

CONSTRUCTING AND PERFORMING AN ON-AIR RADIO IDENTITY  
IN A CHANGING MEDIA LANDSCAPE

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## ABSTRACT

The radio industry is fighting to stay relevant in an age of expanding media options. Scholarship has slackened, and media experts say that radio's best days are in the past. This dissertation investigates how today's radio announcer presents him/herself on the air as a personality, creating and performing a self that is meant for mass consumption by a listening audience. A participant observation of eleven different broadcast sites was conducted, backed by interviews with most key on-air personnel at each site. A grounded theory approach was used for data analysis. The resulting theoretical model focuses on the performance itself as the focal point that determines a successful (positive) interaction for personality and listener. Associated processes include narrative formation of the on-air personality, communication that takes place outside of the performance, effects of setting and situation, the role of the listening audience, and the reduction of social distance between personality and listener. The model demonstrates that a personality performed with the intent of being realistic and relatable will be more likely to cement a connection with the listener that leads to repeated listening and ultimately loyalty and fidelity to that personality. The successful deployments of these on-air identities across multiple channels (in-person, online, and through social media as well as broadcast) suggests that the demand for relatable and informative content will persist, regardless of radio's future delivery mechanisms.

This dissertation is dedicated  
to the memory of “Jackson S. Sturdley,”  
who is undoubtedly proud of the legacy  
his wit and wisdom have left.

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## TABLE OF CONTENTS

	Page
ABSTRACT .....	iii
DEDICATION .....	iv
ACKNOWLEDGMENTS .....	v
LIST OF FIGURES .....	xiii
CHAPTER	
1. INTRODUCTION .....	1
2. LITERATURE REVIEW .....	9
Goffman’s Theories of the Self.....	9
The Presentation of Self in Everyday Life.....	10
Performance .....	11
Teams .....	16
Regions .....	18
Impression Management.....	20
Concept of Self .....	22
Radio Talk.....	23
Background .....	24
Higher Standards.....	25
Roles and Bases .....	25
Types of Announcing.....	27
Errors.....	28
Application by Other Scholars.....	30

Narrative Identity .....	33
Coorientation.....	35
Origins of Coorientation Theory.....	36
The Coorientation Measurement Model .....	37
Coorientation in Media Research.....	42
Coorientation Reexamined.....	44
Research Questions.....	47
3. METHOD .....	51
Ethnography and Observation.....	51
Media Production Ethnography .....	53
Observation Procedure.....	56
The Announcers .....	60
Data Analysis .....	62
Limitations and Threats to Validity .....	65
4. A DRAMATURGICAL ANALYSIS OF ON-AIR PERFORMANCE .....	70
Creating the “Theater of the Mind” .....	70
Using Descriptive Language.....	73
Embellishing .....	74
Teams.....	76
Guests.....	79
Developing Chemistry .....	82
Directive and Dramatic Dominance.....	84
Regions .....	87

Personal Front .....	88
Setting and Props .....	89
Performing in Public .....	94
Backstage .....	95
Being a Multimedia Personality.....	97
Using Digital Media.....	97
Using Social Media.....	99
Being on Radio and Television.....	103
Performance Secrets Revealed.....	105
Breaking “Character” .....	106
Intentionally Playing a Character.....	108
Treating the Broadcast as a Performance.....	109
5. CONSTRUCTION OF AN ON-AIR SELF .....	111
Developing a Personality .....	111
The Influence of Other Announcers .....	113
Being Different from Other Announcers/Stations .....	115
The Ongoing Process .....	116
Catchphrases .....	118
“War Stories” .....	119
Climbing to the Top .....	120
Battles with the Boss.....	123
“War Stories” on the Air.....	125
Forming the On-Air Self Through Narrative .....	126

6. A PEEK BEHIND THE CURTAIN.....	130
Backstage Behavior .....	131
Using Different Standards Off the Air.....	131
Treatment of the Absent.....	138
A Personal Space .....	140
Keeping Things Hidden from the Audience .....	142
Being Visual in an Audio Medium.....	142
Dealing With the Stress of the Job.....	145
Dealing With Things Beyond Your Control.....	149
Enjoying the Job .....	149
The Creative Process.....	151
The Plight of the Speaker.....	157
Handling Errors in Speech.....	158
Running The Control Board.....	164
Holding Announcers to Higher Standards .....	166
Upholding Personal Standards.....	168
7. SO, HOW DO YOU FILL FOUR HOURS A DAY? .....	171
Effects of Setting and Situation .....	172
Reporting.....	176
Industry-Specific Processes .....	177
Editing.....	178
Institutional Talk.....	183
Timing Is Everything .....	185

Using Off-Air Conversations .....	190
Other Forms of Improvisation .....	191
Techniques for Entertaining the Audience .....	193
Adding Humor .....	193
Being Opinionated or Outrageous .....	197
Sharing Information .....	200
Repeating Material .....	201
8. THE ROLE OF THE AUDIENCE .....	204
Interacting with Listeners .....	204
Interacting Online .....	210
Interacting in Person .....	211
Getting Feedback .....	213
Being Treated with Reverence .....	214
Crossing the Line .....	217
Fulfilling the Commercial Imperative .....	218
Promoting .....	219
Recognizing the Audience .....	221
Understanding What Listeners Want .....	224
Achieving Coorientation With Listeners .....	227
9. THE PROBLEM OF SOCIAL DISTANCE .....	236
Communicating Self-Image .....	236
Emphasizing the Importance of the Job .....	237
Name-dropping .....	239

Mystification .....	241
De-mystification .....	244
Claiming to Be the Same On-Air as Off .....	247
Criticizing Television Announcers .....	252
Relating to the Audience .....	254
Acknowledging Local Roots .....	258
Using Popular Culture References .....	260
Conveying Excitement and Emotion .....	263
Telling Stories .....	265
Revealing Personal Details .....	271
Separating the Personal from the Professional .....	276
“Art Imitating Life” .....	280
10. RESOLVING THE ON-AIR RADIO IDENTITY .....	287
Successful Radio Interaction .....	287
A Theoretical Illustration .....	289
Explaining the Theoretical Model .....	291
Construction of Self .....	291
What the Listener Does Not Know .....	292
The Plight of the Speaker .....	293
Effects of Setting/Situation and Industry-Specific Processes .....	294
Techniques for Entertaining the Audience .....	295
Integration of the Audience .....	295
Resolving Social Distance .....	296

Stitching the Umbrella Together.....	298
Effective Performance .....	299
The Impact of a Changing Industry .....	302
Corporate Influence .....	304
11. CONCLUSION.....	307
Radio... What Would Life Be Without It? .....	312
REFERENCES CITED.....	315

**LIST OF FIGURES**

Figure	Page
2-1 The Coorientation Measurement Model.....	40
8-1 The Coorientation Measurement Model Applied to Radio .....	228
10-1 A Theoretical Model for Explaining On-Air Identity .....	289

## CHAPTER 1: INTRODUCTION

After nearly a century of commercial use, radio continues to be one of the most important sources of information and entertainment in the United States. Over the course of its long history, the medium has gone from experiment to the focal point of the nation's family time to a more localized conduit for favorite songs, contests, and community dialogue. A consistent driving force in the popularity of radio has been the on-air personality. From Jack Benny to Walter Winchell to Wolfman Jack to Sean Hannity, radio personalities, driven by talent, ambition, and occasionally an agenda have found a way to connect with large audiences. Some have done it with humor, others through biting opinions, and still others by presenting the image of a person who can be trusted.

Presentation of an image is a large part of how a radio personality makes that connection. It often takes years of trial and error, making one's way up from small town stations to the big time, maybe even national syndication. Throughout the process, the person's on-air personality is, to borrow a line from the classic Top-40 radio satire *Nine*, "developed, refined, molded, polished, honed, shaped, and pulled out of left field" (Hoffman, Moses, Salant, & West, 1974). This process is how a shy kid from Long Island named Howard Stern can become the most shocking announcer in the industry (Stern, 1993), or how Rush Limbaugh III, the son of a Missouri lawyer, can become Pittsburgh nighttime disc jockey "Jeff Christie," before later evolving into the controversial leader of conservative talk radio (Limbaugh, 1992).

To the average radio professional or enthusiast, the development of a compelling on-air personality is considered a given, something that all announcers must do in order

to stand out and have a long, successful career, but how does this development happen? What are some of the decisions that must take place, over time or in the moment, to construct an on-air personality that grabs the listeners' attention? Is it different for news announcers than it is for disc jockeys or talk show hosts? Does an announcer consider the wants and needs of his/her audience during this development, and if so, how?

The purpose of this dissertation is to analyze the ways in which radio personalities present themselves on the air. Every day, on thousands of radio stations around the world, amateur and professional announcers make decisions about what to say on the air, but they also think about how they want their audiences to perceive them. The primary focus of this study regards the conscious deployment of a self that is meant for public consumption by the listening audience. It is important to recognize that radio personalities, however truthfully or sincerely they present themselves, are their own creations.

This project concerns the topic of identity, defined for these purposes as a category of practice that describes a fundamental aspect of individual or collective being. Categories of practice are used to describe everyday life (Brubaker & Cooper, 2000). Therefore, this definition of identity makes sense when applied to the everyday work processes of establishing and reinforcing a professional identity. Despite concerns about extending identity as an aspect of an individual to aspects of a collective (Brubaker & Cooper, 2000; Berger & Luckmann, 1966), there is theoretical justification for applying "collective identity" to smaller groups than those that necessitate the use of the term as a category of analysis (e.g. studies of national identity). Specifically, Tajfel's (1981) social identity theory allows us to view an individual's definition of self through the lens of the

groups to which the person belongs. The listening audience of a radio program or the employees of a certain radio company are possible examples.

It is also important to distinguish the use of the term “identity” from the use of “self.” According to Perinbanayagam (2000), self is a reflexive objectification of one’s presence through the use of signs. Identity comes from the discourses of objectification. This is a trap into which it is quite easy to fall; “self” and “identity” flow so freely within so many scholarly works that one might conflate the terms. Identity allows the self to be named (and constructed) by society. Although this study uses different areas of theory to discuss the behavior of radio personalities, each of these theoretical approaches derives from the belief that the self is a social product (e.g. Vila, 2000; Branaman, 1997; Newcomb, 1959).

Much of the theoretical foundation for this study comes from Goffman’s approaches to viewing the self. Specifically, Goffman’s (1967; 1959) ideas of impression management and dramaturgical presentation of self provide an excellent model for explaining the process of planning and using an on-air radio personality. Goffman’s (1981) analysis of radio talk is a noteworthy account of the ways in which announcers adhere to higher standards of speech perfection; such moves also help broadcasters maintain their professional identities. The remedial techniques that follow speech faults are also a form of impression management.

Additional consideration is given to narrative aspects of the self. Narrative identity researchers explain that people naturally construct selves through narrative conventions (Bruner, 2004; Holstein & Gubrium, 2000; Vila, 2000). Radio personalities have a professional obligation to do so; they often tell stories about their lives in order to

support the version of themselves that they send out over the air. Coorientation (McLeod & Chaffee, 1973; Newcomb, 1953) provides the other theoretical lens for this study. Coorientation in broadcasting requires the broadcaster and the listener to have similar attitudes about the importance of a particular topic, even if they may not necessarily share the same opinion. The process of coorientation helps to explain how a deployed on-air identity assists in the creation of a collective identity among listeners of the program through the building of consensus and affinity.

This study is significant in that it provides an understanding of how radio as a medium fosters connections between personalities and listeners. Much like Powdermaker (1950) in her study of the movie industry, I am interested in how the social system underlying the production of radio content influences the content. To put it another way, I am interested in both how radio works and *why* radio works. Why do millions of listeners find radio so compelling? How does the medium continue to be successful at a time when there are a growing number of other options for entertainment and news? Success in radio is usually measured in terms of audience and revenue. There is always a commercial imperative at work, whether one works for a station that is commercial or non-commercial in nature. The success of an announcer and his/her station depends on consistently pleasing an audience. A superior performance of on-air personality helps greatly in accomplishing this task.

Such an understanding is particularly salient in light of radio industry trends of the last 20 years – including deregulation, consolidation, and downsizing – seen by many as damaging to the connection between radio and its audience, as well as to the medium itself (Crider, 2012; Hilliard & Keith, 2005; Ala-Fossi, 2004). Radio helps to create

imagined communities (Anderson, 1983) among listeners who share a common bond of admiration for their favorite personalities (Douglas, 2004). Membership in such a community becomes a marker of social identity (Tajfel, 1981). Local personalities help in this process by providing symbolic knowledge of what it means to live in their city, state, or region (Crider, 2011). Listeners may identify so much with the personalities on a particular program that habitual listening of the program becomes a form of parasocial interaction (Giles, 2002).

Radio industry downsizing prevents the formation of imagined communities by replacing the live, human aspect of a program with automation. It also reduces the possibility for interaction, particularly when opportunities to bond with local personalities are lost. In addition, the recent trend away from having live personnel has robbed radio of its immediacy. Many stations go unstaffed on the weekends, and therefore cannot provide listeners with timely information that affects them or a forum for reaction. Although the most infamous incident was the failure of stations in Minot, North Dakota to broadcast details of a train derailment that sent toxic ammonia gas clouds over the city (Ala-Fossi, 2004), news of cultural significance similarly gets ignored. When singer Whitney Houston passed away on a Saturday afternoon, many music stations that air automated or prerecorded programming on the weekends missed the story. At other stations, staffers threw brief (and seemingly callous) mentions on their social media pages. Whereas in the past many stations would have turned immediately to on-air tributes that invite listener response, this time radio was on autopilot, leading listeners and columnists to criticize the medium for its inadequate response (Feder, 2012; Lewis, 2012).

A study of how broadcasters present themselves on the air is also pertinent in light of the many controversial statements of the past few years by on-air personalities. When Don Imus makes racially insensitive remarks about the Rutgers women's basketball team (Hinckley, 2010), or Rush Limbaugh makes disparaging remarks about a female law student/activist (Geiger, 2012), people immediately ask why radio talk show hosts say the things they say on the air. However, the same question could have been asked when fellow syndicated host Don Geronimo gave an emotional 75-minute on-air monologue about his wife, who had died tragically in a car accident days before (Farhi, 2005). In all of these cases, the answer could be that these personalities say what they say because it fits who they are on the air, be it brutally shocking or brutally honest. This study proposes that it is not so much "who they are" but "who they choose to be" that drives such statements. There are underlying decisions that go into the creation and maintenance of a personality; the same thought processes lead an announcer to say things that align with such a persona.

In addition, study of radio has been lacking in recent years, as communications researchers focus increasingly on forms of new media. As Sterling (2009) notes, radio research has become more sophisticated and diverse in nature over the last few decades, and many noteworthy journals and books have been published. However, there is still a feeling that radio is the "forgotten medium" (p. 244) when it comes to research, at least in the United States. Many of the studies that make up contemporary radio research deal either with new media (e.g. Ferguson & Greer, 2011; Lin, 2009; Albarran, Anderson, Bejar, Bussart, Daggett, et al., 2007), the role of radio in developing nations (e.g. Torres,

2011; Seneviratne, 2011; Mwesige, 2009), or the ever-growing fascination with radio's past (e.g. Kilpatrick, 2011; Perry, 2011; Keith, 2008).

For the most part, it would appear that those who pursue radio studies agree with many outside academia who believe that radio's best days are in the past, and that, to quote one financial analyst, "it will all be downhill from here" (Munarriz, 2012).

However, the absence of non-historical study of radio in the United States occurs even as the medium continues to gain listenership, reaching nearly 243 million Americans over the age of 12 each week (Arbitron Inc., 2013), an increase of nearly 3 million from just two years ago (Lieberman, 2011). According to Arbitron, Inc. (2013), radio reaches more than 92 percent of African-American listeners, 95 percent of Hispanics, and 92 percent of all adults aged 18 to 34, a critical category in an era of explosive growth for other media options. Most American households have at least eight working radio receivers, and eight out of ten adults listen to radio in a car, using one of the approximately 140 million car radios in use (Keith, 2010). Therefore, research that examines the current state of radio and why people still enjoy it is very relevant, and very necessary. Such research also contributes to the overall study of mass communication by describing how a traditional medium is attempting to reinvent itself to compete with all of its new rivals.

Through the observation of radio announcers, both while they are on the air and while preparing and producing their on-air work, I examine and explain the process through which a modern-day broadcaster conceives and executes a performance of self. This project is limited to observation and analysis of the preparation, execution, and promotion of broadcast programs. The announcers' non-work activities were not included in the research. In addition, the focus is on those whose jobs mostly involve being on the

air; therefore, ancillary personnel such as producers and engineers were excluded. This study was also subject to limitations of expenses and ability to travel.

The following chapter will provide an in-depth explanation of the theoretical background for this study, including the dramaturgical and narrative approaches to self-conception, as well as coorientation. Subsequently in Chapter Three, there will be a description of the methodology for this project. Chapters Four through Nine detail the results of my research. In Chapter Ten, I introduce a theoretical model for the performance of self on the radio through an analysis of my research findings. This analysis will be followed by a brief conclusion.

## CHAPTER 2: LITERATURE REVIEW

### *Goffman's Theories of the Self*

The work of Erving Goffman made invaluable contributions to both communication and identity studies. Born in 1922 in Canada, Goffman attended the University of Toronto before pursuing a doctorate at the University of Chicago. His landmark book *The Presentation of Self in Everyday Life* arose in part from his doctoral thesis at Chicago, for which he observed social conditions in the Scottish Shetland Islands. His dramaturgical approach to conceiving the self fits well within a sociological tradition dating back to Cooley and Mead. Goffman's later application of linguistics made his frame theory a crucial part of the understanding of all levels of communication, from the mediated to the interpersonal. After a decade at the University of California at Berkeley, Goffman moved to the University of Pennsylvania in 1968, continuing his work there until his death in 1982 (Lemert, 1997).

Goffman's analyses of the way humans interact and make meaning make as much sense today as they did when he first attained prominence in the 1950s and 1960s. Lemert (1997) writes, "He was possibly the first to tell us what we hated to hear. Appearances count for more than do truth, beauty, freedom, the good self, and all the other foundational virtues of modern life... this is why he should be read today" (p. xxxiii). At the same time, Goffman saw the larger picture of social reality. He was among the first to recognize that reality was structured by a surprisingly universal social mechanism (Lemert, 1997). Later sociologists such as Berger and Luckmann (1967) would make this view commonplace. We sustain our social reality through fabrications; our everyday activities are guided by our imagined ideals of what we can or should do in a given

situation (Lemert, 1997). Branaman (1997) states that Goffman used metaphors of drama, game, and ritual to describe reality, thus calling attention to the manipulative and moral aspects of social life.

Goffman was also a fan of radio; he often used examples from the world of broadcasting to illustrate his concepts of the social world. Likewise, his concepts can be applied back to the everyday duties of radio professionals. Lemert (1997) states that (much like sociologists) writers, composers, and comedians draw their material from things that happen in everyday life; it follows that radio personalities would be no different. Goffman's *The Presentation of Self in Everyday Life* and his later essay "Radio Talk" illustrate the ways in which radio broadcasters devise, manage, and execute impressions, in order to present the character that they prefer their audiences to receive.

#### *The Presentation of Self in Everyday Life*

Goffman's first major work was 1959's *The Presentation of Self in Everyday Life*. It was noteworthy not just for Goffman's introduction of the dramaturgical approach to theorizing the self, but also for indicating a sort of "practical sociology" that found value in the mundane activities of everyday people (Lemert, 1997, p. xviii). Branaman (1997) states that Goffman devised the self as a social product, created from performances put on in social situations and dependent on validation that comes from the norms of stratified society. The self becomes respectable within society if it shows characteristics that are preferred by the dominant culture. This view is similar to that of Goffman's (1967) essay, "On Face-Work", in which he described how a person maintains the positive social value he/she claims to have, a concept that Goffman called "face" (p. 5).

Granted, many radio professionals are paid performers; they work within the entertainment field and many do so under professional pseudonyms. However, the audience needs to believe that the broadcaster is legitimate for the broadcast to be successful. In other words, they must believe that the broadcaster is the same when on the air as when he/she is not. This is not so different from how people approach each other everywhere, every day. In the following sections, I will present many of the fundamental aspects of Goffman's (1959) dramaturgical approach and how they may be applied to radio.

*Performance.* Through his dramaturgical approach, Goffman (1959) asked us to see each other as characters in a performance. The observing audience must believe that the character an individual performs before them possesses the correct attributes for that character. In addition, the tasks that the character performs must have the appropriate consequences for that character. If an individual becomes fully immersed in the performance of his/her character, this person might go so far as to confuse this staged reality with real reality. Kruse (2012) writes that noted sports talk show host "The Fabulous Sports Babe" became so wrapped up in being that character that she completely refused to be Nanci Donnellan, the real person behind the character.

On the other hand, the individual may not commit to the character at all. Goffman (1959) referred to this type of person as the cynic, who finds "an unprofessional pleasure" (p. 18) in the ability to toy with a performance that the audience must take seriously. Usually, the performance takes place somewhere in between these two extremes. Goffman (1961) suggested that someone engaging in a performance of a social role does not allow him/herself to be confined completely to an expected definition of a

situation. This sort of activity that runs counter to expectation is called “role distance” (p. 133). Many radio personalities have become increasingly cynical about the role they play as powerful presenters of information and entertainment. In the 1970s, John Landecker toyed with the professional concept of being a disc jockey, making fun of his jingles and the formatics of Top-40 radio; many other DJs soon followed suit. As some of those DJs transitioned into jobs as talk show hosts, they brought a certain degree of cynicism and role distance to that format as well (Crider, 2010).

Goffman (1959) defined “front” as the part of the performance that individuals use to define the situation for their audience. The front comprises both setting and personal front. The setting can be any furniture or items used as scenery or props for any kind of action. In the setting of a radio studio, props include the various pieces of equipment, microphones, and other furnishings. With no visual component to a radio performance, scenery is unnecessary. Goffman’s (1959) definition of personal front includes the expressive items most identified with the performer, such as clothing, facial expressions, body language, or gender and racial characteristics. Again, there is typically no visual component to a radio performance, so the vocal aspects of personal front (i.e. inflection, accent) are emphasized. The audience expects consistency between appearance and manner, and coherence among appearance, manner, and setting.

Society places predetermined limits on what an individual can do during a performance of self (Branaman, 1997). Goffman (1959) noted, “When an actor takes on an established social role, usually he finds that a particular front has already been established for it” (p. 27). This is certainly true of radio personalities, whom the audience expects to act and sound a certain way. To put it another way, Goffman (1967) stated that

a person's face is "on loan to him from society" (p. 10). When someone enters a new role, others assume that the person already knows parts of the role, as when an on-air personality takes a job at a new station.

A performer communicates the essential acts for completing the core tasks of a status in such a way as to show demonstrably his/her qualities and attributes, to earn the right to keep that face. Goffman (1959) stated that these activities allow for so much dramatic self-expression that exemplary cases become famous within their craft, be they surgeons, boxers, or policemen. In radio, such examples include real broadcasters such as Howard Stern and Rush Limbaugh, as well as fictional characters, like "Dr. Johnny Fever" from the 1970s television sitcom *WKRP in Cincinnati*.

A performance is an idealized view of a situation; Goffman (1959) quoted Cooley (1922) in explaining that people always try to seem a little better than they are. This point may explain how a normally shy person eventually can become a gregarious radio personality. In addition, people may perform above their social position in the hopes of upward mobility, or they may downplay expressions of wealth to show humility. Goffman used this last point to explain the way minorities and women played to stereotypes in his era; stereotypes of female announcers as sidekicks who laugh at the jokes of their male counterparts or sexualize their delivery have abounded throughout the history of radio (Halper, 2001) and still exist today (Crider, in press).

In order to give a convincing performance, an individual must hide anything that is inconsistent with ideal standards. In most cases, the audience does not know, or is not supposed to know, the effort and mistakes that went into the performance. The performer must convey a sense of reality in a performance, giving no indication that any

contrivance took place. Furthermore, the audience is not supposed to know that the performer spent years perfecting the role, may have suffered indignities, may have made deals to acquire the role, or that qualifications are not as they seem (Goffman, 1959). However, radio personalities may sometimes let the audience in on stories of hardships; Don Imus and Glenn Beck speak often of their past substance addictions (Hinckley, 2010; Beck, 2007).

According to Goffman (1959), the audience should believe that the performance they are receiving is the most important one, and that the relationship between performer and audience has something special and unique about it. The performer should take steps to hide the routine nature of a performance and stress spontaneous aspects. For example, trained radio personalities learn to act as though every show is special. However, Goffman noted that people have several different characters that they play depending on the audience, so they must segregate these audiences from each other.

For any and all of these reasons, Goffman (1959) argued, “we must be prepared to see that the impression of reality fostered by a performance is a delicate, fragile thing that can be shattered by very minor mishaps” (p. 56). Therefore, a character must remain in character and control expressions to avoid getting the wrong reception. It also means that misrepresentation can occur, and that a performer can mislead the audience. Some in radio do this quite well; many radio stations have engaged in April Fools Day pranks over the years, not to mention the hysteria when Orson Welles’s 1938 *Mercury Theater* broadcast of *War of the Worlds* was taken by many listeners to be a real Martian invasion of Earth (Fisher, 2007).

No matter how much a radio personality purports his/her life to be an open book, there are always things that he/she will keep concealed. This is the performer's prerogative in any role or line of work. Goffman (1959) wrote, "Although particular performances, and even particular parts of routines, may place a performer in a position of having nothing to hide, somewhere in the full round of his activities there will be something he cannot treat openly" (p. 64).

