality often equates with masculinity, the mere prominence of the female voice is significant, as it normalises women's presence in the public sphere. There is, however, a tension between this raised profile, and the manner in which it is raised.

Radio's uniqueness is in its singularity of communication technique. That is, outside of a production context, voice is the one and only method of interaction between the presenters and the audience. For women, this has an impact on representation because radio is one of the few areas in the media arena where women are unable to be physically objectified, as may be the case in visual media such as film, magazines, television, internet, and newspapers. They are also present in the radio world in a sense that is unrelated to their social 'role'. 'Janet' is just 'Janet'. She often has no title, but she does have an opinion. She may or may not be married, she may or may not have children, she may or may not be gay/straight/Aboriginal/Chinese/disabled. The actions of overwhelming number of women who contacted the radio stations in question supported the above statement. It was the woman's opinion that generally defined the persona when interacting with presenters, or their 'ability' when participating in a competition.

So, with the potential to challenge a dominant ideology of the passive female, does commercial radio reinforce existing gender stereotypes? Many inconsistencies were found with regard to stereotyped gender representation during the course of the study. The representation by women listeners themselves was often in contrast with the way women were discussed by the presenters. Presenters often used stereotypes to create a sense of tension or conflict in order to attract listener response. These assumptions were often rejected or challenged by listeners in the form of argument or further expression of opinion.

Hot FM's breakfast team was normally 'Smithy and Trace', the normal 'boy/girl' team adopted by commercial FM stations. During July,

however, Tracey was away, and 'Chooky' filled in, facilitating what appears to reflect the converse of what happened with Triple J's 'The Ladies Lounge', as described by Cook (1999): "As Helen Razer and Judith Lucy took up occupancy of centre-studio and main-mic, masculinity became their primary material" (p.70). Here, Smithy and Chooky focus on 'femininity' as their primary material:

SMITHY: What are your thoughts on the blokeyness of the breakfast show? Have you become concerned, like we are?

WILBUR: Well it is pretty blokey and there's nothing wrong with football beer and meat pies, but I think that we do have to make sure that our lady listeners are looked after as well.

SMITHY: So how do we accommodate that - I mean, you're a man of great ideas.

WILBUR: Well I've given it some thought this morning while I was in the shower, and I've made this decision. I think for the entire show tomorrow, Chooky should wear a dress.

CHOOKY: Why just me? Why can't he do it as well.

WILBUR: Because if we put you both into dresses, it will be unbalanced again, and the blokes will be complaining.

Ö Wilbur then asks Chooky to prepare some makeup or beauty theory tips for listeners the next morning.

SMITHY: I think our female listeners at HOT FM would appreciate that while Trace is away, because we haven't spoken about shoes, makeup hair, or any thing like that while she's been away.

(HOT FM 13/5/03)

Trivialisation is not adopted in this context in its early feminist moral sense, but rather in relation to value judgements stated publicly that may disempower women. Trivialisation of the feminine is evident in this interaction, in keeping with Wollman's thesis, but is challenged by listeners. This is illustrated by the following exchange the next day:

SMITHY: Do you feel like we're covering all the female issues?

Probably not Ö

CHRISTINA: No.

CHOOKY: I tried, yesterday.

SMITHY: Well, we'll work on that. Just give us a quick thing that we should be talking about. Should we be talking about spunky blokes or something?

CHRISTINA: Well every individual is different.

SMITHY: Well what do you want to hear about?

CHRISTINA: I'm not sure.

SMITHY: Makeup? Come on, let's do the spunky bloke thing.

CHRISTINA: I like chargers.

SMITHY: Chargers? Chargers?

CHRISTINA: Yes, Valiant Chargers.

SMITHY: Oh, cars. That's a blokey thing! (HOT FM 14/5/03)

These types of interaction fit within Tuchman's concept of 'Symbolic Annihilation', where women are either silenced, condemned or trivialised by media (Lind, 2004, p.5). Trivialisation implies passivity that is not evident in these interactions, so while Smithy and Chooky attempted to reinforce stereotypes, they were continually challenged by their female listeners through the process of interaction, something that is not available to audiences in a print or television environment. Thus, the radio site became one where notions of gender were contested.