Mystification is another concept with applications for radio performance. Goffman (1959) observed that the social distance between audience and performer, and restrictions on access that go with such distance, create a sense of awe and mystique in an audience. Most of the time, the radio audience cannot see the broadcaster, unless there is some visual component to the show, like an online video stream or a televised simulcast. Hinckley (2013) writes, "The fact that radio is a non-visual medium makes it feel exotic and perhaps slightly forbidden to see what happens in the studio." This aspect may explain the cult-like followings enjoyed by many personalities, the members of which engage in a sort of parasocial interaction that makes the personalities into unseen best friends or advisors with whom they engage in daily conversations (Giles, 2002). In addition, callers often treat a conversation with the on-air personality as if they are talking with a friend (Armstrong & Rubin, 1989; Turow, 1974). Listeners often talk to their friends or other listeners about what they heard (McClung, Pompper, & Kinnally, 2007).

Faithful listeners become part of an imagined community, an idea originally conceptualized by Anderson (1983) to describe the coalescing of national identity. People who were not joined into a community geographically became one through a shared

feeling of national pride. Newspapers helped in this formation process, but Douglas (2004) states that the introduction of radio made it more concrete, giving people spread widely across a country the chance to hear the same voice at the same time and have the same reactions. However, Douglas notes, radio as a local medium has more recently aided in the building of multiple identities that do not always align with the social or political mores of the nation as a whole. As a medium without visual images, the imaginative power of radio is much stronger than television, and over the years has led to the formation of imagined communities around certain forms of music (e.g. Top-40 in the days when it dominated AM) or certain personalities (such as Rush Limbaugh or Howard Stern). Again, the very nature of radio lends itself to mystification.

There also can be drawbacks to mystification. Program directors note that at live appearances, listeners may be so in awe of a radio personality that he/she must approach them first, just to remind the listeners that he/she is a normal person like they are (Crider, 2009). In these cases, it is possible that the actual physical appearance of the broadcaster is not what the audience member had expected, thereby creating inconsistency between appearance and manner.

*Teams.* When someone tries to maintain the definition of a situation through a performance, often this person does not do so alone, but as part of a larger team. Goffman (1967) noted that people often try to maintain not only their own face but also the faces of those around them. During interpersonal contact, each person in the interaction is a team of one. Each team member may play a different role in order to create a successful team performance. Goffman (1959) provided the example of the wait staff at a hotel he observed in Scotland. The wait staff puts up with being subordinate to hotel guests in

order to put on a successful work performance. Goffman also finds that team performances align with the norms of business etiquette.

When the individual performances fit together into a team impression, this impression becomes a third level of the act. Goffman (1959) wrote that when an individual commits to a performance, that person becomes his/her own audience. The individual self-imposes privately maintained standards of behavior because of a belief in an unseen audience; the entire team may perform as a whole for an unseen audience. Naturally in radio, a team performance takes place for an actual (and large) unseen audience.

There are two basic components of the relationship between team members. First, any member of the team has the power to give the show away or disrupt it. Each team member must rely on the good behavior of others. Second, they must see each other as people who are “in the know” (Goffman, 1959, p. 83), and extend automatically a formal privilege of familiarity as soon as an individual joins the team. A team is required to maintain its line, even if team members joke that they do not accept it. They know enough to save any disagreements for when the audience is not present. Moreover, to withhold information from a teammate is to withhold the teammate’s character and prevent the teammate’s performance of the character from taking place. At the same time, teammates must be trusted to keep secrets and control information concerning a performance. Team members also frequently engage in communication out of character. When they are between performances, they may treat the absent audience or team members derogatively. During a performance, they may engage in collusion through

secret communication, such as nonverbal cues or insider language. They also conduct realigning actions as a means of dealing with other teams (Goffman, 1959).

Goffman (1959) argued that when a team member makes a mistake, his/her teammates must suppress their desire for punishment until the audience is no longer present. As Goffman pointed out, “It is apparent that if performers are concerned with maintaining a line they will select as teammates those who can be trusted to perform properly” (p. 91). Finally, Goffman noted that certain team members direct the performance, and therefore have directive dominance; he gives the example of a baseball umpire who must uphold the sanctity of the game for the fans. At times, one team member becomes the center of attention and has dramatic dominance. Frequently, the person with directive dominance also has dramatic dominance.

*Regions.* Goffman (1959) defined a region as “any place that is bounded to some degree by barriers to perception” (p. 106). They vary according to the medium of communication. As a courtesy to the broadcasters and other people within a radio station, a typical on-air studio has walls with soundproofing materials attached, thus creating a region. Time is a boundary as well, particularly in the digital age where the listener can download a broadcast program in podcast form and listen at another time (McClung & Johnson, 2010). Additionally, the radio station’s frequency is a bounded portion of the available spectrum. Tuning from one station to another takes the listener from one region to another.

The performance occurs in what Goffman (1959) called the “front region” (p. 107). Activity in the front region requires politeness and decorum; politeness refers to how the performer treats the audience while communicating to them, and decorum refers

to those standards that do not involve communication. The terms themselves may seem out of place within the world of talk radio, where “shock jocks” (Feldman, 2004) often exhibit behavior that hardly would be called “polite.” However, even Howard Stern knows that he cannot disrespect his listeners; he would not be successful without them.

The back region is the place where everything suppressed during a performance can come out; the performers can slip out of character, rehearse their characters, or relax with the knowledge that the audience cannot find them. Errors and mistakes are often removed from the performance in the back region so that a finished product appears perfect and polished. A performer goes from front region to back region through a partition or guarded passageway; these boundaries can be literal, such as the doorway between a hotel dining room and the kitchen, or metaphorical (Goffman, 1959).

In a radio station, the on-air studio is typically the front region, particularly when the microphones are on. Therefore, any other part of the radio station is the back region, including the production room (where the practice or mistakes take place), offices, engineering area, or other departments. Goffman (1959) noted that the on-air studio itself could be the back region when the microphones are off, but that these walls tend to “fall at the flick of a switch” (p. 119). A team of performers can express their familiarity toward each other through backstage language, described as griping, kidding around, or inappropriate language or behavior. Goffman (1959), however, pointed out that “by invoking a backstage style, individuals can transform any region into a backstage” (p. 129).

Goffman (1959) also described a third region, the outside, covering all places that are neither front nor back regions. He explained that the most obvious example is when

one stands outside a building; the front and back regions are inside the building, and the person is an outsider. Outsiders can unexpectedly enter the front or back region of a performance, causing problems for both the outsider and the performer. Outsiders may see a performance that is not meant for them and become disillusioned about the show that occurs when the outsiders are the intended audience. The performer may become confused, caught between the role meant for the outsider and the role meant for the audience in the invaded front region. Goffman uses Burke's example of the husband who is domineering in the workplace, but weak amongst his family, and therefore tries to avoid a collision between work and family life. The performer may adjust by welcoming the outsider as someone who belonged in this audience all along, although Goffman admitted that it might be better to expel the intruder from the violated space.

*Impression management.* The above techniques are examples of what Goffman (1959) termed impression management. There are many ways that a performance can fall apart, causing performers to become flustered, slip out of character, and show the audience "an image of the man behind the mask" (p. 212). Despite the best efforts to keep mistakes in the back region, errors could occur during a performance. Tensions between team members could boil over, causing a sudden realignment of team members. In addition, the audience might confront the performer and tell him/her off. The performer throws him/herself on the mercy of the audience, risking rejection and humiliation.

When these problems occur, or as a means of preventing such problems, performers engage in impression management. Goffman (1967) also called this concept "face-work" (p. 12), and stated that such techniques are necessary for a person to save face. Most of these practices are defensive in nature. Team members must display

dramaturgical loyalty, pledging not to denounce teammates, divulge secrets between performances, or use their presence in the front region to stage their own show.

Performers must also show poise or dramaturgical discipline, which consists of self-control and avoidance of unmeant gestures or mistakes (Goffman, 1959).

Team members must have dramaturgical circumspection, putting the right amount of foresight into the design of a performance (Goffman, 1959). Radio show hosts often engage in many of these design techniques. They choose trustworthy teammates, adapt their performance based on how well the audience knows them and the (technological) props they have at their disposal, and try not to script their shows so tightly that they cannot adjust to changing circumstances (Mills, 2004). They also adapt the amount of modesty to the length of the performance; a disc jockey does not have to reveal much information during the ten-second introduction of a song, but a talk show host has several hours to fill. Other techniques of dramaturgical circumspection do not work so well in radio. For instance, a radio personality cannot choose his/her audience, although he/she can choose to work for a station that might provide a friendly audience, or choose not to include direct contact through phone calls.

According to Goffman (1959), the audience also engages in impression management to help the performer(s). They ignore mistakes made by the performer, come to the performer's aid in a crisis, and give respectful deference to new performers. Audiences use such tact because they identify with the performer or they desire to exploit the performance in some manner. When both performer and audience know that this protection is taking place, the separation between these two teams breaks down, allowing poignant moments to occur.

*Concept of self.* Goffman (1959) defined a social establishment as “any place surrounded by fixed barriers to perception in which a particular kind of activity regularly takes place” (p. 238). He cautioned that although his dramaturgical approach has application for any social establishment (such as radio), the approach depends on dynamic issues that go with the desire to perform a definition of a situation for others. His perspective intersects with Oswald Hall’s four perspectives (technical, political, structural, and cultural) that are used to analyze social establishments in various ways. Goffman merged individual personality, social interaction, and society into one framework; when an impression fails, consequences occur at all three levels. Therefore, as he also stated in “On Face-Work”, any attempt at social interaction is a gamble (Goffman, 1967).

In devising his dramaturgical approach, Goffman (1959) presented a template for social interaction. When an individual enters the presence of others, he/she wants to find out the facts of the situation. In so doing, that individual must rely on the impressions of others. These people will use politeness and decorum to be consistent with moral standards; as such, the individual will have no indication that the impression is a fabrication, created so that he/she will treat the others in the way they wish to be treated.

Using Goffman’s (1959) approach, the techniques used by the on-air personality to gain the desired results of his/her impression require a borrowing of terminology from the theatre. Goffman divided the self into two parts, the self-as-performer and the self-as-character. The performer is the fabricator of impressions, engaged in the all-too-human task of performance. The character is the ideal figure evoked by the performance. The self-as-character is not organic, but created from the social situation presented, just as a

character on a stage is not real. The self-as-performer trains to play the part, seeking to fulfill hopes and dreams through the act of performance. From this definition, the radio personality becomes a self-as-performer. The on-air personality wishes to maintain a definition of a situation for the benefit of the listener.

### *Radio Talk*

By 1981, Goffman's sociological theory had evolved considerably. Although Lemert (1997) points out that Goffman had always shown an interest in language, he took what many call a "linguistic turn" (p. xxxiv) in his 1974 book *Frame Analysis*. In subsequent works, Goffman applied framing to the way people interact with each other. His 1981 book *Forms of Talk* focused on several different ways in which to understand communication. In the chapter entitled, "Radio Talk," Goffman used the professional standards imposed on broadcasters to illustrate how people make and remedy mistakes, or as Goffman (1981) calls them, "faults" (p. 202). Although he frequently used examples from radio in *Presentation of Self*, "Radio Talk" is his most complete application of sociological theory to the world of broadcasting, and is therefore helpful for analysis of the broadcaster's performance of self.

As noted above, a radio audience expects the announcer to act and sound in a particular manner consistent with that social role. When the announcer pre-records a performance, as is the case with most commercials and other station elements, the audience receives a flawless performance. Nobody knows how many errors occurred in the recording process, because none of them are in the final product (Goffman, 1959). Goffman (1981) chose to study radio announcing because it is the central task of the trade; therefore, he attempted to bring sociolinguistic concerns to ethnographic ones.

“The key contingency in radio announcing,” he presumed, “is to produce the effect of a spontaneous, fluent flow of words – if not a forceful, pleasing personality – under conditions that lay speakers would be unable to manage” (p. 198).

*Background.* Goffman (1981) stated that any communicative effort has substantive consequences for any system of ongoing activity, especially those that involve other actors, and expressive consequences in terms of judgments the audience makes about competence. A failed attempt at competence initiates social control; the failing person will take some sort of remedial action, or be encouraged to do so by others. These remedial actions can be either substantive, restitutive acts, or ritual acts designed to redefine expressive implications. The latter acts resemble those of impression management (Goffman, 1959), as well as the ritual actions that restore face (Goffman, 1967). These actions and the remedies taken tend to be dialogic so as to assure the offender that the situation has been resolved.

The study in question is Goffman’s (1981) attempt to show that the social control model does not quite work with regard to competencies. An attempt to impose social control in the event of a mistake sometimes causes more mistakes, which in theory should start the process all over again, complicating the matter greatly. This problem is definitely the case with speech competency; the fault is verbal, and the remedial process must be verbal, which means that the “remedy itself can then add to what must be remedied” (p. 202). Moreover, some speech tasks, such as foreign words that are hard to pronounce, cannot be done without error. Some examples of basic speech faults include transposing parts of words or whole words, omitting letters, and blending words together.

*Higher standards.* Speech competency is the central concern when studying radio announcing, and Goffman (1981) argued that we have a natural predisposition to believe that speech production will always be flawless. However, in ordinary life, lay speakers accept some degree of fault in speech production, as well as when taking turns speaking. Speakers may make mistakes that they should have known to avoid, or they may make mistakes - such as gaffes or misuse of words - of which they were unaware. When the speaker recognizes the fault, there is a reaction and then a remedy. Remedies include continuing as though nothing untoward has happened, or a form of correction ranging between “flat” and “strident” (p. 215). A flat correction involves no change in pace or tone, showing that there is no reason for worry; strident correction usually involves a raised voice or increased tempo, demonstrating single-minded concern for the correction.

However, radio announcing carries with it a higher standard for speech competency. Goffman (1981) pointed out that the only claim an announcer makes is the ability to competently read the script. This is a bit of an oversimplification. The listening audience does not necessarily expect a radio personality to be only, as Goffman put it, a “perfect speech machine” (p. 223). Goffman later recognized a distinction between an announcer who merely follows a script and a radio personality who should show emotion, and the audience gives some latitude for the radio personality to be human because that is relatable. However, Goffman was right to claim that to the speaker, a speech fault could come from anywhere, not just speech itself.

*Roles and bases.* Goffman (1981) outlined three roles of the speaker: animator, author, and principal. The animator is the sounding box from which the utterance originates, the author is the agent who composes or scripts the utterance, and the principal

is the party to whose position or belief the words attest. The latter role requires a person to have a social role or capacity that includes speaking for the entity to which the person belongs. A speaker does not necessarily hold all three roles at the same time. A radio announcer frequently speaks for other people, as in commercials or even station identifications. If the on-air personality's name is the brand (as in the name of the show), then he/she may identify him/herself and switch from speaking to a larger cause to calling attention to him/herself.

According to Goffman (1981), the three roles of the speaker make up the production format of an utterance. The participation framework is the context for receiving an utterance. Both production format and participation framework shift from time to time, often together. There are three bases for vocal production: memorization, reading from a script, and the ongoing assembly of a text in response to the situation and audience, which Goffman calls "fresh talk" (p. 227). A speaker can weave the three bases throughout, switching from one to another or blending them as necessary. Fresh talk commonly combines all three of the speaker roles; reading from a script involves all three roles, but the author is a past realization of the speaker.

Here, Goffman applied his (1974) work on framing to describe speech: footing refers to the alignment of a speaker to an utterance, and frame space is the interpretive space in which listeners can understand the utterance acceptably. When a speaker commits a speech fault and attempts a remedy, the speaker changes his/her footing; he/she must defend his/her role as animator, while also becoming the sole author and principal. In radio announcing, this is a violation of frame space; it strikes the hearer as unusual, once again showing that a remedy can become another offense (Goffman, 1981).

*Types of announcing.* Goffman (1981) wrote that announcing comes in different forms, each with its own footing. Action override is the description of events that the audience cannot see; examples include on-the-spot news reporting and sports play-by-play. The announcer uses fresh talk, but must remain subservient to the events talking place. “Three-way” announcing (Goffman, 1981, p. 234) is the standard interview format; the announcer carries on a conversation with a guest, and the listener is a third participant who cannot speak. Radio programs with multiple hosts or ensemble casts also use three-way announcing. In direct announcing, the announcer carries on a one-to-one conversation with the audience, although again the listener cannot talk back. This is generally the format for solo talk show hosts and disc jockeys, and often involves reading from a script; as such, Goffman put his principal focus on this form of radio talk.

An announcer must give listeners the impression that the announcer believes what he/she is saying. Goffman (1981) stated that radio announcers are more likely to be trusted because they present themselves in the same guise they use in everyday life; here, he contradicted himself because a radio announcer is, of course, performing a character for the audience that is not the same as the character employed off-air. Regardless, the radio personality downplays the presence of a script, giving instead the impression of fresh talk. Commercial and announcement writers learn to maintain this impression by writing for the ear. Again, a higher standard is in play: the radio audience expects a flawless performance from the announcer; therefore, faults that go unnoticed in ordinary conversation are noticed when made by a professional radio announcer. Goffman added that when an untrained person, such as an interview guest or a game show contestant, is

part of a broadcast, the audience tends to allow for the guest's lack of announcing expertise, but will be more likely to notice faults than if they occurred in a normal setting.

*Errors.* In "Radio Talk," Goffman (1981) presented the results of an analysis he conducted of radio blooper records, as well as local radio broadcasts that he observed or recorded. Although he was correct in stating that the announcer has no control over who joins the audience, his presumption that the audience represents the "public-at-large" (p. 242) is no longer valid in the age of niche formatting (Wirth, 2002), if it ever was to begin with. It is more likely today that the audience will be similar in taste, humor, and knowledge to the on-air personality because the personality's station has been targeted to appeal to certain qualities of audience members, as opposed to a more mass-appeal approach.

However, any listener is primed for alternative readings of a broadcast, a perspective Goffman (1981) borrowed from cultural studies (e.g. Fiske, 1992). Announcers usually fail to consider all possible readings of their utterances, and such ambiguity causes unintended faults when the audience misunderstands what has been said. For instance, the audience may find faults by stretching interpretations or finding off-color remarks when ambiguity occurs. Goffman's (1981) examples include a laundry commercial with the line "When your clothing is returned, there is little left to iron," and a reading of FFA contest results with the ambiguous line "Miss Betty Smith was chosen the best hoer" (p. 249-251). Goffman also warned against the use of "leaky" words or phrases such as "balls," "can," or "big ones" (p. 251); such phrases lend themselves easily to indecent misinterpretations. In the heat of the moment, the embarrassed announcer may compound one mistake with another. Once an audience discovers that it

enjoys laughing at such incompetence, it may become a reason for listening to the program.

As Goffman (1981) points out, when others write the announcer's script, the announcer cannot use avoidance techniques and has to read something about which he/she lacks proper knowledge. In addition, faults may arise from prerecorded strips of speech, such as commercials that produce unintentional linkages: "Lipton Soup is what you will want for dinner tonight... Thank goodness I brought an Alka-Seltzer!" (p. 260) The sound effects or sound bites played by personality talk show hosts can also cause mistakes, although often the contextual misuse is intentional for comedic purposes.

According to Goffman (1981), when an announcer does a competent job, he/she projects a satisfactory image. The work that went into creating this image remains hidden from the audience, as is the case with any character in the preparation of a performance of self (Goffman, 1959). Goffman (1981) suggested that a proper comparison would entail analysis of announcers who are new to the industry and still learning how to handle mistakes. However, when even the sharpest announcer makes a mistake, he/she will attempt to create distance from the fault.

Goffman (1981) listed a number of techniques that announcers use to manage faults. The announcer may assume the authorial function and extend the copy, change footing from principal to animator as a means of correction or injecting personal opinion, or betray the role of principal and let the audience know they were not hearing fresh talk. This last set of techniques, which Goffman called "subversion" (p. 296) allows the on-air personality to engage in wordplay or other collusive communications that take the form of in-jokes with the audience. The announcer can also engage in self-communication,

expressing shock through response cries, speaking aloud to him/herself, or breaking up into laughter that overwhelms the ability to continue. As Goffman stated, “Indeed, the two-person, speaker and kibitzer format may be the underlying structure in all of this communication, the one-announcer form being an adaptation.” (p. 312)

Goffman (1981) concluded that corrective actions force the audience to see the speaker in a way they had not considered, through “his plight as a speaker of words” (p. 320). The announcer comes across as more human. This examination of radio talk illustrates critical features of everyday face-to-face talk that would otherwise go unnoticed because of the lower standards that lay speakers have for each other. The professional announcer navigates frame space to handle predicaments in a more exceptional way than the average person, thus making radio personalities notable subjects for research.

#### *Application by Other Scholars*

Few scholars have applied Goffman’s theories directly to radio broadcasting. Montgomery (1986) did his own analysis of DJ talk, invoking Goffman’s speaker roles, but he was more concerned with constructing the identity of the audience. O’Sullivan’s (2005) study of Irish talk show callers and Nicola’s (2010) analysis of talk show host Rush Limbaugh are two noteworthy examples of the application of Goffman to on-air performance.

O’Sullivan (2005) turns the focus from the on-air personality to people who call into a radio talk show; in this case, he chose Ireland’s *The Gerry Ryan Show*. Noting Turow’s (1974) finding that conversing with a talk show host substitutes for interpersonal communication, O’Sullivan uses Goffman (1959) to describe a call to a radio station as

an opportunity for a public presentation of self. In addition, the knowledge that a person is interacting with host and unseen audience causes a caller to manage impressions.

O'Sullivan (2005) analyzed 173 callers to *The Gerry Ryan Show* over a two-week period, and grouped them according to the ends for which they called. These include seeking advice, (emotive) expression of views, expression of personality (or exhibitionism), and telling troubles.

Although the focus of his study is the callers, O'Sullivan takes time to mention characteristics of the host. In so doing, he alludes to Goffman's (1981) primary concern of broadcasters – to be faultless but sound natural at the same time. He also describes the typical talk show host by using Goffman's (1967) characterization of the party hostess whose job is to keep things lively. The bulk of O'Sullivan's (2005) study, however, is interviews with callers. He found that callers learn what makes a good phone call by listening to other calls; they tend to be regular listeners of the program, which acclimates them to the sort of discourse expected.

O'Sullivan also found that exhibitionist and emotive callers tend to be more conscious of their call to the program as a performance of self. Accordingly, these callers engage in many techniques of impression management, such as avoiding nervous stumbles or limiting contribution to the conversation. They also are quite aware of the power dynamic between host and caller. The setting of *The Gerry Ryan Show* places an emphasis on having fun, and many callers reported enjoyment of their experience. However, the dictates that a caller must help to move the show along means that in a way, the caller is temporarily a member of Ryan's team, and must adhere to their line,

which requires understanding playful humor and maintaining the (fun) definition of the situation.

Nicola (2010) looks at the way Rush Limbaugh used race in his treatment of Barack Obama during the 2008 presidential election. She draws an important distinction for her study of Limbaugh, noting that her analysis of Limbaugh's program cannot be an analysis of Limbaugh himself. She states, "The truth is that 'the real Rush Limbaugh' – the flesh-and-blood human who opens and closes the studio door and has mental processes which are not translated into speech for the radio listening public – is entirely unavailable for analysis" (p. 283). Instead, her analysis focuses on the character "Rush Limbaugh", which she describes as the embodiment of Limbaugh's message-persona.

Taking direction from Goffman (1959), the self-as-character is what the scholar should always study when considering a radio personality's work. "Rush Limbaugh" is a character like "Howard Stern" is a character, like "Ryan Seacrest" is a character, and so on. As Nicola (2010) points out, Goffman does not restrict the separation of the speaking self (or self-as-performer) from the self who is represented in speech (or self-as-character) to the world of theatre. Much like other facets of the dramaturgical approach, it is available to everyone.

Nicola (2010) also uses the three roles of the speaker to describe how Limbaugh represents himself on the air. When Limbaugh uses his call screener, James Golden, in the role of "Bo Snerdley, Official Obama Criticizer" (p. 291), Golden assumes only the role of animator, as Nicola suspects that his words are actually Limbaugh's, written specifically for him. When "Mr. Snerdley" appears only as someone alluded to by Limbaugh, Nicola argues that there is no "Mr. Snerdley"; Limbaugh uses him as a

rhetorical device to give the impression of off-air conversation. The only role this version of “Mr. Snerdley” could assume would be that of principal, and Nicola declares it naïve to think so.

### *Narrative Identity*

A closely related area of identity theory to Goffman’s dramaturgical perspective is narrative identity. Bruner (2004; 1997) argues that the only way humans experience time is in a linear, narrative fashion; therefore, life becomes a series of autobiographical stories. When people are in an institutional context, restrictions of that institution tend to constrain what they talk about (Holstein & Gubrium, 2000). In radio, the revealing of the self in narrative fashion is subject to constraints of time and format. Vila (2003; 2000) expands on the idea of self-as-narrative by stating that we create characters of ourselves when in the role of narrator for our own life stories. These concepts of character and narrative complement Goffman’s (1981; 1959) work nicely. In fact, Goffman (1981) noted that a speaker makes him/herself into a protagonist in a world that is only spoken about, not the actual world in which the speaking takes place.

Bruner (1997) states that self-narratives are unstable and subject to change whenever there is “trouble” (p. 157) that makes the self no longer relatable. People look back on these moments as crucial turning points in their lives. The experience of the self comes from a pre-existing system in which we find individuation. The instability of narratives makes us susceptible to cultural and interpersonal (e.g. religious) influences (Bruner, 2004). Bruner (1997) cites Freud’s belief that the self is a cast of characters. In that sense, both Freud and Bruner come close to Goffman’s dramaturgical view of selfhood.

Vila (2000) builds on Bruner's idea of narrative by stating that we pull identity from the same tropes we use to construct narratives, most notably metaphor. Because the self is multiple and fractured, a person has many possible characters that could be used in a given situation. Once an identity plot is formed and a character chosen, metaphor advances certain identity claims, according to the social categories from which one has to choose. Circumstances change, but the plot remains consistent. Vila's (2003) study of Mexican-Americans supports this point; despite having to deal with different sign systems on either side of the U.S.-Mexican border, the identity plot, "All poverty is Mexican" (p. 109) remains. The differences lay in the ways that the plot is applied to various people.

The narrative constructs the character by constructing the story. Redman (2005) adds that narrative composure causes narratives to be composed in such a way so as to be accepted by society. Goffman's study of talk supports this line of thinking: "We are situated as listeners to the teller's story, not as listeners to the utterances of characters in the teller's story" (1983, p. 14). He adds that the listener cannot properly follow and frame the story until a prologue is supplied. The framework of the story is more important than the details, and therefore provides a universal pattern for understanding.

Holstein and Gubrium (2000) draw much of their narrative approach to the self from Goffman, including the performance of self and the importance of setting and props. Like Bruner (1997) and so many other identity scholars, Holstein and Gubrium (2000) believe that the self is always a work in progress. Sometimes the self requires re-centering; this process takes place away from the social world (much like Goffman's concept of "backstage").

Mixing ideas taken from Foucault (1977) and ethnomethodology, Holstein and Gubrium (2000) state that the presentation of self is a combination of discursive practice and discourses-in-practice. When a person constructs a narrative self, biographical particulars are the most ready resource. However, the presentation of this narrative self is constrained, promoted, and shaped by institutional concerns. Holstein and Gubrium use the term “institutional talk” to describe discourses to which a self must adhere when part of an institution. These discourses include any kind of technical jargon or terminology associated with the institution; Holstein and Gubrium’s (2000) best example is the “Twelve Steps” (p. 121) of Alcoholics Anonymous. Radio personalities sometimes invent their own slang; Rush Limbaugh (1992) calls his faithful listeners “dittoheads,” refers to alcohol as “adult beverages,” and says that to die is to “assume room temperature” (p. 294-295).

### *Coorientation*

I have focused on the ways in which radio personalities present themselves on the air in a manner consistent with Goffman’s (1959) dramaturgical approach to identity. This approach occurs on the radio as a means of fostering connection between announcer and audience. Narrative approaches to identity also explain how personalities put a self out to the audience that can be understood through a common framework. However, to effectively study the connection between radio personality and audience, one must also consider the concept of coorientation. The following is a review of the theoretical roots of coorientation, previous applications of coorientation to media and audiences, and the ways in which coorientation research dovetails with my research interests.

*Origins of Coorientation Theory*

Like Goffman, Newcomb (1959; 1953) cited Cooley and Mead as intellectual forerunners of his work. Newcomb tied his study of consensus to theories of the self by stating that the self is “a consensual product” (1959, p. 279). Interpersonal consensus is necessary for social integration. Newcomb defined consensus as the existence of similar orientations or attitudes toward something. These attitudes have cognitive and emotional components, and consensus requires both communication and certain psychological processes. Newcomb explained that the general goal of communication is sharing of information, but humans are motivated to seek increased consensus through communication because they find consensus to be a rewarding effect of successful communication. When communication is nonconsensual, it becomes stressful, or as Newcomb put it, “characterized by strain” (1959, p. 281).

Newcomb constructed a model of consensus based on Heider (1946), who proposed that attitudes toward people and events influence each other. If two people in a dyad have the same attitudes toward the event or each other, then there is balance. Newcomb (1959; 1953) took this notion of balance and created a model wherein Person A and Person B have attitudes about Object X. He acknowledged that there must be a motivation to reach consensus, some level of importance at play, and a sense that the object has some impact on the people involved. Newcomb (1953) stated that Person A and Person B’s orientations are interdependent, thereby making A-B-X a system of simultaneous orientation, or coorientation. The stronger feelings A has toward X, the greater “strain toward symmetry” (p. 395) that A feels with regard to B’s feelings toward X.

Newcomb's (1959) principal research interest was in finding out how groups of strangers come to reach consensus; his exemplary case was incoming college students. Analyzing the consequences of their consensus-seeking behavior, Newcomb stated that there is a circular tendency to exaggerate the existing consensus a person has with someone to which he/she has a strong attraction. Attraction increases when perceived consensus increases, leading to the notion that the most popular people are those with whom others find most agreement. This idea gives rise to a "psychological need to perceive consensus" (p. 290), something that only comes about as a learned outcome of socialization.

Reviewing the existing literature on consensus, Scheff (1967) differentiated Newcomb's model from the symbolic interactionist approach favored by Mead (1934) and the concept of intersubjectivity later championed by Habermas (1984). Although Scheff found useful ideas in Newcomb's model, he took issue with Newcomb's underestimation of the degree and extent of coordination required between different types of groups as they work toward coorientation. Scheff proposed that the greater the need for coordination, the greater the consensus. He conceptualized the idea of different orders of coorientation. Agreement is zero-order coorientation, first-order coorientation is what Person A thinks Person B thinks of Object X, and second-order coorientation is what B thinks A thinks B thinks of X. Later researchers cited the Scheff model, but often found it inferior to Newcomb's (O'Keefe, 1973).

#### *The Coorientation Measurement Model*

McLeod and Chaffee (1973) moved from explaining coorientation to attempting to measure it. They recognized the contributions of five different fields of thought to

coorientation theory, including the symbolic interactionist tradition of Cooley and Mead, and Newcomb's (1959; 1953) model. They also noted the theoretical traditions of psychiatry, consensus research, and person perception. The latter area of research gave rise to McLeod and Chaffee's use of the term *congruency* to indicate the similarity of one's own feelings to his/her perception of the other's, and of the term *accuracy* to mean the correctness of one's perception of the other's feelings about him/her when compared with the other's actual feelings.

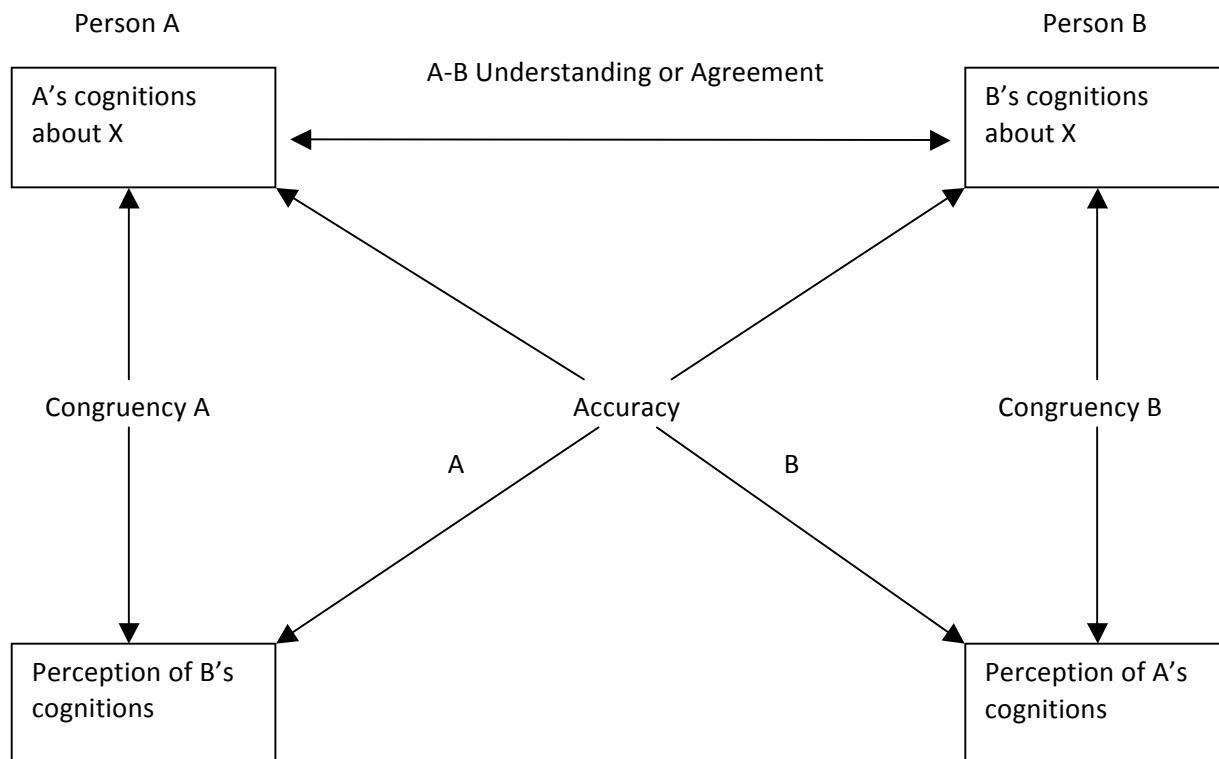
Being careful to not refer to their model as a theory of coorientation, McLeod and Chaffee (1973) first described the strategy behind determining coorientation. This strategy requires an interpersonal unit of analysis, studying changes in cognitive states over time, measurement of sequences of messages and acts, and analysis of the combinations of cognitive states of the people involved. The latter analysis includes their estimates of each other's cognitive states. Moving on to a conceptual model of coorientation, McLeod and Chaffee (1973) shifted the focus from the two people involved (A and B) to the object (X). They stated that the attributes of the object, not the attitudes toward the object itself, are the key elements in the process of coorientation; they allow a person to determine the salience and pertinence of the object and thus discriminate it from other objects. Although salience may be important to short-term coorientation, pertinence is more crucial in the long term.

To update McLeod and Chaffee's example with a more modern political case, suppose "Sam Smith" (p. 14) is Person A, "Judy Jones" (p. 14) is Person B, and President Obama is Object X. Sam likes Judy, and believes that Judy likes him. Sam happens to have negative attitudes about President Obama due to attributes such as his handling of

the economy. Sam believes that Judy has the same attitudes. Through communication, he may come to find out that Judy approves of the president. Therefore, his initial accuracy was low. As they communicate, Sam and Judy focus on what they deem the most salient attribute of President Obama, his handling of the economy. Although their level of agreement may not change, accuracy will increase, and as they both find the economy to be of great importance, they find common ground for discussion of politics. In so doing, coorientation has taken place.

In order to study this phenomenon, McLeod and Chaffee (1973) stated that a researcher must recognize the greater social reality around the interaction, thus making for a problem of measurement. Therefore, coorientation requires not just a conceptual model, but also a model for measurement. The coorientation measurement model focuses on the relationships between measures, not the actual measures themselves. It eludes past criticisms about person perception research by expanding the focus beyond person-to-person orientations to also consider those between person and object.

The three main variables of this model are congruency, agreement/understanding, and accuracy. Congruency, being an intrapersonal concept, tends to be used as an independent variable. Agreement has to do with mutuality of salience; understanding is a measure of similar pertinences. As mentioned above, agreement is unlikely to change as a result of communication, so McLeod and Chaffee (1973) cite understanding as a more important variable for study. Accuracy is achievable through communication. There are five main measures in this model, as congruency and accuracy must be measured for both Person A and Person B (see following page).



**Figure 2-1. The Coorientation Measurement Model (McLeod & Chaffee, 1973)**

McLeod and Chaffee (1973) recommended looking at how coorientational states change over time, but they noted the difficulty in measuring the communication that takes place between two points in time. Indeed, “coorientation” may be an ideal to strive for, but one that does not tend to take place all the time in real-world situations. Therefore, the researcher must recognize that there are factors guiding people to coorient with each other, as well as factors that enable communication. Coorientation applies to groups when one is assumed to be oriented to a group as a collective entity, as with a radio personality and his/her audience, particularly when interaction between the two is limited to occasional phone calls taken on the air.

McLeod and Chaffee (1973) also recognized that there is usually asymmetry between two people entering communication. They may have different statuses, different

experiences, different access to information, and so on. They made three suggestions for dealing with asymmetry: treat it as a control variable; integrate the factors accounting for asymmetry into a theory about coorientation, or limit analysis to one person's side of the situation.

Stamm and Pierce (1971) chose the latter option, operating on the assumption that each person enters a communication situation with some expectation about the other person's views. Through conversation, the person finds out whether or not congruency was confirmed. Stamm and Pearce added that accuracy is part of the communication process, instead of something to be studied after the fact as a presumed result of communication. They redefined accuracy as the discrimination between Person A's expectations of Person B and his/her perception of what B said. The confirmation or disconfirmation of congruency is the state of accuracy.

O'Keefe (1973) provided an example of integrating asymmetry into coorientation research, focusing exclusively on interpersonal communication between family members. He noted that much of the data from coorientation studies to that point was incomplete, and blamed social and environmental constraints that might have interaction effects on coorientation. One of these external factors is the goal of communication. Some goals require communication that increases accuracy; others require communication that increases agreement or congruency.

Wackman (1973) also focused on interpersonal communication and looked at the use of coorientation measures as dependent variables. He revisited Newcomb's (1959) study of college students and reinterpreted the findings to show that as familiarity grew amongst the freshmen, the accuracy of perceptions concerning others' positions

increased. Wackman found this result to be more crucial than the increase in agreement. Similar to Newcomb, he stated that interpersonal communication tends to result more often in information exchange, as opposed to persuasion. As a result, persuasion is unlikely to increase congruency; rather, a person is likely to have increased congruency after communication because he/she is convinced that he/she has successfully persuaded the *other* person.

### *Coorientation in Media Research*

Although coorientation is easiest to understand as an interpersonal phenomenon, several researchers have used coorientation research to focus on the ways that media influence their audiences. Clarke (1971) wrote that such research diverged from previous study of the media to focus on the “communication consequences” of entertainment (p. 354). Clarke (1973) used the concept of coorientation to find out how teenagers use the media to learn about popular music. Following Wackman (1973), Clarke focused on information seeking (outside a social system) and information sharing (within the social system). He used congruency as his main measure of coorientation, defined for this study as “the number of peers thought to enjoy the same music” (p. 554).

Clarke (1973) found that the link between coorientation and information seeking depends on topics and people involved with impression formation. Media use correlated with both information sharing and information seeking. Beyond shared evaluations of music, Clarke stated that his findings point to the importance of a diverse coorientation environment, in which people are exposed to a greater selection of information and can discover new tastes through communication with peers. A more homogeneous environment would only reinforce previously held opinions concerning music. In the 21<sup>st</sup>-

century media landscape where there is a far greater selection of information than in the 1970s, such conclusions are even more relevant.

Despite this promising research on entertainment media, most research regarding coorientation over the years has focused on the news media. Tichenor and Wackman (1973) looked at how exposure to different kinds of media can affect agreement on important community issues. Drawing upon prior research on conflict and consensus (Olien, Donohue, & Tichenor, 1968), Tichenor and Wackman differentiated between “definitional agreement,” agreement on the facts of a situation, and “support of officials,” agreement on opinions of the handling of a situation (p. 594). People who read local weekly newspapers tended to have greater support of officials, but support was highest among those who reported lower daily use of the media. Furthermore, when asked to estimate community opinions of public action, agreement turned out to be low, but congruency was high; most people thought that others had the same opinions they had.

Two decades later, Jones (1993) focused specifically on coorientation in the relationship between the news media and their audience. The interpersonal approach of coorientation can be expanded to the media-audience relationship because the media guides content to a generalized notion of their perceived audience, and the audience has a similar generalized orientation toward media content. Jones asked newspaper staff to rate their own stories, their audience’s reading preferences, and how the staff would rate such preferences. He found that only the accuracy correlation was significant, although limiting his inquiry to the small staff of one newspaper may have affected the results. He admits that such findings are probably not generalizable to the electronic media.

Voakes (1997) took on both sides of the media-audience relationship in his study of newspaper credibility. Applying the same logic as Jones (1993) with regard to studying coorientation in the mass media, he focused on journalist and audience appraisals of journalism ethics. After surveying both groups, Voakes found that journalists and readers would be in agreement over the ethics of a decision to publish a juvenile's name, and for much the same reasons. However, accuracy and congruency were both low; readers felt that journalists were motivated by legal, competitive, and occupational factors.

Meyer, Marchionni, and Thorson (2010) updated the literature on media coorientation to include new media; in this case, they studied online news and blogs. Referring to online media as a form of "mediated interpersonal communication" (p. 100), they adapted media equation theory (Reeves & Nass, 1996) to claim that interaction with blogs was similar to interpersonal interaction, therefore making coorientation applicable. Like Wackman (1973), Meyer et al. focused on congruency, finding that there were high levels of coorientation with both blogs and collaborative stories, those written by journalists with the help of citizens. They found low levels of coorientation with opinionated pieces and straight news stories. In addition, Meyer et al. declared that coorientation predicted expertise of the journalists. Therefore, the perceptions of low expertise in opinionated news pieces derived from alienation over biased reporting.

#### *Coorientation Reexamined*

Kim (2003) argues that previous coorientation research valued decision-making over problem solving, and content over action. He blames a focus on the concept of accuracy, which caused researchers to emphasize information exchange (McLeod &

Chaffee, 1973; Wackman, 1973). He seeks to explicate a behavioral model for coorientation, one that privileges the concept of understanding over agreement. Ultimately, Kim finds that coorientation is one step in a larger process toward action, a process that first requires observing through exposure, focusing attention, and cognizing. Cognizing, in turn, requires orientation, construction, or reorientation. Coorientation takes these individual processes and applies them to a collective.

Kim (2003) differentiates a crowd from a mass (as in an audience served by the media), stating that a crowd is unanimous from the start in its move toward action, but a mass has only co-exposure and the potential for co-focusing. Even though mass media such as radio often promote the formation of communities of interest within their audiences (Douglas, 2004), these communities are often leaderless. The public sphere as conceptualized by Habermas (1962/1996) mostly coorients; the larger concern of the public sphere is decision-making, rather than problem solving. Therefore, Kim (2003) states that the mass media are ineffective for spurring social action.

For the purposes of my research, however, this argument is irrelevant, and Kim's argument that research on affective elements of coorientation is of little use ignores the reasons why audiences select the mass media channels and programs that they do (Tichenor & Wackman, 1973; Wackman, 1973). Although efforts to open up the body of coorientation research to include more work on problem solving are welcomed, it is the information-exchange aspect of coorientation that is more important to my research. In addition, the view that communication is primarily about sharing of information returns us to the conceptual roots of coorientation (Newcomb, 1959).

The reasons why coorientation matters in the study of radio personalities are numerous. For instance, the privileging of information exchange over persuasion (Wackman, 1973) is quite accurate when considering radio communication. Although many talk show hosts may believe that they have persuasive abilities, much of their audience already agrees with them. Therefore, the listeners' primary interest is learning new information, particularly of the variety that confirms their beliefs. They may also listen because they are part of an affinity group of like-minded individuals, an idea very similar to that of the imagined community of listeners (Douglas, 2004). Other radio personalities such as disc jockeys build their audiences on the strength of their ability to impart information about music or entertainment or news to the listener. McLeod and Chaffee's (1973) recognition of asymmetry also merits consideration in research concerning radio. As Goffman (1959) noted, the social distance between a performer and the audience creates a sense of mystique and awe; such a difference in status applies to the radio personality and the listening audience.

The importance of radio as a medium for both entertainment and information makes many of the above studies relevant for the analysis of on-air personalities. The studies of the link between news media and audience (Meyer et al., 2010; Voakes, 1997; Jones, 1993) are especially pertinent. The presentation of a certain identity while on the air is the most important part of this dissertation research, but an understanding of coorientation can help explain why these identities are performed. Quoting Meyer et al. (2010), coorientation guides the media choices of the audience by "striking a fitting middle ground between giving [the audience] what they like and what they need" (p.

116). A well-performed radio personality connects with an audience by finding that middle ground.

### *Research Questions*

In this chapter, I have discussed the theoretical grounding for my study. Goffman's (1959) dramaturgical approach to studying the self has definite applications for the study of radio announcers as they perform a role that society has judged to be of great importance. Goffman's (1981) application of the social control model to radio announcers demonstrates a means of understanding how a radio personality carries on a performance through speaker roles while adhering to lofty professional standards. Narrative identity (Bruner, 2004; Holstein & Gubrium, 2000; Vila, 2000) allows an announcer to construct an on-air self by selecting from socially relevant plots and characters to maintain a linear story for his/her life. The study of coorientation (McLeod & Chaffee, 1973; Newcomb, 1953) illustrates how the performing announcer may establish a connection with the audience through communication that privileges information exchange. This sharing of information helps the announcer understand how to put together a performance that the listeners will enjoy.

In order to understand the role of a carefully constructed radio personality in making radio a successful, compelling medium, the following research questions are addressed in this dissertation:

RQ1: In what ways does an announcer on a live radio program present him/herself on the air as a personality?

RQ2: What processes does this presentation involve?

These are the major questions of this study. What are the everyday decisions made by radio announcers before, during, and after a live broadcast that put a certain persona out to the public? Conscious processes would include the techniques of impression management, as well as the backstage preparation work that precedes a performance for the “front” that is an open microphone (Goffman, 1959). They may also include a conscious consideration of institutional concerns. Are there directives from the program director, general manager, or consultant about how to sound on the air, or what things should and should not be discussed?

Some of the impression management that takes place during a performance may be subconscious, such as remedial responses to speech faults (Goffman, 1981). Many veteran radio announcers may be so experienced in the skills of their trade that the use of such skills becomes reflexive. In addition, the construction of identity through narrative conventions (Vila, 2000) may include conscious decisions on which details to include, but one must consider the predisposition of humans to live time through narrative (Bruner, 2004). They do not consciously choose to tell these details in narrative form; they have no other choice.

RQ3a: How do these processes vary according to the announcer’s job duties?

RQ3b: How do these processes vary according to the type of announcing?

These questions address the different types of announcer duties that occur every day on the radio. Does an announcer respond differently to a situation that calls for a certain type of announcing? Is the preparation for describing events directly to the audience as they happen (action override) different from the preparation for the more conversational three-way announcing format (Goffman, 1981)? Are the responses

different when a news announcer stumbles over copy, as opposed to a disc jockey erring in the production of fresh talk? Does impression management vary according to the sort of personality being performed by the announcer?

RQ4: In what ways does the announcer draw upon the listening audience in these processes?

Coorientation (McLeod & Chaffee, 1973; Newcomb, 1959) provides the basis for this final research question. As previous researchers (Meyer et al., 2010; Voakes, 1997; Jones, 1993) have done, I am applying the coorientation framework to a mass-media phenomenon. However, I am moving coorientation back toward its interpersonal roots by examining the connection between individual broadcasters and the generalized audience, and between individual broadcasters and individual listeners (as representatives of the generalized audience) whenever possible. Because radio communication often takes on the character of a one-to-one dialogue (Goffman, 1981), it is a unique form of media that has yet to be studied through this theoretical lens.

Therefore, this study will address some of the individual announcer's concerns that go with pursuing coorientation in this simulated interpersonal dialogue. Is the radio personality driven by a perception that the audience agrees with them on various topics? Does he/she tweak the presentation to increase congruency? What role does listener interaction play in this process? This question also reminds us that identity allows the self to be constructed by society (Perinbanayagam, 2000). How does the broadcaster work on maintaining a self that will be consistently deemed favorable (or at least acceptable) by the listeners through his/her daily on-air practices? An investigation into a radio announcer's responses to callers or other interactions with listeners will add much-needed

breadth and depth to the body of media coorientation research, as well as the literature on mediated social identity.

The ultimate dream for any aspiring radio personality is to create an audience that identifies itself as a group defined by its loyalty and devotion to listening to the personality. In other words, the broadcaster wishes for the members of his/her audience to incorporate listenership into their social identities (Tajfel, 1981). If the personality succeeds, the commercial necessities of radio should be met successfully. Answering the above research questions contributes to a greater understanding of how radio succeeds in creating and sustaining an audience through the formation of connections between the radio personality and his/her listeners.

## CHAPTER 3: METHOD

### *Ethnography and Observation*

The central research questions of this dissertation were addressed through ethnographic research. Goffman (1959) recommended ethnography as a method for studying social institutions; much of his research for *The Presentation of Self in Everyday Life* involved participant observation in a Scottish island community. Noting that the use of his dramaturgical approach to society as a whole would be unworkable, he suggested, “It would be more prudent, then, to begin with smaller units, with social establishments or classes of establishments” (1959, p. 245).

Radio is an exemplary social establishment for this kind of research. Goffman (1981) pointed out that an analysis of speech troubles should include the ethnographic details of a radio announcer’s work. Therefore, it is very beneficial to observe on-air personalities as they do their jobs on a daily basis. Goffman (1959) wrote, “One of the most interesting times to observe impression management is the moment when a performer leaves the back region and enters the place where the audience is to be found, or when he returns therefrom, for at these moments one can detect a wonderful putting on and taking off of character” (p. 121). The observer of a radio broadcast sees this transition take place with the push of the button when the broadcaster turns the microphone on or off.