Cook argues that familiar commercial talk-radio practice relies on an "aggressive, opinionated masculinity of the commercial DJ or talkback 'bloke' host, or on the sorts of consensual femininity which talk show women callers establish to endorse a powerful male host's views" (1999, p.74). One of the most interesting aspects of this study was that women seemed to emerge as being of equal footing when it came to examining the relationship between presenters. The double-handed approach (male and female presenter) initially appeared to support notions of the passive female/dominant male, but due to changes in personality combinations as the year unfolded, the role of the female 'actor' to challenge became increasingly evident and in the case of Sea FM, ultimately dominant.

Hot FM consistently had more interaction between listeners and presenters, despite the fact that of the two stations, is the less 'local' as it is network-fed after 10 am. It had a consistently higher female interaction when the male/female double-hander act was present, despite Smithy being the dominant personality in the 'Smithy and Trace' team. Tracey's strong personality set up conflict, and served to challenge stereotypes while also helping to reinforce the male – beer, football, simple/female – makeup, clothes, shopping, complex dichotomy that was common on Hot FM in particular. For example, in the following interaction, Tracey talks about her new role as a 'single girl':

TRACE: I've been absolutely having a ball. I've been able to go and do things which I haven't been able to do before, because when I'm with someone, I just love to buy them gifts, and buy them things, and really take care of them, and I starting to take of myself for a change. Look at these (new pair of shoes) Do you like them? I really have started to do things like that, and I've considered buying a house and really taking care of myself for a change.

SMITHY: Are you saying that you don't need a man?

TRACE: At the moment I'm happy just getting to know what it's like taking care of yourself, to do things for yourself, and look after yourself, and not have someone to do everything for you

SMITHY: Sounds like 'me me me'.

TRACE: No, it's just good to learn how to look after yourself. It's a change. It's definitely a shock to the system

On the one hand, Tracey is reinforcing the notion of the female's role to 'look after the man' (as well as her interest in shopping), but on the other hand she's advocating an independent 'stand up for yourself' stance. There is a lot of literature that examines the concept of complicity and subject in relation to empowerment from a feminist perspective that is outside the scope of this paper, but could be applied to this scenario (see Driscoll, 1999). Alternatively, this interaction reflects the merging of some characteristics of gender role constructs (assertion, self-activation) traditionally associated with the masculine with those of communal constructs (openness, caring, helpfulness), traditionally associated with the feminine (Kirtley & Weaver, 1999). This supports Kirtley & Weaver's notion that 'most of us rarely encounter extremely stereotypical models in our everyday lives. We are socialised under more moderate conditions where sex and gender differences are frequently intermingled, if not confounded (i.e. feminine males, masculine females)' (1999).

During the July period of taping, Smithy was subjected to a facial as a gift from Tracey; in the process, he became the 'subordinate' actor as he was exposed to one of the 'delights of femininity'. While this potentially serves to again trivialise female interests, there is enough challenge from the audience to suggest that ultimately in this set of interactions, the women in the studio were the dominant actors. Tracey and the beautician

had Smithy ‘trapped’ in a chair having something done to him that he was originally uninterested in, but ultimately stated that he enjoyed. While this interaction served to reinforce the dominant ‘blokey bloke/girly girl’ stereotype that is the lynchpin of male/female presenter interaction, it also served to question it, as Smithy’s assertion that males are uninterested in personal grooming was challenged by female (and male) listeners.

Changing Presenters

Over the course of the year in Rockhampton, there were changes to the morning crew members on both stations. However, before proceeding with discussion on the impact of these changes, it is worthwhile to examine the context of the male/female team in the Rockhampton stations. A male/female presenting team is common on commercial FM morning programs, and certainly within the regional networks of DMG Radio and RG Capitol Radio (see Tables 3 and 4 below).

Changing Presenters

Table 3 - DMG Network Radio Morning Show Presenters - QLD Coastal Regions

Station	Presenters	Region
Hot 91	Chrissie (F) and Ronnie	Sunshine Coast
HOT Townsville	Monkey and Sam (F)	Townsville
HOT Cairns	Nay (F) and Coasty	Cairns
HOT Rockhampton and Gladstone	Smithy and Joh (F)	Rockhampton and Gladstone
HOT Whitsundays	Meech and Teegs (F)	Mackay and Whitsunday Coast