Goffman (1959) also cited the presence of communication out of character as reason to study performances in terms of teams and potential interaction disruptions. The observation of a radio broadcast provides the opportunity to potentially witness on-air breakdowns, and the reasons why they occur. Is the higher standard of speech production

ascribed to broadcasters (Goffman, 1981) a factor in the formation and maintenance of a radio performance? Furthermore, Goffman (1959) stated that performers give multiple versions of reality, which tend to be incompatible with each other. Ethnographic study allows for deeper analysis of these incompatible versions of reality.

It is also beneficial to study atypical situations in broadcasting. Goffman (1959) explained that the coherence between setting, appearance, and manner creates an ideal type that makes us interested in looking at the exceptions. For instance, during live on-location broadcasts the studio is replicated as much as possible with regard to the equipment being used, but the setting is a public place without the defined boundaries found within a radio station. In recent years, ethnographic researchers have studied the atypical forms of broadcasting that seek to give a voice to the previously silenced, from indigenous radio producers in Australia to female Muslim radio preachers in Mali (Bessire & Fisher, 2012).

In addition, ethnography has been used in past research dealing with narrative identity. Holstein and Gubrium's (2000) conducted observations of Alcoholics Anonymous meetings, nursing homes, and residential treatment centers. Vila (2005) cites the importance of ethnographic fieldwork in his study of identities on the border between the United States and Mexico. Although he advocates a move beyond institutions into local cultures, Vila does acknowledge the strides made by Holstein and Gubrium (2000) in their research. Studies of coorientation are typically quantitative in nature, but Bradley (1991) used the concept as a theoretical lens for her observation of library staff and their interactions.

### *Media Production Ethnography*

Following in the tradition of previous researchers, this ethnographic study focuses on the production end of a medium. Studies of media production date back at least to Powdermaker's (1950) study of Hollywood and the movie industry. Powdermaker applied a similar hypothesis as would be found within anthropology to the study of media production: the social system in which movies are made has a major influence on their content and meaning. She conducted interviews with hundreds of movie producers, directors, writers, and actors. She observed meetings of the Screen Writers Guild and Screen Actors Guild, and also observed movie production on the set.

Tuchman (1978) and Gans (1979) set the standard for media production ethnographers with their studies of news organizations. Gans (1979) admits that he took the same tactics he used for community studies and applied them to the study of four "journalistic communities" (p. xii): CBS, NBC, *Newsweek*, and *Time*. The main differences were that he had to stay out of the way when things became hectic and he could tell everyone that he was a researcher. Tuchman (1978) also observed a mix of television and print newsrooms, sitting in on meetings and generally following the news production process from brainstorming to publication. My research was similar in nature to that of Gans (1979) in that I could not attend meetings for the most part, was not involved in the production process unless I was asked to be, and everyone at the site knew that I was there for research.

Ethnography refers to both product and process. Wolcott (1995) reminds us that the ethnographer's job is to interpret culture, not to merely provide description. He believes in ethnography that produces a theory of cultural behavior for the group being

studied. As such, a researcher conducting media ethnography must go beyond describing everything that is going on and instead provide a sense of how people make meaning of these activities. The researcher can then find cultural themes and patterns in such meanings. As such, the interpretive function of ethnography and the report it produces is more important than the fieldwork that involves mere description; the process incorporates what Geertz (1973) termed “thick description” (p. 6).

Nightingale (2008) calls for observation that accounts for the impact of the process on the end product. Most notably, this work takes place through “exchange” (p. 105) between the researcher and research participants to minimize the effect of prejudice on the part of the researcher, and to transform the participants’ ideas and activities into an accurate description of events. The researcher also must be self-reflexive about his/her presence among the research participants for these same purposes. Through means of exchange, the researcher engages in power sharing with the participants and ensures more equal participation. I worked to ensure an exchange with my participants by sharing my findings in person or through e-mail communication, and I also supplied them with copies of my first draft of the results so that they could get a sense of the finished product and contribute their feedback to the writing process. Using these recommendations for ethnographic observation, this study provided an opportunity for cultural interpretation of radio broadcasting, applying the theoretical lenses explained above. Such interpretation was accomplished through observation of radio personalities as they went about their daily work routines.

At this point, another clarification of terminology is necessary. Many media ethnographers speak of “participant observation” when they conduct their research (e.g.

Gans, 1999). The key difference between observation and participant observation lies in the relationship between the researcher and the culture being studied. The sort of participant observation that is identified with anthropology requires a full immersion over an extended period of time into an unfamiliar social setting, with the end goal being a transformative experience on the part of the researcher. When participant observation is used within the context of cultural studies, the researcher tends to study a culture with which he/she is familiar, and therefore is more likely to only consider behaviors and attitudes, as opposed to the culture as a whole. The researcher cannot put aside what he/she already knows about the culture, hence the need to narrow the scope of study (Nightingale, 2008).

In either case, the researcher makes a commitment to a long-term interpretive process that involves the community being studied. Time and resources can be major influences in deciding whether to pursue a long-term participant observation of an institution, as opposed to short-term observations that may not rise to the level of “participant observation.” Such observations tend to be more objective and detached from the culture being studied (Murphy, 2011). Despite the nature of this project and my desire to study multiple types of radio announcing that necessitated relatively short-term observations, this study falls within the bounds of participant observation. As a former radio personality, I studied a culture with which I was quite familiar, and therefore focused exclusively on behaviors and attitudes within the culture of radio. Due to my knowledge of and experience in the industry, I hoped that I would be accepted into each setting to the point where my presence would be seen as “normal.” Usually, I was

successful in this regard; as noted above, I sometimes was invited into the performance or the preparation thereof.

### *Observation Procedure*

Before beginning the recruiting process, this study was approved by Temple University's Institutional Review Board for research involving human subjects. I approached participants through contacts whenever possible. In some situations, the participants were actual contacts I made during my professional career in radio. In other cases, I contacted possible participants directly by e-mail, introducing myself and describing my research.

Personalities from 11 different programs were observed; the intent was to find the greatest range of on-air duties possible across the various broadcast sites. Hannerz (2003) promotes this kind of multi-site fieldwork as something that goes beyond mere comparisons of different localities. The topics investigated through this approach transcend locations. In this case, I am not necessarily looking at the differences between radio personalities in different cities, but instead at the ways they put their constructed and managed self into play on the air. The locality in which the show takes place may be a factor in the creation of that self, but is at best one of many competing factors.

Purposeful sampling (Bradley, 1993) was used to ensure that a variety of formats, groups, and situations were included, as well as a variety of social identities encompassing areas such as age, gender, and ethnicity. The goal was to widen the scope to as many different performance contexts as possible, as opposed to statistical generalizability. In all, I observed 17 different announcers, 14 males and three females; the ethnic breakdown was 12 White announcers, four African-Americans, and one

Hispanic. They ranged in age from early 20s to late 70s. Data collection took place between June and December 2012. I spent one week at each broadcast site, although due to variable work and vacation schedules, I observed four days of broadcasts at some sites and five at others.

As mentioned in the introduction, observation was limited to the preparation, execution, and promotion of broadcast programs. From my career experience in radio, I know that off-air job duties include such activities as meetings to discuss possible guests and show topics, production of commercials, and the planning and staging of promotional events. I attended and observed promotional appearances made by the announcers whenever it was possible. During the actual programs, I paid close attention to discussions that take place when the microphones are off, as well as any non-verbal behaviors while the broadcasters were on the air. At times, I was asked to take part in on-air discussions.

Throughout the observation, I kept detailed field notes according to Sanjek's (1990a) stages of field note writing. The first stage was handwritten scratch notes that were either taken during interaction with informants or out of sight immediately afterward. Scratch notes were converted into field notes in a timely manner to add description and expand the shorthand of scratch notes into fuller explanations of everything that occurred. These field notes were later typed into lengthier accounts, or what Sanjek calls "fieldnotes (*sic*) proper" (p. 99). These notes were usually typed soon after leaving the field or the following morning before I returned to the site. I used a daily log for these accounts; I also kept a journal of my fieldwork experiences. At the same time, I gathered other information about the announcers that I could collect into field note

records as supporting documents; these documents included publications, news stories, and screen shots of station websites and the announcers' Facebook and Twitter accounts.

As the week of fieldwork progressed at each site, I narrowed the scope of my observations by following Spradley's (1980) instructions for focusing ethnographic research. My initial observations were guided by descriptive questions that require descriptive observations to take in the full expanse of details. I then conducted a domain analysis to select the pertinent cultural domains (categories of meaning) that I planned to study in depth. Next, I devised structural questions that required focused observations. As a result of this gradual narrowing, I eventually worked from getting an idea of the entire process of putting a live radio program together down to those aspects of the process that dealt with the performance of self, and therefore directly addressed the research questions.

I also conducted ethnographic interviews throughout my observation. Interviews are often conducted to supplement the field observations and to give the participants an opportunity for direct feedback (Nightingale, 2008). They also provide some degree of triangulation for data (Seale, 1999). In an ethnographic interview, the researcher takes the questions he/she has asked during the observation process, and asks them to the research participants. They may be informal interviews where a question is asked during the normal course of observation, or they may be formal interviews that take place at an appointed time (Spradley, 1980).

For this project, I supplemented my field notes with formal interviews of all key members of each program. I defined "key members" as broadcasters who have a substantial on-air presence on the program. Formal interviews were recorded and

transcribed. These interviews took place outside of the work environment whenever possible, thus reducing the likelihood that informants would “lapse into character” when interviewed. However, it is acknowledged that some radio personalities may always feel the need to be “on” while around outsiders. In all, I conducted formal interviews with 15 of the 17 announcers.

Some of the questions were planned out in advance of the observations, as I knew that there were certain aspects of performance that I wished to cover regardless of whether I noticed them during observation. Other questions were formed during the first week of observation and were tweaked and added or dropped at later sites according to the situation and announcers being studied. Sometimes, I did not feel the need to ask certain questions during interviews, having felt that they were addressed to my satisfaction informally during observation. In addition, some questions developed over time as I noticed patterns arising by the latter weeks of data collection; these questions were asked to the earlier participants by e-mail following the end of data collection.

Situations where the observed radio personalities publicized my presence problematized confidentiality. If their listening audience already knew that the program was part of my study, I could not promise confidentiality to the announcers by betting on the likelihood of listeners to forget my presence on the program. Should any of these listeners read any product of this research, they would be able to deduce the portions in which I referred to that particular program. Therefore, at the outset of the observation, I informed the participants that if they wanted to explain my presence on the air, or ask me to take part in an on-air discussion of my work, then they were in essence publicizing their own participation in my research.

### *The Announcers*

Some announcers allowed their names to be revealed in exchange for publicizing my presence on their programs. Other announcers voluntarily waived confidentiality. I have identified these announcers accordingly. In cases where the announcers use a professional pseudonym on the air, I identify them by their on-air names (given in quotes below, and thereafter without quotes unless it is relevant to the topic being discussed). Otherwise, identifying information was kept confidential, and pseudonyms and generic terms have been used here.

In the following cases, I was allowed to use the announcer's actual name or actual on-air name: Brent Axe hosted *On the Block*, a daily afternoon sports talk show on The Score 1260, an all-sports station in Syracuse, New York; the show was also simulcast on the local Time Warner Cable Sports channel. Brent has since left The Score for a job in digital media. I observed his preparation for each day's show in his office, and the four hours of the program in the studio. Bill Anderson hosted *Wake Up With Bill*, a morning talk show at WURD, a Philadelphia AM station focusing on the city's African-American community. He has since left radio for a new television venture. I also observed Bill's preparation in his office, as well as the three hours of his daily program in the WURD studio. In addition, I observed a live broadcast of *Wake Up With Bill* at the Oak Lane Diner in North Philadelphia.

"Drew Kelly" and "Ali Stevens" host *Drew and the Crew*, the morning show at 94KX in small-market Sunbury, Pennsylvania. In addition to being the morning team off and on since 1999, Drew and Ali were married early in 2012. I observed the in-studio preparation for each day's show, followed by the program itself. "Hunter Scott" and Josh

Grosvent hosted *The Show*, the morning show at rock-formatted 95X in Syracuse. A few months after my observation of their program, they left 95X after faking a death-by-zombie-attack on the air. Shortly thereafter, *The Show* took over the morning shift at rival station K-Rock (Bialczak, 2012; Niedt, 2012). My observations here mostly took place in the 95X studio as their program was occurring, although I did spend some time in “Hunter” and Josh’s office. I also observed two promotional appearances during the same week, and followed up with them after their move to K-Rock.

In addition to these professional radio announcers, I also observed the members of *The Weewo Show*, a nightly one-hour show on WHIP, the student-run Internet radio station at Temple University. The college students I observed included “Weewo,” the principal host and creator of the show, and “Dan Cas,” an associate member of the show who was about to take over as host when Weewo graduated. I observed broadcasts during Weewo’s final week as host.

In the remaining cases, I have maintained confidentiality by using pseudonyms for the announcers’ real or on-air names and obscuring other details of their jobs. Some music station announcers use only their first names on the air; in such cases, one-name pseudonyms were substituted for the announcers’ on-air names. Brian Winter is a reporter and fill-in anchor at W-NEWS, an all-news station in a major Northeast city. I observed Brian during a Sunday-morning anchor shift, a weekday anchor shift in which he teamed with veteran newsperson Bob James, a day in which Brian switched between reporting and anchoring, and a full day of reporting. Vanessa is the midday disc jockey at an Urban-formatted station in a medium-sized Southeast city. Laura Donaldson and George Brooks work at “FM University,” a non-commercial station in a major Northeast

market. Laura plays classical music on her afternoon show; George, a former long-time newscaster, hosts the evening jazz show. At these two sites, I observed only Vanessa, Laura, and George's programs, which did not require large amounts of prior preparation.

Mark Nelson works the midday shift at a Country station in a small Southeast market. Mark also serves as his station's music director; as such, I observed his "music call" hours, during which record company representatives can call him to promote artists and songs. In addition, I observed as he produced commercials. Cameron is the nighttime personality at a major-market Pop station in the Northeast. I observed as he and his interns prepared his program each night in his office, then I observed the program in the on-air studio; I also sat in on commercial production and a live broadcast of Cameron's show at a local "haunted hayride" attraction. Rick Hayes and Chris Williams were the play-by-play team for the SkyFish, a minor league baseball team. I sat in with them during the last four-game series of an extended road trip, observing their preparation for each night's broadcast, as well as the broadcast itself. Most of this observation took place in the press box, although on a couple of occasions, I joined Rick as he chatted with players and coaches in the SkyFish clubhouse, dugout, and on the field during batting practice. Both Rick and Chris have since left the team for new opportunities.

### *Data Analysis*

Data analysis was typical of qualitative study in that it was inductive. Aspects of grounded theory were applied. When conducting data analysis in a grounded theory study, the researcher can take a systematic approach that explains a process or action, or a constructivist approach that interprets the researcher's perspective and focuses more on revealing the assumptions and ideologies of the participants (Creswell, 2007). Although

there is value in both approaches, the process-oriented nature of this study and the need to focus on a core phenomenon made the systematic approach a more attractive option.

Themes that emerged from patterns in field notes and interview transcripts were catalogued and constantly compared with new information that arose from later observation (Glaser & Strauss, 1967). Formal coding of notes and transcripts followed. In addition to constant comparison, I also made theoretical comparisons (Corbin & Strauss, 2008) by applying Goffman's (1959) dramaturgical approach and his (1981) analysis of talk to explain the generation of certain codes and to provide thick description. Coding was a multi-step process: following initial (or open) coding of the data, I moved on to axial coding (Hahn, 2008), during which these codes were grouped together into larger thematic categories. The categories were then grouped together again, using index cards. Categories were combined according to commonalities discovered and theoretical memos written during the coding process (Hahn, 2008; Creswell, 2007). Some categories were adjusted, added, or dropped during coding. In some cases, open and axial coding occurred at the same time (Corbin & Strauss, 2008).

As part of the grounded theory process of data analysis, a full cultural theme analysis was also conducted. According to Spradley (1980), this analysis includes discovering themes through looking at the relationships among various cultural domains within the various sites being studied. I also considered the similarities and differences between these domains among the different sites, noting that sometimes the exceptions can be as interesting as the prevailing patterns (Miles & Huberman, 1994). Using these "dimensions of contrast" (Spradley, 1980, p. 146), I was able to see different ways in which the research questions could be answered.

There are also certain universal cultural themes that may be used as a basis for interpreting field notes. Possible examples of these themes include social conflict, cultural contradictions, problem solving, social control, and the acquisition and maintenance of social status (Spradley, 1980). Follow-up questions were asked and answered by e-mail as needed to confirm certain themes or fill gaps in the research. Recognizing that I am creating my own narrative in the report of this study, I invited participants to review quotes taken from interview transcripts to ensure accuracy and engage in dialogue about my findings (Corbin & Strauss, 2008; Nightingale, 2008).

According to Corbin and Strauss's (2008) procedures for constructing grounded theory, I started with a core category that illustrates the central theme of the research. In this case, it was the presentation (or performance) of an on-air personality. I then constructed relational statements to describe how the other conceptual categories integrated with the core phenomenon. As I reviewed my memos and transcripts, I was able to create a story line connecting everything together, developing a theoretical diagram that served as the basis for my explanatory model. I then refined my theory as I conducted the analysis, filling in gaps in logic and improving the explanatory narrative.

After an organization of themes and how they intersected, I interpreted the data and established findings by working from the general down to the particular, as recommended by Spradley (1980). Finally, I moved in the other direction by following Creswell's (2007) recommendation to develop a conditional matrix that provides social, historical, and economic context for the core phenomenon. Given the current state of the radio industry and the desire to frame my findings within those current conditions, such a step was very necessary.

### *Limitations and Threats to Validity*

I was limited in the geographic area in which I could travel to observe various broadcast situations, due to lack of funds for air travel or long-term hotel lodging. I was also limited by time; the observations mostly took place over the summer, so as not to interfere with on-campus work duties that occur during the regular academic year. As with other studies that seek inside-the-industry perspectives, I also gave consideration to potential denials of access. Media consolidation and production pressures have made researcher access a more difficult proposition. Puijk (2008) found that top levels of management have more control over researcher access within media organizations than in the past. Management figures at some stations are sometimes hesitant to reveal any kind of “trade secrets.” I averted these potential roadblocks by seeking the approval of station management once I had the interest of their announcers. In all cases, management approval was given before my initial entry into the broadcast site.

Although my requests to observe on-air personalities went unanswered in relatively few places, it is possible that those who chose not to take part did not want a researcher to see what goes into their performance. Of the announcers I solicited, I may have worked with the people who were most open and had “nothing to hide.” I observed only announcers for local stations or programs; although I attempted to contact personalities with national audiences, I could not successfully recruit any. Finally, I was unable to see all of the ways in which all of the announcers interacted with their audience; in some cases, they told me how they do it by bringing up prior examples.

In order to consider the possible threats to validity, I will first define what constitutes ethnographic validity. Sanjek (1990b) explains that ethnographic validity can

be assessed according to three “canons” (p. 395). The first is theoretical candor: the researcher must be explicit in giving the theoretical reasons behind the choices he/she makes in designing an ethnographic study. These theories include both significant theory and those that arise during the ethnographic process; these “terrain-specific” theories (p. 396) often complement or revise significant theories. The second canon is the ethnographer’s path through field research. This area includes detailed descriptions of the social network formed in the process of the observation. The third canon accounts for the relationship between the researcher’s field notes and the written report derived from them. This last area literally incorporates the process into the product (Wolcott, 1995).

The major threats to validity include common issues that arise in multi-site ethnography, such as the belief that one cannot go into much depth in the analysis of specific sites and situations (Hannerz, 2003). Therefore, this approach may limit the possibility of developing terrain-specific theories; it may also limit opportunities for exchange and feedback from participants. In multi-site ethnography, the researcher must always choose certain sites from a longer list of possibilities. There is always the possibility that a better site was ignored. In addition, the selection of participants through convenience or purposeful sampling could be problematic.

However, Hannerz (2003) states that multi-site studies bracket out the most relevant aspects of life for study as a way of compensating for the lack of time at each site. In this study, only the work-related activities were considered because they were the most relevant. Although Hannerz notes that topics of multi-site research transcend localities, the use of several locations reduces the likelihood that particular findings may be dismissed as germane to only a specific geographic region. Creswell (2007) notes that

if participants in a grounded theory study are dispersed, they can provide useful context for developing categories during the coding process. Therefore, these aspects of multi-site ethnography may balance out those that threaten ethnographic validity. The multi-site approach also counters issues of gaining long-term access to each workplace.

Other threats to validity include those that are common to most ethnographic research. As previously noted, ethnographic studies such as this are always subject to scrutiny over biases of the researcher (Murphy, 2011; Nightingale, 2008; Bradley, 1993). In addition to procedures that ensure that the participants' points of view were not minimized, there were certain personal sources of bias for which I needed to account. In my case, I needed to account for my knowledge of social identity, the theories I explained in Chapter Two, and the power that I have as the sole person conducting, analyzing, and reporting the research.

Like the announcers I studied, I realize that I also have multiple selves, each of which I had to consider when in this production environment. Different aspects of my background may have affected my interactions with participants (Darling-Wolf, 2003). The female or African-American announcers I observed might have formed initial impressions of me based on the privilege associated with my being a White male. My career experience in radio may have been useful as a participant, but may have introduced bias as an observer. In addition, my status as a researcher had the potential to cause unease for some members of an ensemble cast. Nightingale (2008) recommends in these situations that the focus of the observation and interviewing shift from the group being studied to the shared behaviors or experiences of the group, which are common to people who do and do not belong to this group. I often found myself establishing rapport

with my participants by bringing up common experiences that occur within the radio industry, or by demonstrating an understanding of the tasks and vernacular of announcing.

Because this study dealt specifically with the way that an announcer chooses among multiple selves to put on the best performance, I followed Darling-Wolf's (2003) recommendation that ethnographers also consider the multiple selves of informants. The announcers had different aspects of self that could be called upon outside of the performance, as opposed to during it. These different sides of research participants were more likely to emerge during observation, as opposed to interviews. I sought to recognize and embrace these multiple selves and their possible contradictions, rather than trying to fit participants into preconceived categories. This recognition further adds to the richness of representation for the announcers being studied. Darling-Wolf's (2003) suggestion of examining multiple selves also dovetails nicely with Goffman's (1959) tension between the self-as-performer and the self-as-character, and contributes to addressing the first three research questions. It also supports Goffman's (1959) recommendation that ethnographic research is the proper way methodology for documenting performances of self that take place in a social establishment such as radio.

Returning to Sanjek's (1990b) three canons for ethnographic validity, I can now show how I have addressed these three methods of assessing validity in my ethnographic research. I addressed the first canon (theoretical candor) at the beginning of this chapter by relating the theoretical background of this study to recommended or previous research that incorporates such theory (e.g. Vila, 2005; Holstein & Gubrium, 2000; Bradley, 1991; Goffman, 1959). The second canon, the ethnographer's path through the field research,

can be assessed initially through the manner in which I gained rapport with my participants and was able to work with them, as detailed above. The third canon, the relationship between my field notes and the written report that comes from them, is addressed through my detailed explanation of how I isolated categories and themes from my notes and constructed a narrative from the manner in which the themes fit together. Of course, the narrative itself, which spans the ensuing chapters, also accounts for the ways in which the various activities, quotations, and incidents that I recorded in my notes exemplify the themes I have derived from my research. The following six chapters contain the results of my observations and analysis.

## CHAPTER 4: A DRAMATURGICAL ANALYSIS OF ON-AIR PERFORMANCE

The core phenomenon being studied for this dissertation is the presentation of a self created solely to be performed on the radio. As such, it is logical to begin my analysis of radio announcers with a Goffmanian dramaturgical analysis of the eleven broadcast sites that I observed. In this chapter, I will outline the various ways in which on-air performance adheres to the theoretical framework advanced by Erving Goffman (1967; 1959) to describe the social self.

### *Creating the “Theater of the Mind”*

Many of the announcers whom I observed understood the legacy of radio as a medium that inspires imagination on the part of the listener (Douglas, 2004). Accordingly, they sought to carry on that tradition through their on-air performances. The techniques mentioned below add to the notion that “radio is the theater of the mind” (Brown, 2006).

As a newsperson, Brian Winter adheres to the classic connotation of “theater of the mind”: using sound to enhance the story. Writing up his anchor script, he included a sound bite of rain falling to set up a story about flooding in Alabama. When he reports on a story, he makes sure to record some ambient sound of the scene that he can use later in the background of his completed report. At one story, the people Brian was covering faked applause just so the various reporters could record it. He even made a subtle move to bring ambient sound into a live report; sitting in his parked vehicle, he rolled down the window just before he went live, allowing the noise of the city to play out in the background as he read his story.

Many music station personalities use clever audio editing and presentation to change the way that their interactions with callers go on the air. One morning while taking calls for the “Morning Mindbender,” a daily trivia question, Drew Kelly got a winner almost immediately. However, in the interest of stretching out the length of the segment and getting more entertaining calls to play on the radio, he sat on the recorded winner call, playing wrong answers and soliciting more calls before finally playing the winning answer on the air. Mark Nelson’s daily giveaway contest worked completely through the placement of sound effects. After taking the ninth caller, he asked the listener to punch in a code on his/her phone to activate a spinning wheel. When the listener obliged, Mark played a sound effect of a wheel spinning that ended with the revelation of the listener’s prize. As he explained, “It makes it fun, rather than just say, ‘Hey, caller 9 is gonna win Montgomery Gentry tickets’ ... and it makes it interactive too. They think that that (the code) really triggers the wheel, and now suddenly the wheel’s spinning. ‘Oh, what am I gonna win?’ ... and that’s good radio.”

Vanessa described an even more grandiose contest that her Urban station once did: a fake hotel filled with prizes. She had to describe what floor she was on, and what was on that floor that the listener had now won. One night, she heard a part-time DJ talking on the air about being in the “hotel’s” penthouse, painting a great verbal picture of what he saw. “People really believed we were building a hotel,” she noted.

Cameron sometimes goes back to a previously recorded phone call and re-records his voice to make the call more interesting. For example, after recording a telephone conversation with a six-year old about Justin Bieber tickets, he went back and added the line, “This is a sassy six-year old.” Cameron also told a caller to act like they were

restarting the phone call so that he could just use a certain part of their conversation on the air. While recording another phone call, he suddenly told the listener, “Say cheese. Let me take a picture of you.” He then played a sound effect of a camera and exclaimed, “Oh, that’s a keeper!” In addition, he resorts to the occasional planned phone call, asking someone he knows to call the station and chat with him about a certain topic. Cameron also keeps both unaired and previously aired calls “banked” so that he can play them months from now if a particular topic comes up again. On one such occasion, he took a call recorded during a previous Bieber ticket giveaway, edited it to fit the current contest, and played it on the air. Cameron told me, “Now, it’s finally serving its purpose.”

Phone calls are just one of many ways that Cameron uses the imaginative properties of the medium to shape his performance. Sometimes, he asks his intern to be ready to yell out a number, then goes on the air and asks, “Okay intern, what phone line?” The listener not only thinks that Cameron is taking a live phone call, but also that the intern must have screened it. One night, he scoured the Internet for a recording of talk show host Maury Povich announcing the result of a negative paternity test, then played it back on the air after telling the audience about a listener who wished that Cameron was her father. Cameron explained his approach by stating, “Things are mapped out, but if I can create that illusion, that theater of the mind that everyone’s involved, everyone’s invited, and just keep some kind of controlled chaos, it’s fun.”

Hunter Scott and Josh Grosvent’s resignation-by-zombie-attack from 95X is a perfect example of announcers using radio to construct a theatrical experience for the listeners. Hunter and Josh recalled that they came up with the concept the night before they executed it:

Hunter: It was really scary for us because we worked with those people, like Josh said, for a long time, and we knew that there was gonna be some definite kickback, and we were such zombie fans that we just kind of threw that together. We said, you know, it would be kind of funny... And one of the things we thought was we could've gone out in a blaze... we didn't want to go out that way, and they were also having an event that weekend, the Zombie Walk, so we thought, "Well, we'll promote it, and then we'll just disappear," and kinda left it at that, and it kind of grew bigger than we thought it was going to. It was kind of strange, but yeah, it was just really us being, I think, terrified and trying to think of a better way than going on the radio...

Josh: Just a goofy way for us to kind of say goodbye without anybody really knowing.

Hunter: Because we didn't want to go out that way. We didn't want to go, "We're not happy," because people knew, but we didn't want to get yanked off the air in the middle of the thing...

Josh: And it was even better to be... to go out with a zombie attack and then be silent, like no one knew where we were for days.

### *Using Descriptive Language*

Rick Hayes and Chris Williams, as baseball play-by-play announcers, have their own tradition to uphold, one that relies on vivid, descriptive language to recreate the feeling of being in the ballpark for the audience (Silvia, 2007). Chris describes the uniforms of both teams at the beginning of every game. He inserts random visual details, such as the "black leather glove" of the first baseman. He described a pop-up as "twisting, turning." Rick gave an account of the weather conditions at the stadium and informed the listener of the way the infielders were aligned. Both announcers called attention to the mannerisms of the players: rubbing up the baseball, adjusting a cap, "holding the bat high." It seemed like every movement was described when the situation was crucial to the outcome of the game.

A stickler for description, Chris explained, "When I listen to big league guys... that's the biggest element that is forgotten about." He added that today's sports announcers were raised on watching games on television, where description is

unnecessary because you can see everything. “Nobody listens unless they’re forced to,” he added. When he calls a game, Chris hopes that for passive radio listeners, “this pulls them away from what they’re doing and transplants them into (the) stadium.” He recalled a playoff game in Texas that he once attended. Sitting in the stands, he listened to the Texas Rangers’ play-by-play announcer on his radio describing the outfield shadows in great detail. “Even though I was there,” Chris remembered, “seeing what he was describing was awesome.”

### *Embellishing*

However, being on the radio also allows Chris to fudge a detail or two. On one occasion, he described a double by the home team as “rolling to the wall,” when in reality the ball did not get that far. At times, Chris admitted, he gets so wrapped up in telling a story or giving a fact about something that he ends up calling a pitch several seconds after it happens.

Most of the announcers whom I observed illustrated in some way that exaggeration or embellishment is a necessary part of the on-air performance. Brent Axe embellished quite often during his sports talk show. At one point, he “fined” his producer \$1,000 for coming into the studio ten seconds late. When the same producer mentioned Notre Dame football, Brent grabbed his update script from him and told him (jokingly) to get out of the studio. Later in the week, he “fired” a different producer. Mark told his country music listeners that the phones were “blowing up” for a particular song after he received one request for it. After Ali Stevens read a story about the dangers of running outside, Drew Kelly “warned” her that if she continued her outdoor runs, an eagle would swoop down and carry her away. When the name of the Carousel Center mall in Syracuse

was changed to Destiny USA, Hunter remarked that anyone who still said “Carousel Center” would be kicked out of the mall. He also claimed that *The Show’s* beer expert had a basement with beer protected by armed guards “and a labradoodle for some reason.”

Cameron happily acknowledged embellishing at times, tying it all back to the concept of “theater of the mind”: “I can’t tell you how many times that my brother stubbing his toe late (at) night has turned into a 9-1-1 rush to the hospital based off of embellishment of a random story that has happened.” For example, while asking listeners to call in with their stories of the dumbest mistakes they have ever made, Cameron said that his mistake involved “whipped cream, a helicopter, and three rubber bands. That’s all I’m a say.” As he explained to me, “When I go for the shock value, I want to go for that funnier angle of the shock value, like ‘did he really just say rubber bands, helicopters, and whipped cream?’ What did that mean?”

Bill Anderson admitted that he sometimes made things up during his live commercials. For instance, while reading a live commercial for cleaning products, he talked about a friend who brought his six-week old baby to his house and his desire to make sure that the house was safe. Bill told me later that his friend had never brought the baby over to his house, but the story fit the commercial. Drew made a similar move during a live iced coffee commercial, saying that the last time he did not have his coffee in the morning, he “yelled at that nice old lady.” Josh alluded to the famous quote, “Never let the truth get in the way of a good story.” He explained that he would say what needed to be said to make a good story, and then add to it. Weewo said that he

exaggerated a lot on his show: “Maybe it didn’t happen exactly that way, but how can I tell a story that’s more interesting? It’s kinda based on some truth, you know.”

When Rick had his own talk show, he once made the listeners believe that he had followed through on a threat to take his clothes off if the air conditioning in the studio was not fixed. Rick demonstrated the embellishment process in action one night in the broadcast booth. After telling Chris off the air that he wanted to stay in the drug store all day just for the air conditioning, he changed the story during the broadcast of that night’s game, saying that he was kicked out of the drug store because he “set up a lawn chair and sat there for three hours.” Chris, as any good colleague would do, played along, adding, “Well, you weren’t supposed to drink the beverages for free... You have to pay for those.” On another occasion, Rick compared himself and a SkyFish pitcher to “a modern-day Don Johnson,” leading Chris to quip, “I remember a *GQ* ad with both of you.”

### *Teams*

Rick and Chris’s examples demonstrate that, as with any presentation of self, the performance of the on-air personality is a team effort. In some cases, it is obvious, as with ensemble programs; *The Show*, *Drew and the Crew*, and *The Weewo Show* all have multiple team members who appear on the air. Rick and Chris were a broadcast team. Brian Winter and Bob James, whether anchoring together or apart, have traffic, weather, business, and sports reporters with whom they coordinate, as well as reporters who go on the air in the studio or via telephone. On Brent Axe’s sports talk program, the producer appeared on-air frequently, as was the case on *Wake Up With Bill*. Vanessa has a teammate when the DJ for the station’s lunch-hour mix show appears in the studio with her. Cameron’s interns make up part of his team, and often get to speak on the air. Laura

Donaldson and George Brooks worked with the station's afternoon news anchor and traffic reporter; their station has since eliminated local news in the afternoons. Mark Nelson is usually the only announcer during his show, so in the pseudo-interpersonal medium that is radio, Goffman (1981; 1959) would consider Mark to be a one-person team. Mark also sometimes fills in on his Country station's morning show.

However, the composition of the team goes beyond the people whose jobs require them to be on the air. Brian and Bob have a producer in the newsroom coordinating everything they have to do on the air, as well as a team of writers supplying most of the copy they will read. When Bill Anderson was on location at Philadelphia's Oak Lane Diner, he also had a producer helping out at the WURD studio, in addition to his regular producer joining him on-site. Because Rick and Chris broadcast from a remote site for every game, they also have a producer back at the radio station. Vanessa's interns do not go on the air with her, but they still help her do her job. Brent consulted with his station's engineer about problems he was having with one of the guest microphones. Without the technical assistance of these people, the announcers could not maintain their definition of the situation.

The definition of what constitutes a team member can be extended in other ways. Sales and promotions people can be part of the team when it helps the on-air product; a sign at W-NEWS reads, "On-air and sales: We go together like traffic and weather." They may not put on the actual performance, but their influence permeates. During breaks, sales people occasionally stopped into the 95X studio to chat with Hunter Scott and Josh Grosvent about upcoming promotions or ideas they had. The promotions director at Mark's Country station frequently visited him in the on-air studio during songs

to talk about upcoming events. Brent's chats with sales and promotions people took place in his office before his show, but the subject matter was very much the same. The sales manager at Vanessa's Urban station stopped into the air studio on a few occasions as well, but his visits were more collegial. As I was introduced upon my initial entry into the studio, he jokingly (and ominously) warned me that Vanessa is a different person when there are other people around.

The team can also include other air personalities who are doing a live broadcast while the regular announcer is on the air. One morning, Hunter and Josh had to work with a colleague who was making an appearance at a Tim Horton's coffee shop. Vanessa had to collaborate with a colleague who was broadcasting from a Rita's Italian Ice location.

The size of the team also varies with the format, the time of day, the size of the market, and the personnel strategy of the corporate owner. When I first arrived at big-market, big-corporate W-NEWS at 4:45 on a Sunday morning, there were five people working in the station: Brian, the anchor who would be alternating hours with him, their producer, a receptionist, and the anchor who was on the air at that moment. Despite the fact that many other stations of this format would have far fewer people in their newsroom on a weekend off-hour, Brian declared, "It's dead in here." By comparison, when I arrived on Monday, the station was packed with on-air personnel, salespeople, and other possible team members. At small-market Pop station 94KX, there are three people (Drew Kelly, Ali Stevens, and their sports reporter) in the on-air studio at 6am, and their sister news station's morning anchor is "backstage" in the newsroom.

At Cameron's large-market Pop station, the night shift is Cameron and his intern; everyone else has gone home, aside from the occasional night when someone is working

late on production or programming tasks. He said that having a team makes the show more fun to listen to than if it was just himself talking on the air alone:

When you have the people around, and we are all on the same page behind the scenes structuring this thing, but it comes across as sounding like a bunch of people just hanging out, that creates the bond with the listener, like, “Yo, this is just a dude who’s having fun with a bunch of people around him.”

### *Guests*

Guests are temporary members of the team. When they come to the station to be interviewed, it is important that the announcers maintain solid relationships with their guests, particularly if they are or will be frequent guests. Both Weewo and Hunter emphasized to me the importance of making a guest feel comfortable in the studio.

Weewo explained, “It’s maybe their first time (on the air)... so I want to put them at ease so that way they can get comfortable and they can explain in detail whatever the question or topic we’re talking about.” In Hunter’s case, it is especially important when having a female guest on such a male-centered show. *The Show* had three different female guests in the studio during the week I was with them. One was a regular guest from the local zoo; in addition to the topic she was there to discuss, they asked her to comment on a male Olympic gymnast accused of texting risqué self-portraits. The other two, a model who had posed for the station calendar and a vendor of adult-themed products, were first-time guests, but Hunter and Josh had little trouble making them feel relaxed while on the air. In fact, they asked the model to join them on a limousine trip to a Snoop Dogg concert, and she returned to the studio the following Monday to talk about the experience.

The other music morning show I observed, *Drew and the Crew*, also had in-studio guests during my week with them: their regular movie reviewer, a recruiter for a medical

research study, and a local historian who was there to promote a heritage festival. The movie reviewer brought his son to the studio and Drew chatted with both of them off the air. Brent had a couple of regular guests appear in the studio for his sports talk show. One of them, a local bar owner, sat in with Brent for a full hour on his Friday show. Brent kidded the other guest (a sports blogger) on the air about his recent experience at a blogger “geek convention.” Bill had several frequent in-studio guests for his talk show, and he had collegial chats with all of them both on and off the air, including a lengthy on-air discussion of one guest’s misadventures coaching youth football.

In addition to the in-studio guests, many of the announcers had guests call in to their shows for interviews. The guests ranged from a Hall of Fame basketball coach to an executive at Comcast to an up-and-coming British pop star. George interviewed the organizers of an upcoming jazz festival; they talked at length about the artists who would be playing and the organizers’ previous work with other jazz festivals. Whether they were regular guests or one-time interviews, the announcers were friendly and respectful to them. Similarly, when Brent appeared as a telephone guest on a sports talk show on a station in Cleveland, the treatment and rapport was very much the same.

Rick and Chris had an entire baseball team (coaches and manager included) who were potential guest members of their on-air performance team, so they maintained good relationships with the players and coaches. On my first two days at the stadium, Rick brought me down to the field to join him for batting practice. Some of the players and coaches chatted with him; one of them teased Rick about his wardrobe. He told me that several of the players do daily crossword puzzles, and they sometimes ask him for help. They rarely talk to him about baseball. When the music on the stadium’s PA system was

turned off one afternoon during batting practice, the SkyFish players insisted that Rick call the home team's announcer to complain. Rick said that word was passed down through the years as players came and went that he could be trusted. By comparison, Chris was the new member of the team, and he had to work harder at earning the players' trust. While interviewing a player for a pre-game interview one night, the player accidentally called him the wrong name.

As a news reporter, Brian sometimes has people who will be temporary members of the on-air team on a regular basis; these people are the spokespeople for the city government, police, or other organizations. He also has other regular contacts, such as a local woman who is working to improve the health of inner-city children; when Brian chose to cover the woman's efforts to open an urban farmers market, he coordinated his reporting through her. Once on site, Brian had to recruit workers and shoppers to join the team on a temporary basis as interview subjects. Some people agreed; others turned him down. A similar process occurred the next day when Brian went to a local immigrant assistance office. He set up his visit through the office spokeswoman, whom he also interviewed; she in turn lined up other people for him to interview.

Bill had elected representatives on his team during his live diner broadcast. A sitting congressman took on a major team role, as he was part of the entire show, almost becoming an on-air "sidekick," as opposed to Bill's producer, who was not on the same social level as Bill or the congressman, and therefore had a different role. In addition to talking about major political issues, the congressman kidded Bill about his massive billboard for a local clothing store and talked about his Achilles injury. A few days earlier, Philadelphia's district attorney appeared on the show via telephone and talked

about running into Bill's producer at the local grocery store. Bill teased both of them equally.

In addition, I became a member of a couple of on-air teams during the course of my research. Hunter and Josh mentioned my presence in the 95X studio one morning during an on-air conversation about dating women with self-injury problems. When Hunter admitted that they were not "mentally well" either, he asked me if I thought they were sane. Playing along, I shook my head. They brought me on *The Show* the following Monday to give my "preliminary analysis" of them. I had to figure out how to keep up with them and maintain a good performance, and it was a struggle. Bill also invited me on the air on my first morning with him to explain my research. I was a little more relaxed with him, and did a better job. He mentioned my presence at least once a show for the rest of my week with him.

### *Developing Chemistry*

My experiences of integrating into a team performance illustrate that it often takes time for an on-air team to develop chemistry. When Brian and Bob anchor together, it is an impressive display of two people in sync with each other. At the top of the hour, they take turns reading headlines, and then they go back-and-forth reading stories. They even alternate lines when reading live commercials. However, Brian said that it took time for him to develop that sense of flow with the veteran members of the W-NEWS team. He needed about three to four months before he was comfortable with all of the possible things that could happen while he was on the air. He said that it takes at least one full shift with a co-anchor to understand how he/she does things, and that every anchor has a different way of taking turns with his/her colleague. "We just kind of set it at the

beginning,” he explained, “and then the rest of the shift, we follow the same pattern. We’ll allow it to dictate, but it definitely is different with every anchor.”

Play-by-play announcers Rick and Chris did not have quite as frenetic a pace as the news anchors. As the lead announcer, Chris started the pregame show and called the first two innings. Rick handled the 3<sup>rd</sup> and 4<sup>th</sup> innings, Chris the 5<sup>th</sup> and 6<sup>th</sup>, Rick the 7<sup>th</sup> and 8<sup>th</sup>, and Chris called the last inning. If the game went to extra innings, they switched every inning. Chris started and ended the postgame show. They traded the responsibilities of getting the pre-game player interview and recording a recap for the parent club’s radio network on a nightly basis. Rick has worked with a few different colleagues, and said that the development of rapport varies. Before working with Chris, he had been calling games with his previous on-air partner for six years, and the chemistry was immediate because they had known each other for a long time before they started working together. “It’s not always like that,” said Rick. “It’s sometimes tough. You have two different personalities, two different views of the game, (or) two different generations.”

Before they started in mornings at 95X, Hunter and Josh worked together on the live-to-podcast show *Walk-Up Radio*, recorded each week at a local comedy club. They also did a nightly show on 95X during the New York State Fair, called *Deep-Fried Happy Hour*. Hunter said that it takes a couple of years to really click as a team:

At first, we kinda had that stepping on each other thing, or, you know, whatever the case, but I think that’s where you work it out and you talk about it on the air. I mean a lot of times, the thing I really like for us to do is just talk to each other, so we’ve gotten better at talking to each other through the day. We don’t spend time together, like, on the weekends, but we’ll text each other, or in the studio, I think that when we get there at 5:00, that 45 minutes is like gold because we can actually talk about, “Oh, what about this? What about this? Oh, this video would tie in here.” I think that’s really important, and the shows that are the worst is (*sic*) when

we both come in, and we really don't know where we're going, and then you're kinda grasping at straws.

Josh admitted, "We're still figuring each other out." Hunter added, "It's a marriage, so you really have to kind of get to know each other."

For Drew and Ali, the marriage is literal, but their morning-show partnership preceded their marriage by over a decade. "For Drew and I, it was instantaneous," said Ali," but I've been with other co-hosts where it's just not worked out." "It's almost like a relationship, you know, when you meet somebody," Drew added. "You either... there's either something there or there's not in a lot of ways." Although she usually does not have teammates, Urban DJ Vanessa said, "I think (rapport) can be instant if the chemistry is right... and I think you can work with somebody forever and never gain it."

Hosting a college radio show with an ever-changing cast, Weewo said that he tried to bring new teammates into the fold by hanging out with them off the air. "Just so that that way we get to know each other on another level, and that way, we come back into the studio and in addition to being co-workers, we also are creating a friendship, you know?" Dan Cas recalled that he joined the show the same day as a couple of other new members, and he was a little intimidated at first: "Weewo would come on the microphone, and he would start speaking Spanish, and I'd be like, 'Uhhhh...'. Like I would have no idea what he was saying." Soon after the first day, however, the friendly and inviting atmosphere made it easy for Dan to become part of the team.

#### *Directive and Dramatic Dominance*

Goffman (1959) states that the team member who directs the performance has directive dominance. Typically, directive dominance in radio falls on the person running the control board; this person controls the volume and the on/off switches for every

microphone, computer, or other audio source. He/she presses or clicks the buttons that make all of the songs, commercials, or other pieces of audio play over the air. In every situation where there was one announcer or a main host, he/she ran his/her own board and therefore ran the show. For example, Bill ran the board at WURD during his talk show while his producer screened calls, passed notes, and occasionally contributed to the on-air discussion. Bill made it clear that sometimes, directive dominance has to be strongly enforced: “I’ve had producers in the past who really wanted to be the host, so then it became more of a battle and a competition. You were hesitant to invite somebody into the discussion because if you invited them in, you may never (get back control).”

Where there was one announcer or a main host, the announcer with directive dominance also had dramatic dominance over the performance (Goffman, 1959). In situations where there are teams of multiple announcers, directive dominance does not necessarily go hand-in-hand with dramatic dominance. Although Drew runs the board on *Drew and the Crew*, and therefore has directive dominance, he and Ali argue that dramatic dominance is an even split:

Ali: Well, I just think our dynamic is different than other morning shows in that it’s 50-50. We’re partners... sometimes the sidekick or the news/cohost person isn’t necessarily dominant.

Drew: She’s there to giggle, and then move on.

Ali: Right, and in our situation sometimes I’m the dominant and he’s the passive voice, so I think we’re 50-50. Even though he’s the one you hear opening the mic every time, I think that we’re pretty equal on who contributes.

Hunter runs the board on *The Show*, and he also does most of the talking. Josh plays off of Hunter and sometimes plays a sound effect or a song from his iPad. Other announcers add comments here and there; occasionally they are the focus of attention, but certainly not as often as Hunter or Josh. However, Hunter argued that dramatic

dominance is shared equally. “I mean, really my role is to just make sure we hit the (commercial) breaks at the right time,” he said. “You know, if we’re running long, I’ll give a wrap-up, but I mean what happens in between is all of us, and the stories come from all of us.” Hunter added that their show is only as good as the sum of its parts, which is why they call their program *The Show*. Hunter explained that they hated the alternative title of *Hunter & Josh* “because everybody is ‘So-and-So and So-and-So.’”

The anchor teams at W-NEWS have a 50-50 split of directive and dramatic dominance because they each have their own control board. As part of the decision of who will say what when, the anchors also have to decide who will press the buttons that activate the various pre-recorded announcements that the station uses to introduce weather, traffic, sports, etc. However, with Brian filling in for his regular afternoon co-anchor, Bob has directive dominance most of the time when they work together, ceding it to Brian at times.

Announcers working at a remote location still have dramatic dominance, but they cede directive dominance to a producer back at the station. Chris and Rick had to coordinate with their various producers when deciding what time to start the broadcast, which of the recorded highlights would air during the postgame, and other technical issues. Dramatic dominance went back and forth, depending on who was calling the play-by-play or who took over a particular pregame/postgame segment. The regular producer of Bill’s talk show handled communication with the studio during the live broadcast at the diner. When he is reporting on location, Brian has directive dominance with the temporary team members that he interviews, but the producers/anchors have it when he

goes live. He plays his role as a bit part in the larger performance where the anchors have dramatic dominance.

College station WHIP has a two-studio setup: a control room with a board and a microphone, and an on-air studio with microphones positioned around a table. Weewo had dramatic dominance on *The Weewo Show* and sat in the on-air studio with his guests, but he had other people run the control board, thereby giving them directive dominance. Most of the time it was Dan, but on Weewo's last show, Dan joined him in the studio and another student ran the board.

### *Regions*

Goffman (1959) differentiated the front and back regions by stating that the front is where the performance takes place and the back is where performers can relax, rehearse, and otherwise slip out of character freely. As discussed in Chapter Two, regions in a radio station are often clearly defined, separated by walls and passageways. However, even the types of boundaries can vary by location. At the small-market stations I observed, everything is confined to a small building; the transmitter towers are located right outside the studios. Mark Nelson's office is in a modular home located across the parking lot from the building housing his Country station's studios. At the other end of the scale are the large, well-appointed facilities of major-market radio stations, with long hallways connecting studios to offices.

However, it should be noted that the size of the market does not always determine the size or layout of the station. WURD's Philadelphia facility is not much larger than that of Mark's station, although WURD is located in a multi-story office building. The

size of the owner does not determine the size of the facility, either. Mark's small-market station has the same corporate owner as Cameron's major-market station.

### *Personal Front*

As Goffman (1959) wrote, the personal front includes visual items associated with the performer, such as clothing. Although there was rarely a visual element to the programs I observed, the announcers' attire still gave some indication as to the type of performer or performance I was watching. For the most part, the announcers' work clothes reflected their idea of casual. Hunter Scott and Josh Grosvent wore T-shirts and jeans or shorts for their Rock morning show. The baseball announcers wore weather-appropriate golf shirts or dress shirts; Brent Axe also wore a golf shirt for his sports talk show, sometimes with the logo of the cable TV channel that simulcast his show. Talk-show host Bill Anderson wore sweaters and jeans. Although morning-show host Drew Kelly admitted to being a "clothes horse," he mixed in the occasional T-shirt with his golf shirts; co-host Ali Stevens also dressed casually. Classical music announcer Laura Donaldson wore blouses and slacks; jazz announcer George Brooks wore flannel shirts, khakis, and a baseball cap.