Table 4 – RG Capital Radio Morning Show Presenters – QLD Coastal Regions

Station	Presenters	Region
Sea FM 90.9 Gold Coast	Paul (M) and Moyra (F)	Gold Coast
Sea FM 95.1 Rockhampton and Gladstone Coast	Nelly (F) and Bunty (M)	Rockhampton and Gladstone
Sea FM 101.1 Fraser Coast Sea FM 93.1 Bundaberg	Todd (M) and Maree (F)	Fraser Region
Sea FM91.9 Sunshine Coast	JC (M) and Lindsay (M)	Sunshine Coast
Sea FM 100.7 Townsville	Mazzer (M) and DC (M)	Townsville
C FM South Burnett	Lizzy (F) and Hamish (M)	Dalby,Kingaroy, Warwick, Toowoomba
Sea FM 99.5	CairnsTodd (M) and Bridget (F)	Cairns

All stations on the Queensland coast comprised of two people. All teams with DMG Radio were male/female, while two teams with RG Capital Radio were all-male. There were no all-female morning crews in regional Queensland. It is interesting to compare this to the composition of metropolitan crews (see Table 5). While individual presenters, such as Wendy Harmer (who retired last year), Judith Lucy, and Kate Langbroek, act as challengers to the ‘male’ voice, it can be seen that they are the exception to the rule, and 2Day FM in Sydney is the only station with the inverse of the standard ‘two guys and a girl’ format with Kaz Cooke and Judith Lucy acting as the dominant partners. While this makes for interesting comparison and would be worth further discussion, it is out of the immediate scope of this paper; however, it is evident that the ‘personality’ factor of a morning breakfast team, the gender balance of

this team, and how it interacts with the audience is crucial to the success of a station.

Table 5 – Metropolitan Morning Crew Presenters

Station	Presenters	City
Nova 96.9 (DMG)	Merrick (M) and Rosso (M)	Sydney
Nova 100 (DMG)	Hughesy (M), Kate (F) and Dave (M)	Melbourne
Nova 937 (DMG)	Nathan (M), Nat (F) and Craig (M)	Perth
B105 (Austereo)	Jamie (M), Penny (F) and Ian (M)	Brisbane
2 Day FM	Judith (F), Kaz (F) and Pete (M)	Sydney
Triple M Sydney Triple M Melbourne Triple M Adelaide	Tim (M), Peter (M), Brigitte (F), James (M), and Mike (M)	Sydney
Fox FM	Matt (M), Jo (F) and Chris (M)	Melbourne
Triple M Brisbane	Fatcat (M), Marto (M), and Tanya (F)	Brisbane
SA.FM	Milly (F) and Lehmo (M)	Adelaide
Mix 94.5	Fred (M), Paul (M), Lisa (F), and Chris (M)	Perth
92.9	Zara (F), Troy (M), and Bernie (M)	Perth
FM104 Canberra	Jo (M), Cam (M), and Mel (F)	Canberra

There did appear to be a direct link between the relationship between gender and the audience in Rockhampton. Sea FM’s morning crew

originally (commencement of 2003) consisted of Nelly and Aaron. In this partnership, Nelly was the subordinate presenter - she read the weather, and took her cues from Aaron, rarely initiating interaction. During the year, however, Aaron moved to a later timeslot, and Nelly then presented the breakfast show on her own. A new male partner, called Lowey, eventually joined Nelly. It was evident here that the power relationship between the presenters had changed. In this instance, Nelly was the initiator of dialogue and the dominant actor. Lowey, the male presenter, provided her with support. The dominance of Nelly on Sea FM is notable, as Cook (1999) argues that even Helen Razer, in her renowned role as co-presenter of Triple J's breakfast show with Mikey Robbins in the 1990s, was ultimately subservient in her role (p.69).

Similarly, Hot FM experienced changes to presenters during the year. The morning crew originally comprised Smithy and Trace. However, during one of the taping periods, Trace was on holiday, and replaced by 'Chooky', who is male. Tracey ultimately left the station, and by the end of the year, Smithy was a solo male presenter. Tracey generally played a passive role, following dialogue leads from Smithy, usually acting as the 'girly girl'. During the period that 'Smithy and Trace' were a team, however, Hot FM had the greatest level of interaction between female listeners and the two presenters. It was notable that during the two periods where the only presenters of the Hot FM breakfast show were male, the number of male callers increased. The only time more men contacted the station than females was when males dominated as presenters, either as a pair, or as a solo male (See Tables 6 - 9).