The on-air staff at W-NEWS wears more formal clothing: Brian Winter and Bob James wear dress shirts, ties, and dress pants. When an associate asked Brian why he dresses up for a medium in which he cannot be seen, he replied that he started to do so at a previous station when he first met the on-air staff there. "People felt a deep level of respect and regard for the station," he explained, and he decided that he liked that approach. Brian continued that it is important to look professional for clients or government officials who may visit the station. Despite being in college radio, arguably

180 degrees removed from Brian and Bob's major-market news station, Dan Cas was the only other announcer to wear dress shirts and ties. He explained that the tie was a personal style choice as well, a complete contradiction with Brian's explanation. In that way, Brian's format and situation are on one end of a continuum, matching his professional attitude and high standards for what he does, and the DJs are on the other side. Dan's desire to be professional and live up to standards puts him closer to Brian's end of the scale. Clothes are a reflection of who they are, both on the air and off.

### *Setting and Props*

The setting of each performance has a function geared toward making sure that the performance happens flawlessly. Each announcer's setting is an example, and some announcers have multiple settings. Brian anchors in an on-air studio that was built with large windows, thus making it easier to look outside and get the current weather conditions. The studio door does not close all the way, which causes potential problems. The atmosphere in the newsroom is very professional, almost like a library; people get shushed for being too loud. When Brian goes out to report a story, he has to create the setting, and he carries his props (e.g. microphone, recording equipment) with him. By recording ambient sound, he brings the "setting" with him into the finished story, again using tactics consistent with radio as "theater of the mind." Because there are times when the reporter cannot be live at the scene, he/she has to improvise, which is how such tactics bring the "setting" to the listener without the reporter actually producing his/her story in that setting. As Brian was on the air live, people walked past his vehicle, and few noticed or cared that there was a radio reporter in his car with a laptop, putting together and giving reports.

Rick Hayes and Chris Williams's setting was the ballpark. As they prepared for their job, they had a bird's eye view of a baseball stadium coming to life, with the grounds crew preparing the field, players stretching and warming up, music playing over the PA, and fans starting to file in. Ironically, the setting of a baseball broadcast from the listener's perspective is the field itself, not the booth in which the broadcast takes place. Because the announcers' job is to narrate the action, their voices are the focus of the broadcast, but *they* themselves are not. The setting might only enter the mind of the listener when the occasional foul ball comes right at the announcers, as it did a couple of times while I was observing them. Rick and Chris also had props that were specific to their job functions: the equipment in the booth, team media guides, statistics, and binoculars to see what is going on in the bullpen. The fact that the announcers are exposed to the elements most of the time for a broadcast also means that weather becomes part of the setting. The heat wave that occurred during the series became something to be mentioned constantly by Rick and Chris during their broadcasts.

The in-studio announcers work in a setting that places the focus on the member of the team with directive dominance. A solo announcer – like Mark or Vanessa – runs the board, speaks into the one microphone, and that is the performance. The morning shows have other team members, but they are positioned at places around the main console while the person with directive dominance sits at its center, running the board. Ali, Josh, and Bill's producer sit to the side of the console on "Mic 2"; each has their own computer monitor, but they have to cue Drew, Hunter, or Bill (respectively) if they want a certain piece of audio played. Other cast members use another microphone outside the console, as do any guests. Hunter and Josh both complained that the position of the microphones

in the 95X studio was not conducive to the type of show they perform; the position of Josh and others relative to Hunter at the console made it difficult for Hunter to keep a group conversation flowing. Of course, the listener does not know or see how the studio is set up unless it is brought up on the air, which it was not during my observations. Therefore, the listener would tend to see Hunter and Josh (or Drew and Ali) as equals.

Mark, Vanessa, George, and Laura are the only people in the studio for their shows, but if they did have in-studio guests, it would be the same setup. They have other microphones positioned around the outside of the console. George and Laura cued the newscaster in the next room; his audio came through their board, and they controlled it. Cameron has a similar setup: the intern sits on the other side of the console, and yells when asked. The announcers at spoken-word stations also have a similar layout. Brian and Bob stand or sit at their respective control boards, side-by-side; reporters who give their reports in the studio stand at another mic, situated off to the side of the console. Brent ran the control board in his studio, and other people who appeared on the air stood to the side at the edge of the console.

As described above, WHIP has a two-studio setting for its broadcasts. This setup increases the number of nonverbal cues going back and forth, particularly because the team member with dramatic dominance is in the talk studio, and someone else is running the board in the control room. Because the air studio is just a table with microphones, it infers a more laid-back atmosphere without imposing audio equipment surrounding the announcers and their guests. Because Dan verbally cued Weewo to start talking and Weewo cued Dan to play a song, the listener might infer that they are in two different places, but that inference is not automatic. The listener is not likely thinking about the

studio layout unless prompted to do so by the announcers. The frequent mentions of the unusually large number of people in the studio for Weewo's last show are a good example.

The computer equipment and control board not only indicate the location of different announcers, but they are also props that are essential to the performance going off perfectly. Such props vary by station. Cameron and Vanessa both use a computer system with its own mini-board to record phone calls. Automation systems varied, but were fairly similar visually and in terms of how they operated. The quality and condition of the board varied, from the top-of-the-line models at W-NEWS to the aging model at Vanessa's station with its missing buttons. In addition, Josh used an iPad to read texts and to play an array of sound effects. George and Laura still have to use CDs and the occasional vinyl record, so these are also important props for their performances. They have their station's massive music library at their disposal; George also brings in records from his personal library.

Headphones are a great example of a necessary radio prop. They are only to be used when the performance is happening, so the announcer putting on his/her headphones becomes a visual cue to other team members that the performance is about to resume. In the stadium broadcast booth, Chris took off his headset sometimes when Rick had the play-by-play role, allowing Chris to remove himself from the performance for a while. At one point, Chris even left to get ice cream, returning to the booth and eating it with his headset off while Rick called the game. The process becomes frenetic at W-NEWS, where Brian whips his headphones off and on almost simultaneously with turning the microphone off and on. Headphones can also affect the performance. Music-station

personality Vanessa explained that she purposely sets her headphone volume at a high level and her microphone volume at a low level. As a result, she speaks loudly on the air so she can hear herself, but her voice is not so loud that it sounds bad to the listener. Therefore, Vanessa has a different, “professional” tone that is separate from her off-air, out-of-character voice.

Studio props also include dry-erase boards with instructions on what to say on-air. In most cases, these are advisories and talking points for promotional events or the correct ways to say certain things. Hunter and Josh write out a rundown of topics for their morning show. Where there is not a dry-erase board, various notices are posted around the studio, instructing the announcer on what to say and do. For example, the positioning statement for Mark’s Country station is taped to the control board, including a handwritten note: “Hey, Mark! Say this!”

Most of the on-air studios that I observed have a display window through which people outside in the hallway can look in on a performance. Normally, this aspect of the studio setting is not troublesome to the announcer, but it was at Mark’s station, where visitors frequently walked past the air studio. Although the window is somewhat covered with autographed pictures and other things, people still can (and do) look in. In doing so, they take on the role of outsiders, viewing a performance that is not meant for them, particularly if the announcer is off the air and assumes that he/she is backstage when they look in. Mark, who normally performs for an unseen audience, responded to the people looking at him through the window by exclaiming to me, “Look at the people in the fishbowl!” He then puckered his mouth into a “fish face” and pretended that he was swimming.

### *Performing in Public*

Unlike Mark's impromptu reactions to the occasional interloper, there are times when radio announcers perform in public and the audience is meant to see the show. When Bill broadcast his talk show live from the Oak Lane Diner, the diner itself became the setting for the performance. Tables that would be otherwise used by patrons were now pushed together so that equipment and other props could be set up for Bill, his producer, and his guests. There were stand-up microphones placed on the table for each guest, cords strung into the hallway near the restrooms, and the diner's sound system played the radio station.

That day's episode of *Wake Up With Bill* was very much a public performance, and by design. We all sat around the table and had on-air and off-air conversations, surrounded by booths where patrons ate breakfast and occasionally greeted us during commercial breaks. As the broadcast continued, they almost became oblivious to the fact that our performance was happening in front of them. The waitress treated us like any other customer, offering us coffee or tea. I passed a state senator some sugar and a stirring spoon for her coffee. Bill asked the waitress to shut the blinds when the sun started to come in through the windows at eye level, thus creating a distraction for Bill as he performed. The noise level rose as the morning went on, but we did our best to block it out. The diner setting created a feeling of comfort for everyone. Although Bill also wanted a similar feeling for his guests in the studio, doing a show in a normal, relaxed setting like a diner added to putting these government officials at ease. They were amongst their constituents; some of the constituents just happened to talk to them with microphones.

By contrast, Cameron's live broadcast setting was completely artificial: we were outdoors, in a tent set up next to a parking lot for a "haunted hayride" attraction. Inside the tent, broadcast equipment was kept in the back, out of the audience's view. Large speakers on either side of the tent blared the station. Prizes and entry forms were positioned prominently, as were Cameron and his interns. Cameron pre-recorded his talk breaks, using a direct connection to the studio to send his voice to another extended team member to record and play over the air at the correct time. Therefore, the time boundaries of the performance changed. The actual broadcast "setting" was where Cameron happened to be when he recorded. He frequently recorded his breaks with the help of young listeners, leading them away from the tent and speakers (so that his microphone did not cause irritating feedback) to a random spot where the performance could take place. The performance was fully orchestrated by Cameron, much more literally so than in the studio, with his young fans-turned-teammates following his directions and playing their roles. Like the diner, this setting also gives the listeners full accessibility to the announcer, and they gave Cameron all kinds of respect and reverence for it.

### *Backstage*

The radio performance is a clear example of Goffman's (1959) idea that barriers of perception separate front from backstage. Announcers can leave the physical space of the studio to go backstage, but they also do so by turning the microphones off and severing that immediate aural connection between announcer and listener. I will go into greater depth about the things that happen when announcers are in the studio but the microphones are off in Chapter Six; for now, I will focus on backstage as a separate space.

In today's modern radio environment, where several stations are often combined into one cluster with a shared office space, an on-air team could share a common backstage area with other on-air teams. Examples include a common kitchen or lounge area, a shared conference room, or even the hallways between studios. Ali shares the newsroom with the anchor from 94KX's sister news station. These places tend to have flourishes of the mindset that comes with working in radio. While we were in the kitchen one day, Cameron demonstrated how to trick a vending machine into giving him an extra can of soda. A sign in the break room at Vanessa's workplace reads, "Free food has no calories," a nod to the prevalence of free food often brought in by staff or sponsors. However, Vanessa said that despite the presence of a common area, "We're so segregated around here. Certain people don't speak to each other."

At the cluster where Brian works, the stations are separated from each other. His employee ID badge only gets him into W-NEWS, so there is not a lot of co-mingling between stations, aside from the occasional off-air chat with a sports reporter via remote hookup from the sister sports station. Brian explained that there is no need for sharing of personnel in such a large market. He said that they do have a common area (a kitchen) upstairs, but they also have their own vending machines within W-NEWS, so there is no need to go upstairs. As Brian put it, "Our 'family' is W-NEWS, not (the cluster)."

In a press box, sports announcers may occasionally share the same backstage area before returning to their separate performances for separate audiences. They all have the common thread of being radio play-by-play people, and in that sense, they can relate to each other and share the commonalities of the job. They all line up for food together, and if they are old friends or colleagues, they bring up some of the old stories. They might

also leave the stadium to enjoy some of this camaraderie. For example, I was invited to join Rick, Chris, the home team's broadcast crew, and various other press box employees at a sports bar for beer and wings one night after a game. By "invoking a backstage style," (Goffman, 1959, p. 129), the bar became another backstage area for these announcers to relate their common interests, share anecdotes, and cut loose after their performances.

### *Being a Multimedia Personality*

With the explosion of digital and social media, radio announcers are trying to adapt their on-air presentation to as many platforms as possible. Personalities and stations now have Facebook fan pages, Twitter accounts, and extensive websites where they can post videos and pictures. The announcers whom I observed have to continue their performances past the time and space boundaries of the radio broadcast. They are now "on stage" anytime they click "record" for an online video or click "post" on Facebook and Twitter.

### *Using Digital Media*

Pointing to the television lighting they had in their office, Josh Grosvent said that he and Hunter Scott can add extra online video content whenever they wish: "We do the occasional 'Show in the Office,' where it's our show but it's in here. It's uncensored. People love to see that." Bill Anderson had a personal website in addition to a page on the WURD site. Although he did not promote the personal site on the air, he admitted that he tended to update his personal site more often than the station's site. Bill also posted additional video content online; for example, following the live diner broadcast, he recorded a video segment with the congressman. When these additional videos are made,

normal “backstage” areas like the office or a back hallway become the front. For a time, Bill’s show also included a live online video stream that included things that happened during commercial breaks, but his guests became uneasy about their off-air comments being available for all to see.

Cameron and his interns post celebrity news items to a blog on their Pop station’s website on a nightly basis, and Cameron often posts additional content online as well. At the live broadcast, he sent his interns out to record audio and video of the “haunted hayride” experience, mostly because he wanted the terrified reactions of a particular intern who scares easily. The material was then edited and posted to the station’s website. Brian Winter’s news stories are often posted online through the station’s website. He also posts his stories on a free audio website so that friends and colleagues can hear what he is doing.

In addition to his live sports talk show, Brent Axe recorded a weekly video podcast with a local sportswriter, and that show continues as part of his new job. I observed the recording of one edition of the podcast. Brent and his colleague sat on stools in front of a green screen; the technician who was recording them told me that he could put graphics or pictures or video behind them to fit whatever they are talking about. On the podcast, Brent is no different than he was on the radio. He played off of his colleague, making jokes about his salmon-colored golf shirt and pointing out silly words and phrases spoken by his colleague, such as “whiz-bang.”

Laura Donaldson and George Brooks recognize that their non-commercial station is trying to keep up with the changing times. Their station has an employee whose job is dedicated to updating their website. Laura and George both submit their daily playlists to

be posted on the station website the following day, so that listeners with Internet access can find out about classical or jazz music with which they may not be familiar. Laura said that even though their station has a primarily older audience, many of their listeners are online, so it is important for the announcers to be online as well. George added that he wants to learn more about computers so that he can do more with them. In addition, the ability of listeners to hear radio stations anywhere in the world over the Internet greatly expands the reach of a performance. Laura mentioned getting classical music requests from China and Italy; George said that he gets calls from as far away as Germany and Portugal.

### *Using Social Media*

The older announcers I observed tended to see less importance in social media. A radio veteran of over two decades, Rick Hayes acknowledged that he tries to keep up with the times. For the SkyFish, he kept a regular blog, and he said he injected as much of himself as he could into it. He also has a Twitter account, but he limits his use: “I guess I’m just not of that generation where I’m constantly thinking of Twitter and tweets. When I do, when it pops into my head, I’m glad to do it.” Vanessa limits her use of social media because she recognizes that some of her Urban station’s listeners do not have Internet access, and she does not want to exclude people who cannot afford computers and smartphones. She said that she uses her blog on the station website to give extended opinions about things, and she also posts links to her Facebook page. However, she pointed out that she was already doing well in the ratings before the introduction of social media, so it is not part of her regular strategy to gain listeners.

Brent has fully embraced Twitter: “I got in on it early, and I’m somebody that doesn’t embrace new technology and things like that, you know, willingly (*laughs*).” He uses it to connect with people and to get his sports-related opinions on the record during “off hours.” He did not have to wait until his show the next day to be “on the record.” Hunter and Josh both have Twitter accounts, and they agreed that having such an outlet allows them to keep their morning show going all day long. Bill takes a similar approach to his account, saying that it is more of what he is doing off the air. He tweets and posts pictures of things that he thinks are not important enough to bring up on the air, but he acknowledged that his Twitter followers would see more of his life. He told me that there was some tension between WURD’s talk show hosts and station management over whether the hosts’ Twitter and Facebook accounts were the intellectual property of the station. The station was slow to get on board with online content, and the hosts had already picked up thousands of online followers before the station could get its own social media accounts set up.

Cameron also splits duty sometimes between personal and station accounts. Cameron sometimes lets his interns handle the job of tweeting for the station, and he wants to make sure that they develop a “personality” that comes across even within the 140-character confines of Twitter. Correcting one intern’s method of tweeting, he told her that she was giving information in her tweets, but it was “just” information. Cameron explained, “You don’t follow people on Twitter that you’re not entertained by. If you can be entertaining and informative, that’s the perfect storm.”

When Cameron takes over the station’s Twitter account, he creates an interesting performance dynamic. One night when a listener badgered him on Twitter to play a song

and she missed it when he finally did, he went on the station account and tweeted, “Nyah, nyah... That’s from Cameron for yelling at him.” He replied to the abuse he was taking himself by taking on a different Twitter identity (the station’s) and using this alternate identity to relay “his” message. Brent also recognized that Twitter helped him prepare for his show: “It’s the best source of breaking news; it’s the best source of opinions... I still do go through a number of websites, but I could literally do all my show prep just keeping an eye on Twitter. The people you follow, it’s all the same stuff that I’d be going through 10 different websites for.”

Twitter was invaluable to Brian when he was working at W-NEWS on the afternoon of the 2011 East Coast earthquake. The instant reactions from friends and sources that he follows provided confirmation of the size and scope of the quake far faster than any official report. “I know that it can certainly add to what it is that I’m doing on the air in that I can get story ideas,” he continued. “I can see what’s happening immediately. Things appear on Twitter faster than the wire.” Brian even credits Twitter with helping him land his coveted job at W-NEWS; tweeting a statement from one of the station’s anchors put him on their radar. However, in his format, he finds the promotional capabilities to be overrated: “People on social media want to see more of the content, but they want to do it on the Internet. Nobody’s gonna go to their radio and turn it on because they see a tweet, so social media is valuable to supplement the content, not promote it.”

College radio announcer Dan Cas, however, finds some promotional value in Twitter, and he frequently uses it to promote *The Weewo Show*. Weewo is in between using Twitter to supplement and promote content: “I don’t want to be the guy that seems

like it's just shameless plugs and always talking about the show. I like to sometimes switch it up a little bit, and maybe give a piece of news, and then tease (the show)." He admitted that he needs to try harder with social media, and that keeping up with Twitter is practically a job in itself.

Drew Kelly and Ali Stevens said that their morning show's listeners have gravitated more toward Facebook. Drew explained, "We decided early on that we were gonna accept every friend request we got on our personal Facebook pages... I think anything you do on-air needs to be mirrored online, so we try to do that the best we can." As a small-market personality, Drew sees an additional advantage in being on Facebook. He can connect with a greater percentage of his listeners:

Five percent of 40,000 is what? 2,000? So that's my Facebook (*laughs*). It's really great having that because five percent of 12 million, you know, who could possibly keep track of that amount of people? I'm not saying that I know all of my Facebook friends, but I will say this, that I recognize a lot of people in a lot of places I go.

Ali jokingly added that she has become more popular online by marrying Drew.

Mark Nelson uses his Facebook fan page to post links to content on his Country station's website, such as the blog that he writes, as well as links to sponsors. He also said that he uses Facebook to post additional content related to things he talks about on the air. One day when we were in the studio, Mark noticed that the morning show announcers had left an odd-shaped potato behind. Mark thought that it looked like Admiral Ackbar from the *Star Wars* movies, so he took a picture of the potato with his smartphone and posted it side-by-side with a picture of Admiral Ackbar on his Facebook fan page. He said it was a great way to get the listeners in on the joke. He also posted a picture of himself with a vinyl record he got in the mail, along with the tongue-in-cheek caption: "I

tried... but the big black disc won't fit in the CD player or the disk drive." Although he admits that he has more freedom on Facebook, Mark said, "I'm still not gonna be posting anything raunchy or really cursing or anything like that on my Facebook page. You will generally get what you're getting on the show."

Hunter and Josh used Twitter to carry on the "theater of the mind" that started in their resignation-by-zombie-attack from 95X. First, Josh tweeted about their impending doom during the "attack" itself, with messages such as "The zombies have breached the compound. We don't have long. Thank you for everything." The following day, Hunter and Josh ended their silence by posting news stories about their departure from 95X, and then they jokingly tweeted about becoming Wal-Mart greeters. They also exchanged tweets with one of K-Rock's DJs about coming to work for him as an intern. Once the story of their move to K-Rock went public through other media channels, they dropped the joking façade and revealed the truth. Hunter and Josh both acknowledged that it was a way to have fun with what was temporarily a tense situation of being between jobs.

Cameron resorted to some theatrical trickery of his own through Facebook. One night, he took a picture of himself with his laptop camera, holding a folded-over list that he claimed was the list of artists for an upcoming station concert. He then posted the picture to Facebook with the caption, "Who is this hooded man, and what is he holding?" Cameron also carries on the same embellishment on Twitter that he uses on the air, even tweeting a fake conversation with Taylor Swift after he interviewed her for the station.

### *Being on Radio and Television*

The growth of local and national cable sports channels has created a need for sports-related content. Many of these networks have added television simulcasts of

popular local and national sports radio shows. Examples include Dan Patrick (carried simultaneously by NBC Sports Radio and the NBC Sports Network), and two shows from WFAN in New York: *Boomer & Carton* and Mike Francesa carried respectively by the MSG Network and the YES Network (YES Network, 2013; MSG Holdings, L.P., 2012).

Brent's show *On the Block* was also carried on the local Time Warner Cable Sports channel. He credited the television simulcast with growing his audience, stating, "Sometimes people will listen to the show and then they'll watch it later or combo the two somehow." Being on television affected his presentation in certain ways. He made sure to look up at the camera at the beginning of each segment to greet the television audience, and he also looked into the camera intermittently as he gave his opinions or interacted with callers. "The idea is you're kinda eavesdropping on the conversation," Brent explained, "but I do want to acknowledge the TV audience. I kinda look up there once in a while, like 'Hey, I know you're there.'" He also admitted to playing up certain mannerisms for the television viewer: "Once in a while if it's a bad caller or something, I will literally look at the camera and just shake my head or something. They're watching anyway, you know; you're getting what my reaction would be on or off TV, so you might as well say you saw it as much as I did."

Because his show was also televised, aspects of setting in Brent's studio were different from in other radio studios. Signs and other objects (e.g. figurines) were positioned for the camera. The two television monitors behind Brent were only for the camera. There was no other useful purpose for them, given their position in the studio; he already had three televisions on the opposite wall to which he could refer. The

microphones were also set up so that the producer could read his updates facing the camera. The third microphone then became what Brent called the “mystery corner,” out of the view of the camera and the TV audience, and used only when a guest was in the studio and the producer had to move over.

Before Bill left his daily radio talk show for television, he already had experience with the delicate balancing act of being on both media platforms. Bill was a reporter and in-studio analyst for Fox 29 in Philadelphia and for upstart network Bounce TV. Although the video version of his show was an online stream and not live television, it still was presented in the same way as Brent’s television simulcast. The viewer was “eavesdropping” on a live radio program, but was not an outsider; the performance was still intended for him/her.

### *Performance Secrets Revealed*

As mentioned in Chapter Two, radio personalities sometimes have no problem letting the audience in on the secrets behind the performance. Some revelations have to do with the type of performance being conducted. After telling the audience that he tried to be objective, Bill Anderson admitted that he planned to vote for President Obama in the upcoming election and that taking a side is just the nature of talk radio. Weewo advised his on-air guests that he might catch them off-guard, but that it is just part of what happens on his college radio show. He also mentioned that he was now allowed to say the word “ass,” which led to the word being used so many times that Weewo joked, “They should’ve never told me I could say that.” Brent Axe often spoke on-air of the conventions of sports talk radio, such as asking unanswerable opinions and having slow days where he needed to search for things to talk about. When asked about it, Brent said

that pretending that the listeners do not know how his show works is “ridiculous,” adding that when he meets listeners or does interviews, they always ask him how he does his show.

Other on-air explanations reveal the secrets that go into creating the “theater of the mind.” Mark Nelson announces that his weather reports come from his Country station’s “Weather Center,” but in reality, it comes from a weather website. One day, the website was not working, and Mark was forced to rely on his iPhone to act as the “Weather Center.” After a couple of occasions in which he had to stall for time on the air while the weather report loaded, he finally acknowledged to the audience that he was using his iPhone to get the forecast.

As mentioned above, Bill sometimes added “details” to his live commercials. On one occasion, he was caught doing so on the air. As he read his live cleaning products commercial, one of his regular guests grabbed his script, and as Bill transitioned back into the program, the guest interjected, “The commercial doesn’t say all that.” Bill promptly collapsed into laughter for several seconds. He tried to take a call, but soon he, his guest, and the caller were all laughing. Bill then had to explain to the audience that he strays from the script when he does live commercials. However, he added, “If you believe in your products, then it’s easy to talk about.”

### *Breaking “Character”*

Goffman (1959) would have described Bill’s loss of composure as one of those moments where the performance breaks down, the performer slips out of character, and the audience gets a glimpse of the person “behind the mask.” (p. 212). In radio, these breakdowns can be equally amusing and frustrating. During Brian Winter’s newscast

with Bob James, they were set to read a story about the previous night's Tony awards. The script said that there would be a clip from the musical *Jesus Christ Superstar*, but when the anchors played the clip, they heard, "Hi there, I'm Jesus Christ," a lyric from *The Book of Mormon*, a very different show. When they heard the unexpected funny song, both Brian and Bob burst out laughing on the air. For a moment, the normally serious news anchors revealed a light-hearted side that typically is not part of the broadcast performance. Bob quickly admonished the scriptwriter, and did not seem to appreciate the writer's reply of, "Eh, close."

Ali Stevens had similar moments when her serious news announcer façade slipped. While recapping a previously read story about a jogger who was attacked by raccoons, she started laughing. She promptly apologized and said that she should not laugh at that. Later, she made herself laugh on the air after making a joke off the air about Batman fans trashing movie critics who gave poor reviews of *The Dark Knight Rises*. Morning show co-host Drew Kelly tried valiantly not to laugh after Ali read a news story about Kazakhstan; he explained later that he started cracking himself up with references to the movie *Borat*.

Most of the breakdowns I noticed were of a laughing variety, and were often invoked by one team member throwing the other team member off his/her rhythm. In addition to his guest, Bill's producer also got him to laugh on the air by doing a funny impersonation just before the mics were turned on. A couple of times Chris Williams said something funny right before Rick Hayes came back from a break, causing him to momentarily lose his composure. Brent once said something on the air that was so funny

to his producer that Brent could hear the producer laughing outside the studio, causing him to break up laughing as well.

Other times, breakdowns are emotional in a far different way. On the anniversary of the 9/11 terrorist attacks, Laura Donaldson concluded her classical music show with a very stirring tribute piece, and found herself overcome by the music as she tried to speak on the air afterward. The listeners found this slippage from character so troubling that one called the station to ask if she was all right. Near the end of Weewo's final college show, as he thanked everyone who had been a part of the show over the years, he said, "Also, I never do this... I've gotta thank my mom!" In such a situation, it is completely understandable for a normally entertaining announcer to take an introspective turn.

#### *Intentionally Playing a Character*

Many personality-driven radio programs allow an announcer to step into a role other than that which he/she has created for the air. There are times when a member of a program intentionally plays a fully formed character, created to add to the program. Two members of *The Weewo Show* cast created characters for the show. One of them only appeared in character, playing the Jewish mother of his real-life self; the other contributed to the show both as a regular on-air personality and as a character he conceived as a satire of flashy Puerto Rican women. The Jewish mother character gave over-the-top opinions on everything from Robert Downey, Jr. to "her son's" penchant for inappropriate texts. The Puerto Rican character mangled words like "perpendicular" and "prescription," professed "her" love for the announcer playing her, and attributed her recent weight loss to factors that included the P90X workout program, Goya food products, and "beating up on other girls."

*Treating the Broadcast as a Performance*

Announcers may not know that they are consciously engaging in a performance of self when they are on the air, but in some ways, they do see it as a performance. Although Mark doesn't see what he does as a performance on the level of the country music artists that he plays, he knows that it is to some extent. He brought up announcers who use fake names: "If you're going with a name like 'Phathead' on the radio, you better sound like a 'Phathead.' Whatever 'Phathead' is supposed to sound like, you better be that guy because if you're not a 'Phathead,' you can't use that name."

Other announcers use performance terminology around their workplace in a more tongue-in-cheek manner. Bob referred to the hour that he anchored by himself before Brian joined him as his "practice hour." Brent jokingly called the photographer shooting his video podcast "Scorsese." On the air, he inserted the comment "pause for effect" while playing a clip of NBA commissioner David Stern announcing a draft pick. Mark used a couple of magician's terms as he did his job, exclaiming, "Ta-da!" or "Poof!"

Bill may not go so far as to consider his performance to be akin to what happens on a stage. As he interviewed a young actor one morning, the two of them inadvertently got into a conversation about performance. Bill joked that he doesn't know anything about acting; the one time he was asked to be in a film, the producers asked him to play a talk show host. When the actor pointed out that even talk show hosts have to put in long hours developing skills, Bill replied that he is not asked to be a talk show host one day and a boxer the next.

Even Brian, the serious newscaster, realizes that he is performing:

I thought it was weird the first time I heard somebody use the word "show" (to describe a newscast), and it was somebody who was a network

anchor who did that, and ever since then, I've used that. I picked it up years ago, before I worked in a major market, and I never thought to call it that. It was always my newscast, but yeah, to an extent it is a performance. You want the listener to not only get the information, but you want the listener to enjoy it.

Having established how on-air radio performance is a performance of self by using Goffman's (1959) dramaturgical approach, the ensuing chapters will expand on this concept. I will first discuss how an on-air personality is created, both initially and as an ongoing process. I will then go into more detail about the aspects of performance that the listening audience never sees. In the following chapter, I will once again use Goffman (1981), this time through an analysis of talk, focusing on the self that is represented in on-air speech and the effects of different types of announcing on the performance of personality. Next, I will explain the processes that are used to entertain a listening audience. Finally, I will discuss the role of coorientation with the audience in on-air performance, as well as how the announcer resolves social distance to improve coorientation.

## CHAPTER 5: CONSTRUCTION OF AN ON-AIR SELF

There are many ways in which a radio announcer composes the self that he/she will use on the air. These processes predate the announcer's entry into the field, and they are ongoing. Announcers develop and refine their on-air personas based on their motivations for being in the field, the influence – positive or negative – of other announcers, and to a large extent the telling of stories. In this chapter, I will detail the life circumstances that factored into the creation of the on-air personalities performed by the announcers I observed. I will also explain the common narratives told by announcers to reinforce the character they seek to portray on the radio. In so doing, I will show that the on-air self, much like a self performed by any person in everyday life, is a narrative creation.

### *Developing a Personality*

The thought process of how to construct an on-air personality begins the moment that someone decides that he/she wishes to pursue a career in radio. The various radio announcers that I observed came to radio in different ways. Drew Kelly entered the field through some fateful parental intervention. His parents owned an appliance shop, and when a local radio station sales representative tried to sell them airtime, Drew's mother insisted that Drew (then just 15 years old) get to be in the commercial. He did such a good job that the station hired him on a part-time basis. He continued to treat radio as a hobby of sorts while he went to college and went into the work force as an electrical engineer. Radio did not become his career until the owner of 94KX asked him to become the program director and take over the morning show. He still has these two positions 13 years later.

Josh Grosvent of *The Show* got into radio as a reason to promote his career as a stand-up comedian. After doing regular segments on a Top-40 station's morning show, he soon met Hunter Scott and they started working together. Chris Williams was about to graduate from college with a degree in history and no idea of what to do with it. He remembered waking up one morning and thinking, "It would be great to be paid to talk about sports." From that moment, he worked toward getting into sports broadcasting. Laura Donaldson was a classical musician who segued into being a classical announcer. Vanessa told the story of how she got into radio on her station's website for all to see. Attempting to get back at an ex-boyfriend for stealing from her, she asked the local Top-40 station if she could replace her ex as the nighttime personality's intern. She got the job, and she parlayed that into a paid position at the station.

Hunter recalled that after going to school for television production, "I kinda fell into (radio) and I just was like, 'Well, maybe I'll just do this.'" Mark Nelson's entry into radio developed out of his love of music. He tried to be a musician himself, but after a while he decided, "Okay, let's quit trying to write songs and play instruments that we're not really good at, and singing songs that we're not really good at (*laughs*), and help other people." Dan Cas also cited an interest in exposing people to new music. His on-air partner Weewo had a more profound purpose: "I felt like I had a message... I had to find an opportunity to reach out to an audience, and in school I feel like I could do that through radio, and the opportunity was there, so I didn't want to pass up on it."

Bill Anderson was born into the radio business. His father, Cody, owned radio stations. As Bill put it, "When I first started, I was playing because I was kind of legacy... I had been around a lot of different people, but I didn't have a firm grasp of the

fact that I was really doing it as a career, so I was playing.” At the other extreme, George Brooks had other careers before he entered radio. Although his father was a radio enthusiast, George entered the Army and worked in food service, then sold insurance for a few years. The latter career enabled him to get over his shyness, a consequence of being the youngest child in his family. Without that job, George says, he never would have ended up in radio: “Divine hand or just dumb luck threw me into that.”

### *The Influence of Other Announcers*

Brian Winter knew from an early age that he wanted to be in radio. He grew up listening to W-NEWS’s afternoon news anchor and always wanted to be him; now they sometimes anchor together. In fact, many announcers start out wanting to emulate a favorite radio personality. NPR legend Bob Edwards once described it by saying, “When you’re young, you don’t know how to be yourself, so you are who you want to be” (personal communication, February 17, 2011). As a newspaperman, Edwards started out trying to sound like legendary CBS reporter Edward R. Murrow.

Listening to live sporting events as a kid in New England, Rick Hayes wanted to be Boston Red Sox play-by-play announcer Ned Martin or Providence College announcer Chris Clarke. Current Red Sox announcer Dave O’Brien and Texas Rangers announcer Eric Nadel were Chris’s inspirations. Brent Axe drew influence from famous sportscasters Bob Costas and Chris Berman from a young age, but he really found his voice at his first radio job when he produced for Brad Davies, now a sports talk show host in Houston. Even now, Brent said, “If you heard (us) do a show back to back, you know, it’d be very similar.”

As an African-American woman with few peers in the radio business, Vanessa was drawn to controversial New York DJ Wendy Williams. She did not necessarily want to be like Williams; she just “wanted that kind of notoriety.” She even sent her demo tape to Williams for feedback. Once he got into radio, Drew wanted to be like another New York radio star, Z100’s Kid Kelly. Ali Stevens idolized Sarah Jacobs, who read the news on a morning show in Baltimore. “She was the newsperson who sounded very professional doing the news,” Ali explained, “but could also add so much to the show.” Hunter and Mark both cited *Paulsen & Krenn*, the longtime morning duo at WDVE in Pittsburgh as influences, although Mark said that he did not try to emulate anyone in particular when he was first starting as a DJ. Hunter also pointed to Howard Stern, whose influence in radio is so wide that sports announcer Rick also credited him as an inspiration.

Like Hunter and Rick, many announcers have multiple influences and try to take a little bit from each. In addition to his idol-turned-colleague at W-NEWS, Brian said, “I like to emulate the best parts of a lot of different people, the delivery and the way they handle themselves on the air.” George said that he got his first radio job by imitating NFL Films narrator John Facenda, but he also jokingly acknowledged that he “stole stuff” from many legendary DJs. “It took me a while to get my own sea legs,” he admitted. “I guess all (these influences) converged, and maybe it makes me interesting because I’m so many-parted.”

Cameron grew up on the West Coast and drew his inspiration from Los Angeles radio fixtures like “Big Boy” and JoJo Wright. As he sought to improve his on-air persona on college radio, Weewo also listened to several different radio personalities for

inspiration. His on-air partner Dan, in turn, emulated Weewo when he first joined *The Weewo Show*. “Weewo was very cool, and calm, and collected, and I know it’s a cliché to say, but he really made it look so easy.” Ultimately, an announcer wants to stand out from the rest in his/her own way. As Chris put it, “I don’t think any broadcaster wants to sound too much like anyone else. It’s obviously important to develop your own style/voice. That said, we all have influences.”

*Being different from other announcers/stations.* Just as radio announcers find models to emulate, they also find examples of what not to do. Mark poked fun at an announcer from another market who reads every commercial one line at a time; his voice starts out loud, and then trails off toward the end of each line. Vanessa referred to Steve Harvey’s syndicated morning show as “the worst thing on radio.” She also expressed a desire to be part of *The Tom Joyner Morning Show* because she would be better than Joyner’s present supporting cast. In addition, Vanessa vented frustration at the difficulty in getting voiceover work, saying that she hears other announcers and wonders, “Where the heck are they looking? She doesn’t sound better than me.”

Some announcers also point out that they treat other people better than their contemporaries do. Josh defended the insults that he and Hunter hurl at other people on the air by saying that satellite radio shock jocks *Opie & Anthony* are “just mean-spirited” by comparison. Hunter added, “*Opie & Anthony* would pick on a mentally handicapped kid. I’d never do that, ‘cause it’s just mean. There’s no point to it.” When he interviews artists, Cameron asks them about everyday things to get them to open up more, as opposed to other interviewers who just ask the obligatory questions about certain songs or albums.

Announcers often cite other stations with which they are competing for their examples of what not to do. In the W-NEWS newsroom, Brian expressed his disapproval of news stations that lead with celebrity news, telling a colleague, “It makes me feel better about what we do.” While talking about the freedom he has to give his opinions on the local sports teams, Brent dismissed a competing station for being in the local university’s pocket because they carry the games. “At the end of the day, I do better radio than they do... I break more stories than they do,” he stated proudly. Pride also infuses Cameron’s comparison of his Pop station with his rivals. He bragged about his station’s ability to work closer with artists and their fanbases.

Sometimes, the criticism spills over onto the airwaves and is more biting. In response to a listener suggestion that he watch ESPN’s *Mike & Mike* more often, Brent compared them to vanilla ice cream. At 95X, Hunter and Josh made regular mentions of rival station K-Rock that were not particularly flattering. They complained about the local newspaper’s cozy relationship with K-Rock’s owner, which led to an increasingly silly exaggeration of the attendance and artist roster of K-Rock’s recent music festival. Hunter called both the owner and the then-program director (“Nixon,” to whom Hunter referred only as “the ex-president name”) a “bitch.” Having switched over to K-Rock since my week with them, Hunter and Josh now go after their former employer just as often, and with more enmity behind the barbs.

### *The Ongoing Process*

The development of an on-air personality lasts for as long as an announcer works in radio. Over the years that he has been on college radio, Weewo has improved his planning and organization. “As much as I might want to cover it all,” he said, “maybe for

me that's not in my best interest. Maybe I just need to find a focus." Weewo added that there are a lot of things an announcer can do in college radio that he/she likely could not do in commercial radio. College radio gives an announcer more of an opportunity to try different things and discover what works for him/her, and eventually find his/her own style. Weewo encouraged Dan and other members of his team to listen to veteran announcers and develop a professional sound. As he takes over the show from Weewo, Dan is still adding and tweaking content to make the program flow better, and he will continue to add to his on-air team. He says he would like to become a professional on-air personality, but he understands that such opportunities are limited.

Having developed his on-air persona, Cameron now pays it forward with his interns. He doesn't want them to have the stereotypical experience of being asked to get coffee or dry cleaning for him. "That's not gonna teach them anything," he stated, "nor is it gonna continue to fuel the fire with their passion to be in radio." Instead, they are part of the show, laughing in the background or playing along with Cameron's attempts to create a "theater of the mind" for the listener. At live broadcasts, they wear hooded sweatshirts advertising their Twitter accounts, just like Cameron does, making them personalities to be promoted as he is.

As a person changes over the years as dictated by life circumstances, so too does an on-air personality. When Drew and Ali started working together in 1999, the two morning hosts were in their late 20s. Now they are both in their 40s and have children. "It's a completely different mindset," Ali noted. "When you're in your 20s without kids, you stay up late and watch shows that are completely different, and now we're lucky if

we get to see anything because we go to bed earlier. It's a whole different show than it was back then."

*Catchphrases.* The ongoing process involves finding things to say that feel natural. In some cases, the things that the announcer says may sound so good to the announcer or the audience that they become catchphrases, informal sayings that become part of mass culture (Warner, 2002). Brent prefaced statements about sports betting by saying, "For entertainment purposes only," frequently referenced "Kramer" from *Seinfeld* by stating, "Giddy up," and punctuated obvious statements by saying, "Duh." The way he opened the show each day could also qualify as a catchphrase: "*On the Block* is ON... THE... AIIIIIRRRRR!" Weewo began using the Spanish phrase "mi gente" (my people) early on, as a nod to his roots: "Although the show... I deliver it all in English basically, I wanted to use a word to connect to any other Latino, but also to kinda throw a little tagline in there, catchphrase."

Laura's show opens with a simple "How are you today?" When she meets listeners, they ask it back to her. When callers or guests asked Bill how he was doing, he replied the same way every time: "I'm great every day." Bill also began every show by saying good morning to "the ancestors," previous generations of African-Americans who struggled so that Bill's generation could be where they are today, concluding, "Without you, there would be no us."

The double entendre-laden dance of shock jock humor lends itself to the invention of catchphrases. Josh said that once Hunter started using the *Star Wars*-inspired phrase "put Captain Solo in the cargo hold" to describe anal sex, listeners started texting the phrase back to them. There are also clean catchphrases on their show: A blundered

attempt to pronounce a word or name will cause them to say “row-adds... roods,” referring to a scene from the movie *Black Sheep* in which David Spade’s character mispronounces the word “roads.” A rash of arrests in Syracuse connected to illegal drugs known as “bath salts” led Hunter and Josh to refer to the heretofore-nicknamed “Salt City” as the “Bath Salt City.”

*“War Stories”*

Anyone who chooses a particular job or career amasses a number of memorable experiences over the years. Such experiences come up in conversation from time to time. They tend to be called “war stories,” an allusion to the tales that former soldiers tell of their experiences in battle. Although most careers are not nearly as intense – or violent, for that matter – as that of a soldier, people tend to see their careers as a series of conflicts or defining moments. Some are successes, some are failures, but these moments are always important, and they gain new life as war stories to be told and retold among colleagues, providing optimal learning opportunities for people who are new or less experienced in the field (Joung, Hesketh, & Neal, 2006). The world of radio is no different from any other job in this regard. All of the announcers whom I observed, no matter the job or length of time spent in the industry, had stories that they were all too willing to tell, not only to me, but to colleagues as well.

Sometimes, the stories are of exemplary performances. Brian Winter keeps his career highlights in his e-mail account. As we sat in the newsroom early on a Sunday morning, he played me various audio pieces from his time at W-NEWS. Each audio artifact has a story that goes with it, often reflecting his enthusiasm for the job. As he played clips of his coverage of a major national story, he told me about the experience of

covering the story, and then added, "It was fun." Drew Kelly and Ali Stevens referred to the 9/11 terrorist attacks a couple of times during the week I was with them. They were on the air that morning, having to relay information as best they could, and trying to be voices of reason amidst the chaos of that dark day. They clearly see that broadcast as a defining moment in their radio careers.

Not all of Brian's recordings feature him in top form. He played me a recording of him and Bob James awkwardly returning to the air after a press conference the station was carrying. According to Brian's accompanying story, he and Bob tried to sneak in a quick lunch during the press conference, and the order to go back on the air was so sudden that they were in mid-bite when they had to rush back into the studio.

Other times, war stories can be silly events that occur within the everyday life of an announcer. Country DJ Mark Nelson told me stories of going to Nashville and finding hole-in-the-wall bars. Rick Hayes said that he had become so respected among the baseball players that he covered for the ability to throw back any wisecracks or "ball-busting" he received, they started to call him "Agassi," a reference to tennis champion Andre Agassi. He told one specific story about a player who threatened him after he talked about a visiting player's famous ex-girlfriend on the air one night. The player said that if Rick ever said anything about his or any of his teammates' wives, he would not be able to broadcast that night. Rick replied, "Really? Well, I'll tell you what. I might not be able to broadcast, but I can sure as hell guarantee you won't be able to catch either."

### *Climbing to the Top*

Many war stories deal with the trials and tribulations assorted with breaking into the business and moving up through the ranks. Mark told me stories of his first radio

station, where he was asked to do everything from reading news to working the overnight (12-6AM) shift. At one point, the owner of the station tracked Mark down at a friend's house to tell him that he needed to take over the morning show the next day. The story of how he landed at his present station was a case of timing; the job was actually open for him a few years earlier, but he liked where he was at the time. Things turned sour right around the time that the job opened up again. In fact, the previous midday person called Mark to tell him the job was opening up before tendering his resignation to the program director. All of Mark's stories reflect the nature of small-market radio, where an announcer is often asked to wear multiple hats and change responsibilities at a moment's notice.

George Brooks started his long career journey in the mid-1960s at the age of 29, working for a small station in a major market. One of his duties was to turn the transmitter off at the end of the broadcast day, then turn it back on the next morning. He would shut down the transmitter at 2AM, sleep on a couch in the control room until just before 6AM, get up, turn the transmitter on, and do his regular shift. George first got on the air through something of a happy accident. His job was to play the commercials off of audio cartridges, and one day one of the cartridges broke. The general manager told George to read the commercial live, and he impressed his boss so much that he was told, "From now on, play one, then read one." Because the station would not pay him for overtime, he worked on an assembly line for six months so that he could afford to chase his dream. He began to trade news stories with a station in his hometown, and soon that station hired him. From there, George began his long career in radio news before moving on to FM University to do his current jazz show.

Other announcers portrayed themselves as models of perseverance through adversity. As we compared notes on industry people we may or may not have met, Drew told me about a DJ who worked for a rival company. This particular announcer drank himself to death when he was only in his 30s. Along with being a cautionary tale about the perils of the radio business, there was an implied “Thank goodness that wasn’t us.” Vanessa pushes her interns to be aggressive in the pursuit of career goals, as she has been. She tells them cautionary tales of past interns who did not put in the time and effort, and did not succeed as a result. Her own story of being a junior-college dropout who had to bring her baby in to sleep under the control board while she worked the overnight shift serves as inspiration for her young mentees. She tells them that she used to come into the radio station at 1:00 in the morning to make audition tapes. George admitted that the toll of working long hours in radio cost him his first marriage.

Hunter Scott and Josh Grosvent’s recollections of their move from 95X to K-Rock played out as an exemplary war story. They both cited repeatedly that there was a clear division between them and the rest of the on-air staff, and that they were mostly ignored or otherwise disrespected. Hunter said that there were different philosophies on programming, use of social media, and the station’s public image. As Hunter put it, “I feel more comfortable here (at K-Rock) than I ever felt over there (at 95X). There’s definitely more of... I feel more embraced at this studio. We never really felt accepted over there.”

As a couple living their now-married life on the air, Drew and Ali could even tell me a war story with a “happily ever after” ending. At one point before her relationship with Drew went from strictly professional to romantic, Ali left 94KX, seeking to advance

her career in a larger market. Drew tried to work with a couple of new co-hosts, but the chemistry was not the same. Finally, as Drew explained, the owner of 94KX took action:

At one point, Roger – our CEO and president, Roger Haddon Jr. – said, “I know what I want, and I know who it is, and I’m just gonna get her,” so he tracked (Ali) down wherever she was at the time, and she was probably gonna make a move to another radio station, and what did he say to you? “Why don’t you turn that U-Haul up (Routes) 11 and 15?” *(Ali laughs.)* And brought her back, and he hasn’t regretted that decision one bit, and neither have I because it really was a really, really good chemistry there, and I’m glad that it happened.

### *Battles with the Boss*

Sometimes, the relationship between a radio announcer and his/her superior is not as cordial. The most frequent conflict in the workplace may be between a person and his/her boss. Many war stories told by the announcers I observed were of this nature. As play-by-play announcers, Rick Hayes and Chris Williams worked for the SkyFish, rather than the station carrying the games. In the broadcast booth before a game one night, Rick told Chris about the problems he had with the late owner of the team. After reciting a litany of run-ins, Rick provided the final assessment of how the owner was seen by the people who worked for him, noting that only one player showed up at the owner’s funeral.

Vanessa told me a couple of stories about leaving a station where she was unhappy. First, she was working at a station where her boss hired another woman, who Vanessa suspected of sleeping her way to the top. Eventually, the other woman received preferential treatment while Vanessa was gradually pushed out of the radio station entirely. At another station, she worked for an owner with no prior radio experience, and the situation between them became unbearable for her. Realizing that she was doing too well in the ratings to be fired, Vanessa quit the station on the air, the most dramatic and

public of ways to express frustrations with management. She had to go without a job for six months before landing at the Urban station where she currently works.

Hunter and Josh also cited problems with their superiors as a catalyst for their departure from 95X. Josh said that when they did something wrong, nobody ever wanted to hear their side of the story. Hunter stated that their new boss at K-Rock understands what they are doing. Josh added, "He's a programmer, whereas every boss I've had at Citadel/Cumulus was a sales guy." At his second station in the market where he started his career, George had to deal with a difficult boss. He was asked to do news on an AM station in the morning, then come back to do an afternoon show on the FM sister station. George ultimately got out of his situation when, as he put it, he "wandered into news" at another station. In a typically folksy manner, he stated, "You get lemons, you make lemonade, doggone it."

Mark had perhaps the best story about dealing with difficult bosses. He had an inkling that the station where he was working at the time was about to fire him, and when he showed up one payday to find no paycheck in his mailbox, he assumed that this was the end. He started to clean out his office, and the operations manager caught wind of the situation and called him into a meeting. It was explained to him that he was not being "fired," but that his job was being "eliminated" in a "repurposing." His bosses offered him two weeks pay, along with his accrued vacation and sick time, or he could stay on for two more weeks. Mark's reply: "Give me the check." When they warned him that leaving now would result in a negative review in his personnel file, he repeated, "Give... me... the... check." Knowing that he was about to be let go, he was already close to lining up another job, so he took the check, sat out his last two weeks, waited an

additional week to take the new job so he could collect unemployment, and spent the money on a big-screen television set. “It was like a bonus check,” Mark boasted. “This was the best firing ever!”

*“War Stories” on the Air*

When an announcer works in a format that provides more time and leeway to talk on the air, war stories may come out for the audience to hear. Having perhaps the most freedom to say what he wants on the air, Hunter brings up the battles with former bosses. Reading from a news article about the best places to grow old, he mentioned a city where he once worked, then pointed out that the boss who fired him there got busted for drug possession. “Never trust a dude with a ‘gelmet,’” Hunter concluded, referring to the boss’s hairstyle.

Other times, the stories are much more innocuous. On my first night with Rick and Chris, we saw smoke rolling into the stadium at one point in the later innings of the ballgame; we later learned that it came from one of the concession stands. Rick used the occasion to tell a story about a building fire that broke out one night while he was calling a game. Later in the week, Rick was invited into the hometown broadcast booth to relate some memories of his time calling games in this city. An off-air war story had to be told on the air when Rick accidentally mentioned Chris being called the wrong name during their pre-game interview; Chris had edited the mistake before airing the interview. Rick smoothed things over by telling stories of times when players called him by the wrong name.