Table 6: Broadcast Interaction Between Presenters and Listeners - MARCH 2003

	Sea FM Nelly and Aaron (male/female)	Hot FM Smithy and Trace(male/female)
Male Listeners	19 (45%)	21 (39%)
Female Listeners	23 (55%)	32 (61%)
TOTAL	42	53

Table 7: Broadcast Interaction Between Presenters and Listeners - MAY 2003

	Sea FM Nelly and Aaron(male/female)	Hot FM Smithy and Chooky(male/male)
Male Listeners	7 (24%)	18 (51%)
Female Listeners	22 (76%)	17 (49%)
TOTAL	29	35

Table 8: Broadcast Interaction Between Presenters and Listeners - JULY 2003

	Sea FM Nelly (female)	Hot FM Smithy and Trace(male/female)
Male Listeners	17 (44%)	17 (38%)
Female Listeners	22 (56%)	28 (62%)
TOTAL	39	45

Table 9: Broadcast Interaction Between Presenters and Listeners - OCT 2003

	Sea FM Nelly and Lowey(male/female)	Hot FM Smithy(male)
Male Listeners	11 (46%)	14 (56%)
Female Listeners	13 (54%)	11 (44%)
TOTAL	24	25

This effect is supported by Wollman's US research, where a commercial station (WAXQ FM) was 'deliberately constructed for the male audience' (1998). Wollman noted that the strategies used in this attempt were to use only male announcers, play only songs that had a male vocalist, and play commercials that specifically targeted men as active consumers.

Whether the attempt to actually attract the desired audience was successful in the long term was hotly contested, but in the short term it did appear to have an almost immediate impact. Much of Wollman's argument, however, is based around the application of market research as applied by the production side of the radio station, and the understanding of the audience as discussed by the local presenters, which appear to be markedly different.

The case study presented by Wollman, therefore, provides some insight and reference for analysing radio stations where there is gender targeted marketing. This was certainly the case with Sea FM, which changed direction in terms of its target audience during the middle of the year. The station changed its programming and approach in order to attract the older male market (25 - 40). From July, this was supported by a more 'contemporary rock' approach with more male singers evident on the rotation list, and a definite swing towards more Australian music being played. This increased the gap between Hot FM, which remained pop oriented, and Sea FM which was now adult rock. While there was a distinct change in music style, the attempt to attract a male audience was contradicted somewhat by the increase in profile of the female presenter Nelly. Despite Sea FM's attempt to woo the older male, the gender balance of listeners did not change significantly, and may reflect a greater willingness of female listeners to engage with a 'masculine' virtual environment than males to engage with a feminine environment, as was reflected on Hot FM.

Finally, the significance of studying media in a regional environment is related to the social confines of the environment. While 'global' media is available via television and the internet, as well as state and national newspapers, there is evidence that audiences use local media to engage with their community (Ewart, 2000). If, as Ewart suggests, 'regional media play a central role in constructing and cementing the identity and culture of communities and their publics' (Ewart, 2000), the study of representations is important to understanding social influences within the community. The interaction between presenters and their audience allows local voices to be heard and subsequently reflected back into the community. This study suggests that representations of women in a regional environment are dynamic and complex, and that the regional commercial FM stations are a site of contestation that may challenge

traditional notions of rural/masculine, and the position of women in regional Australia.

Conclusion

Ultimately, a number of potentially significant trends are indicated in this study, which is to date limited. The female voice has a higher profile on the commercial stations, and one that is less role-specific, than other media in a regional context. While presenters did reinforce common gender stereotypes, the changes in personnel during the year had some impact on the level of interaction by gender that appeared to be possibly related to the genders of the presenters. The subordinate role of women was balanced and often challenged by listener interaction, and indeed the female presenters who provided some balance and questioned the assertions of their male colleagues in a masculine rural/regional environment.

Conclusion

The role of regional stations within a network is increasingly important as establish their positions in the Australian radio industry. Comparisons between the metropolitan and regional approaches will ultimately be of interest as the two regional network owners, DMG Radio and RG Capital Radio, continue their expansion with station acquisition. I'm interested in a comparative analysis of regional stations with metropolitan commercial FM stations, which often have triple-hander breakfast crews (two males and one female), as discussed. The subordinate position of the female presenter, and the possibly lower interaction rates of female audience members (yet to be established) may in fact establish these regional commercial FM stations as rather progressive in their approach to gender representation. Anecdotal data, and initial research suggests that this may be the case, but will be examined as part of further research.

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