The final broadcast of a program evokes a general feeling of remembrance, and is therefore tailor-made for the telling of war stories. Weewo’s last episode of *The Weewo*

*Show* was one such occasion. Weewo and a large reunion of present and former co-hosts told stories of things that happened off the air, the stories behind the creation of the “Jewish mother” and Puerto Rican satire characters, and favorite memories of the show. Despite (or perhaps contravening) his admitted tendency to exaggerate personal stories on the air, Weewo also gave a factual account of the show’s history.

### *Forming the On-Air Self Through Narrative*

All of the details about how these announcers chose to enter radio, developed their personalities, and made it through good times and bad, were told to me in the form of stories. People construct identity through narrative (Vila, 2003; 2000). Radio announcers wish to create an on-air self that is capable of holding an audience, and if we are to believe that this self is “genuine” or grounded in who the announcer really thinks he/she is, then it makes sense that the stories they told me and others are a way of constructing the desired self through narrative. This narrative construction takes place not only in the telling of stories of formative career experiences (both on and off the air), but also in the on-air stories of day-to-day events that will be covered in more depth in Chapter Eight.

Seeking to become a trusted newsperson, Brian Winter relates stories of being on the front lines of major events. As the narrator of his own stories, he constructs a character with all of the qualities that he wants listeners to hear in him when he is on the air. For Drew Kelly and Ali Stevens, their broadcast on 9/11 crystallized what they want to be for their listeners. Rick Hayes wished for listeners to think of him as a respected veteran announcer, but he also wanted to be seen as “one of the guys” with the baseball players he covered. As Rick explained, “You’ve gotta kinda show them that you’re not

gonna back down from them.” His stories of “Agassi” moments reflect how he sought and gained the players’ respect.

The way a story is told can often reflect the character being constructed as well. George Brooks, a man of much humility, peppered his stories of career accomplishments with words and phrases such as “I guess” and “surprised” and “they seemed happy to have me.” His humility is also evident when he tells stories about his upbringing and all of the other jobs he held before he entered the world of radio. In George’s life story, his brother’s love of jazz and the fact that his father loved radio and enjoyed tinkering with radios meant that, in his words, “I was kinda set up.” Had he stayed in the Army or insurance, these specific contributions from his family would be irrelevant, and therefore not part of the story. Like Brian, George uses the stories to convey how much he has enjoyed being in radio, saying things like, “Not complaining. It’s been a blast.” In this way, there is impressive symmetry between the 79-year old jazz host and the newspaperman in his mid-20s. Perhaps in George’s case, it is more important that he can derive happiness from what he has done because he never made a lot of money in radio, as exemplified by his story about working on the assembly line so he could “afford” to work in radio.

There are other examples of the narrative constructing the character. By mentioning his father’s role and his early work with legendary Philadelphia radio personality Georgie Woods, Bill Anderson sets himself up as someone who was destined to work in radio. However, in telling me the story of how he left his first station, Bill said that you do not commit to doing radio for your whole life, noting, “I can do other things.” Those words became prophetic when he announced months later that he was leaving

WURD for a new television venture. Cameron's stories reveal the fun nature of his life as a Top-40 announcer. For example, he told his intern a story about locking a previous intern in a closet with the McDonald's "Filet-o-Fish" jingle playing on an endless loop because the previous intern failed a challenge of trying to eat a spoonful of cinnamon in less than 60 seconds. The same feeling of fun emanates from all of the stories told on Weewo's final show.

The identity plot (Vila, 2003) most often chosen by the announcers is the story of overcoming. The narrator/character confronts a hated boss and (in his/her own mind) wins in the end, or the narrator/character stays away from the path to ruin that has claimed others within the industry. Vanessa overcame a lot of things over the course of her career, constructing a character that is hardened by life and should serve as an inspiration to others. Her character is so compelling, in fact, that at one point while I was in the studio observing, she pointed at me and yelled to her interns, "He's here because of my pitiful-ass story!" George overcame low pay, the breakup of his first marriage, and the occasional difficult boss, using the life lessons he picked up from the Army and selling insurance to end up with a life that is "easy on the back end."

Vanessa also went through battles with bosses, had to leave a station where she was doing well, only to move to her present station and find success once again. Mark Nelson's "best firing ever" story is a similar situation; he wound up with a big check, a new television, and a new job. In these stories, as well as Drew's story about the DJ who drank himself to death and Hunter Scott's story about the former boss's drug bust, the resonating message is "I'm better than that." This message also emerges from the announcers when they tell stories of competitors who are not as good at their jobs.

As with the people Vila (2003) studied, who define themselves in opposition to a less fortunate group, many of the radio announcers defined themselves in opposition to someone else, someone who did not understand the business the way they did. Nowhere is this more evident than Hunter and Josh's experiences. They left a situation in which they did not feel respected, and they are now free to define themselves in opposition to the station and former colleagues they left behind. As Josh put it, "I think we built this 95X monster... and now we've gotta destroy this beast that we built." The idea of the "war story" itself is a metaphor (Vila, 2000). Clearly, these announcers were not in any life-threatening peril, but they liken their experiences to the horrors of battle and the camaraderie of the corps. These moments are also comparable to Bruner's (1997) moments of "trouble" (p. 157) that bring about changes in self-narratives.

The radio announcers I studied all base their on-air performances in the construction of a self that is a narrative creation. It begins when the person decides to pursue a career in radio, and as with other types of identity formation, this self is always a work in progress (Holstein & Gubrium, 2000). Perhaps this is why Rick, George, and Laura Donaldson all told me that they think they could write a book about their lives, and also why Vanessa told me that she would like to create a TV show. They are already adept at weaving narratives about themselves, and such narratives are an integral part of their on-air performance. In the next chapter, I will explain the aspects of the performance that are hidden from the audience.

## CHAPTER 6: A PEEK BEHIND THE CURTAIN

Radio as an audio medium can inspire the listener's imagination (Silvia, 2007; Douglas, 2004), leading them to paint mental pictures of what they think they would see if they were watching the broadcast take place in person. Fortunately for radio announcers, the fact that they work in an audio medium also ensures that a lot of the things that they do at their jobs never reach the audience. Goffman (1959) referred to these activities as "communication out of character" (p. 169). During their shows, they are able to use the barriers to perception that establish a backstage atmosphere the moment the microphones are turned off. They can also communicate visually in ways they could not if they were in a visual medium. In addition, these announcers undertake the maneuvers of remediation that become necessary when someone is held to the higher standard to which Goffman (1981) claimed that radio announcers are held.

Before and after programs, radio announcers also do a lot of things about which the listeners never find out. Much like during breaks in the studio, there are certain backstage behaviors occurring, but the time outside of the program is also when the process of preparing a show takes place. In this chapter, I will outline many of the things that happen behind the scenes when a radio announcer is not engaging in a performance of self. I will also explain the visual parts of a performance that are normally unknown to the audience, as well as the efforts of these performers to handle the inevitable errors that come with the job. By understanding what takes place outside of these barriers of perception, one can begin to understand how a radio announcer crafts a performance of self. When announcers take advantage of the spaces and activities about which the

audience has no knowledge, they are able to exert control over something that is designed to seem natural and effortless.

### *Backstage Behavior*

As mentioned in Chapter Four, radio announcers go from being in the front region of a performance to backstage as soon as their microphones turn off. They do not have to leave the studio to shift into backstage behavior, thus making the transition a mental one, rather than a physical one. Most announcers immediately relax their standards, allowing topics and language that rules of decorum or privacy do not permit to be used on the air.

### *Using Different Standards Off the Air*

Goffman (1959) wrote that when performers are backstage, they are free to engage in inappropriate dialogue or behavior. In the world of broadcasting, on-air content must meet the standards imposed by management, as well as FCC standards that prohibit indecent language. Once announcers are off the air, the standards no longer apply, and they are free to adopt different standards of dialogue. Sometimes these different standards are expressed in a subtle manner, as when Brian Winter cursed because he almost played the wrong commercial. Other times, it is certainly intentional. As opposed to the *Book of Mormon* incident chronicled in Chapter Four, serious news anchors have no problem with laughing or being humorous when the microphones are off. Referring to an award that the station just won, Bob James joked, “All awards are bogus... Hey, see you at the banquet tonight!” They are also free to give opinions about the stories they are currently following. Taking a break from reporting on a story about a boat alleged to have exploded at sea, Bob and Brian speculated about whether it was a hoax. Bob declared, “I

don't have the guts to say it on the air!" They turned out to be right; the sinking was a hoax.

Most of the time, I observed a more general inappropriateness to the off-air dialogue. Chris Williams sarcastically flirted with the male producer back at the station during breaks. He and Rick Hayes followed an on-air conversation about Britney Spears with a more sexually charged conversation during a break. They made fun of the food in the press box, other announcers, the grounds crew, the on-field promotions, the lack of attendance, and even the players on their team; mentioning any of these things on the air would not be received well. Rick explained, "I mean you just hope that the mic's not on by mistake, you know? You sit there, and I don't know, blow off a little steam or whatever." While on the air, he and Chris also violated the unwritten rule about not cheering in the press box through subtle off-air exclamations or gestures. Off the air between innings, they vented their frustration. "I want us to win every time we go out and play," said Rick the day after a tough loss, "But when I see what I saw last night, I'm like, 'Good God, I don't care if we win another game. I just want to get the hell out of here.'"

Similar things happened when the other announcers turned the microphones off. There were more pointed comments about competitors, guests, and listeners, more ribbing of teammates, and a lot of obscene or indecent language. Even after Brent Axe wondered what happened to the old standard of never using bad language in the studio (whether the microphones were on or off), the next day he grinningly told his producer to "Get the fuck out" of the studio. Later when the producer muttered that he had trouble talking while giving a sports update, Brent joked, "You have to talk to do this job?"

When a frequent call-in guest asked on the air, “Who’s reading the young adult books?” Bill Anderson, his microphone off, sarcastically replied, “Young adults?” Hunter Scott and Josh Grosvent peppered their off-air commentary with bad language and opinions that could not be said on the air. When the protests against Chick-Fil-A’s stance on homosexuality were mentioned, Hunter simply replied, “Fuck Chick-Fil-A,” while Josh added that eating at a Chick-Fil-A was “no different than going to a Klan rally.” Josh also explained to their guest beer expert that they make fun of certain beers on the air only because they are not advertisers, adding, “If Bud Light spends \$100,000, we’ll love them again.”

Drew Kelly and Ali Stevens tease each other more directly off the air, using sarcasm that would never come out on the air because listeners might infer problems in their relationship. On her way out to get coffee for her and Drew, Ali joked, “Say, ‘Yes wife, I need an iced coffee...’ Tough, you’re getting coffee... and if you don’t like it, I’ll probably divorce you.” Drew’s edgier side came out after his live commercial during which he made up a story about yelling at an old lady. After starting the next commercial and turning his microphone off, he went further with the embellishment: “Remember that hitchhiker I ran over when I didn’t have my iced coffee?”

When the station format only allows a DJ to talk for a small amount of time, the announcer ends up spending most of his/her work time “backstage”; such is the case for Mark Nelson, Vanessa, Cameron, George Brooks, Laura Donaldson, and the members of *The Weewo Show*. While off the air, they also say things that they cannot say on the air, most notably violating the unspoken rule that disc jockeys must never say bad things about the music or artists they play. Vanessa fumed, “I hate Nicki Minaj! I hate music

today.” She also called “Birthday Song” by rapper 2 Chainz “the dumbest song ever.” Mark also occasionally griped about the quality of a country song he played. Cameron said that after a few months of playing Carly Rae Jepsen’s summer pop anthem “Call Me Maybe,” he would sigh, “Really, again?” every time he had to play the song. He later made a prediction about PSY’s smash hit “Gangnam Style”: “Eight years from now, people won’t be saying they need it in their iPod.” Even Classical announcer Laura remarked that a Jean Michel Jarre composition she was playing was “crummy. Not one of his better works.”

As Josh said above, announcers are not allowed to make fun of sponsors on the air, but off the air is a different story. Listening to a Wal-Mart commercial in which the announcer replies to customer e-mails, Mark mused, “Does anyone actually e-mail Wal-Mart? ‘Dear Wal-Mart: Why do you have 60 registers, and only two are open?’” Even the *Weewo Show* crew made fun of their non-commercial college radio underwriters. Like their spoken-word colleagues, the music announcers also made fun of their listeners at times while off the air. After taking one phone call too many about Justin Bieber tickets, Cameron began to mutter, “Justin Bieber tickets” repeatedly in a teenage-girl voice. He reprised the impersonation a few more times throughout the week. Mark added that he cannot talk about politics on the air, and “in real life... my humor goes more to *The Daily Show* and *The Colbert Report*.”

Performance secrets are not always revealed on the air; sometimes, they slip out during breaks. After promoting a gift certificate giveaway on the air, Drew turned the microphone off and promptly added, “Except I left them at home.” Vanessa told her intern that she did not attend a station-sponsored movie premiere, but “I shouted

everyone out for going. They don't know I wasn't there... You never want to give the impression that it wasn't that great, for all the people listening who didn't go."

Because the standards are so relaxed, radio announcers often joke on the air that their best conversations are the ones that happen off the air. Brent acknowledged that off-air conversations keep things loose. "Sometimes I do that on purpose," he added. "You know, kinda throw it out there, like, 'Man, the best conversations happen during the break,' 'cause people are like, 'Oh, what are they talking about?' You know, it gets people to stick around. It works." Dan Cas said that there have been times when an off-air conversation was so funny that he and his co-hosts wished they had the microphones on. However, he acknowledged, "You're a lot more vulnerable when the mics are on, as opposed to when they're off and you're just goofing around with your friends."

Having different standards off the air, announcers must sometimes change standards at a moment's notice. Again, sometimes it is subtle, as when play-by-play announcer Chris started to say, "Yeah, yeah" to a batter's stadium introduction music, only to promptly snap back into announcing the game. Sometimes the difference is quite pronounced. Right before the start of their broadcast one night, Rick and Chris exchanged fake announcer voices, saying that the SkyFish had no chance to win. Seconds later, Chris was starting the broadcast in a much more professional manner. Drew turned his microphone off just long enough to make a not-suitable-for-air comment a couple of times. During the latter stages of her shift one afternoon, Vanessa had a deep conversation with her interns about good and evil. In the midst of the debate, she went back on the air to give a light piece of celebrity gossip over the introduction to a song. Bill was even more impressive in changing standards on one particular morning. Seconds

before his show began, Bill, his producer, and I were talking about radio station engineers. He began, “He’s always in the back, building some mechanical arm or...” In mid-sentence, Bill turned his microphone on and started the show, as if our conversation had never happened.

Because on-air standards can vary from station to station (or even program to program), off-air standards will also vary. Drew made some jokes off the air that would be inappropriate on a family-friendly morning show. For example, while listening to a Giant grocery store commercial, he responded to a deal on store-brand Italian sausage by saying, “Is he allowed to say, ‘Giant Italian sausage?’” Drew also complained that Ali never lets him do jokes about flatulence on the air. However, jokes like these that are subordinated to off-air conversations at 94KX are normal for Hunter and Josh’s on-air conversations. The two shows still have different standards off the air as opposed to on the air, but the on-air standards are tailored to the humor expectations of the target audience. Hunter and Josh do not have to worry about keeping their content “family-friendly.” They also feel freer to make fun of the competition on the air, whereas Drew kept such jokes off the air. On a morning when a rival station’s transmitter was knocked off the air, Drew heard a commercial with a Top-10 list voiced by one of the competitor’s DJs and joked to his co-workers, “Number Four: We’re off the air. Number Three: We’re still off the air.”

In addition, changes in on-air standards can lead to changes in off-air standards. In Vanessa’s market, Arbitron (the leading radio ratings company) uses personal people meters (PPMs) to measure audience ratings. These meters detect whenever the wearer is listening to a certain radio station. Therefore, the PPM data is much more accurate than

the previous method of relying on listeners to keep diaries of when and for how long they listened to a station. The initial PPM results caused the management of some stations to drastically alter their on-air approaches. The management of Vanessa's Urban station severely limited the amount of time that the announcers are allowed to talk on the air. Therefore, Vanessa's on-air standards were changed. Having less time to speak gives her less opportunity to be opinionated, something for which she was known and something that she claims to be both on and off the air. Vanessa continued to be very opinionated during the week that I was observing her, but this behavior happened primarily off the air. Having less control over what she can do on the air, she became more attracted to pursuits that allow her to (in her words) "be God": gardening and playing the video game *The Sims*.

Off-air standards can even change at a moment's notice. Brian's traffic and sports reporters broadcast from a different studio; the W-NEWS meteorologists are located in a different city. Normally when he puts them on the air and turns his microphone off, he is free to talk to other people in the studio without the reporters hearing him. Forced into a backup studio for his anchor shift one night, Brian quickly discovered that when the traffic, weather, or sports reporter was on the air, they could still hear him talking even though his microphone was off. Once he was back in the regular studio, the regular off-air standards resumed. After cuing his weather person by talking about the beautiful sunset, Brian promptly turned his microphone off and joked that the meteorologist could not see the sunset from his faraway location. Brian then added, "Good thing the mic's not hot in this studio."

The different standards of off-air behavior cover more than just dialogue. Ali painted her toenails during a commercial break, and used a curling iron during another break. When the microphones are turned off, the décor of the studio itself sometimes comes into play. At 95X, the air studio is set up like a “man cave,” with neon beer signs, a mini-fridge, and a mini basketball hoop at which *The Show*'s personnel occasionally shot baskets during breaks. 94KX and Cameron's station have couches in the studio so that people can relax when they are not on the air. Most of the on-air studios have television sets to give the announcer(s) something to watch while preparing for the next time the microphones are on. Cameron turned up the TV during songs to watch *The X-Factor*. When the mics are turned off, the “backstage” air studio is perfectly suited for using much more relaxed off-air standards. When the mics are on, the equipment (props) in front of them receives greater focus.

#### *Treatment of the Absent*

One of the ways that team members remain loose when backstage is to make fun of those team members who are not there. Goffman (1959) alluded to this “treatment of the absent” (p. 170) as one form of communication out of character that helps to maintain the solidarity of a performance team, often through derogation. The announcers I observed had no trouble making fun of the absent when off the air. Often they were throwaway comments about an absent team member who had complicated their work tasks. Vanessa fumed about her mix-show DJ always waiting until the last second to send her his recorded show. After making Drew close the door because people in the hallway were being too loud, Ali referred to people yelling as her workplace pet peeve. Hearing laughter in the newsroom after Brian stumbled over an error in his script, he remarked,

“I’m not laughing about the fact that our show sucks.” Hunter and Josh debated the merits of allowing their producer on the air because he was not adding anything to the show.

Sometimes, however, announcers were more light-hearted about it. Upon seeing a Twitter headline about a most-wanted criminal being arrested, Bob joked, “Where is (the regular co-anchor) today?” Rick and Chris joked about their regular studio producer on a night when he was not working. Mark and a co-worker laughed about their general manager’s lack of fitness habits. Vanessa joked that she had met every crazy person in town through her mix-show DJ. She also imitated former interns. Cameron was even complimentary about one of his young interns while she was away from the studio, saying that she knows her stuff and has personality. Laura and George both had nothing but praise for fellow co-workers they mentioned while off the air (including each other).

The jokes about absent team members sometimes spilled onto the air, as the announcers invoked a backstage style (Goffman, 1959) in the front region for everyone to hear. One morning, Hunter and Josh had an on-air discussion about an Applebee’s promotion in which the restaurant chain sold inflatable dolls that people could use to stand in for them at their jobs while out to lunch. Hunter likened the blow-up dolls to 95X sales people. The next morning, Hunter asked if he could tie up his absent producer with duct tape. Brent and his producer zinged Brent’s perpetually late video podcast partner for telling him to be on time for their taping. Brent also made on-air jokes about other producers on days when they were not working, and kidded that one of the other hosts on his station had made “a rare salient point.” Bill repeatedly suggested places for one of the other WURD hosts to do live broadcasts, laughing as he called himself the host’s “agent.”

### *A Personal Space*

Backstage, of course, also includes the announcer's office if he/she has one. It is here that the announcer can let traces of his/her personal life in because there is no need to be concerned about revealing personal details to people who should not know them. It is a *personalized* space, in fact. All of the announcers who have offices (or an office area, in Mark's case) have items of personal significance. These items often convey information about what is important to the announcer, and in some cases the announcer's sense of humor. The 94KX newsroom, where Ali works, has AP awards on display, including some won by Ali herself. Bill had laminated newspaper articles about him and his father on the walls of his office. Cameron's office has autographed posters on the walls and countless toys and silly promotional items on the shelves. There were also many autographed posters on the walls in Hunter and Josh's office at 95X, along with a mock safety sign with their former corporation's logo on it and a place to write the number of "Days Without a Stabbing."

In addition, family – an area of purposefully limited specificity in the on-air performance – can be put on full display in the office. As in many personalized workspaces, Brent, Ali, Hunter, and Josh all have pictures of their children on display in their office. Brent's young daughter hung out with him in his office on my first day there. Although the announcer can work on his/her performance in this space, alone or with other members of the team, he/she does so with the different off-air standards in place, so the personal can be mixed with (rather than separated from) the professional. For example, as Brent prepared his show, he jokingly asked his daughter for her opinions on the sports stories of the day.

Vanessa's on-air studio is her office. There are no pictures or reminders of her daughter in the studio, but she does talk about her daughter regularly when she is not on the air. She also has a rare opportunity to put her daughter's voice on the radio. When her daughter was young, Vanessa recorded her saying the name of the station and another random sound bite that she plays on the air sometimes. Ironically, she told me that when her daughter asks her to tune the radio to her station, Vanessa says no because she finds much of the music to be inappropriate. A co-worker's son visited Vanessa in the on-air studio one morning, leading her to joke, "Kids are so neat when they're not yours."

As co-workers and life partners, Drew and Ali bring their personal lives to work every day, making their on-air studio another place for family. Off-air conversations sometimes included mentions of their children's summer camp, the hijinks of their cats, and reminders about lunch, dinner, or grocery plans. During a break one morning, Ali pointed out the four-month anniversary of her marriage to Drew, and joked that they should have asked the singer of a bank commercial jingle to sing at the wedding. When a guest came in to speak about a medical research study, Ali talked about the guest's pregnancy and associated topics before they started preparing for the on-air interview. Later in the week, she and Drew talked with the spokesperson for a local heritage festival about the school district where he teaches and students they know from the district.

Josh has a similar situation: His brother "Joe Nasty" has the primary "sidekick" role on *The Show*. "We're essentially the same brain in a lot of ways," Josh noted. "He was raised on TV that I was watching essentially, so all the references I know he's gonna know, and all the kind of funny, silly things that I'm thinking of he's probably thinking of, so it's great to have a second you in a lot of ways." Hunter and Josh also have off-air

conversations about their parents, their wives, and their children. Bill's father was part of the live broadcast at the Oak Lane Diner, giving them a chance to bond on the air as well.

### *Keeping Things Hidden from the Audience*

Once they transition from backstage to the front region of on-air performance, radio announcers are focused on maintaining their definition of the situation for the listening audience. However, as they do so they are still hiding aspects of the performance from the listeners by engaging in what Goffman (1959) called team collusion, another form of communication out of character. Team collusion is secret communication given in ways that prevent the audience from knowing something that is not consistent with the definition of the situation. In some ways, the announcers are taking advantage of not being seen by the audience. In other ways, they are adhering to standards of professional on-air behavior by not disclosing how they feel about their jobs.

### *Being Visual in an Audio Medium*

Because their audience is normally unable to see a radio performance as it takes place, announcers are free to give each other visual signals without concern about how they might be interpreted by other people. When Hunter Scott embellished or added his own silly comments to something he was reading on the air, he waved off his colleagues to let them know he was making it up. Josh Grosvent showed a picture of an adult film star to their producer with his smartphone while they talked about her. Bill Anderson showed his producer a text message in similar fashion. At one point, Drew Kelly looked up a picture of an NBC reporter whom he and Ali Stevens had been trying to identify. He swung his computer monitor around to Ali's side of the console, and while reading her newscast, she gave him a positive thumbs-up upon seeing the picture.

Often, these signals are used to maintain a flow of the broadcast and keep the announcers on track. While reading her newscast, Ali handed Drew a sheet of sound bites, pointing to the one she needed him to play. She cued him when it was time to play it. In the two-studio setup at WHIP, the person running the control board needed to gesture to Weewo when it was time to break, or when they were about to go back on the air. When a visual signal failed, the colleague tapped on the glass window between the two studios to get everyone's attention. In turn, Weewo and Dan Cas gestured back with a thumbs-up motion or the lowering of an open hand to indicate that the music should be faded out.

Bill and his producer kept their live broadcast at the Oak Lane Diner moving along with visual signals to each other. When Bill had a problem with his headphone volume, he tapped his headphones, and his producer promptly texted the studio to have the problem fixed. Another time when Bill pointed to his ear, his producer knew to turn up a guest's microphone. They exchanged "break" signals (two fists imitating breaking something in half) when it was time to go to a break. These subtle gestures did not distract the guests or the diner patrons, and ensured that the broadcast operated smoothly.

Nonverbal visual communication extends to times when the microphones are off. On my last morning with Hunter and Josh, they were playing back prerecorded announcements from their colleague's remote broadcast at the Tim Horton's coffee shop. Playing the recording back on the air, Josh held his hand up as it neared the end, and then he cued Hunter to play the next commercial. Because Brent Axe's sports talk show was simulcast on television, secret nonverbal communication was less likely. However, even with a camera capturing his every move, Brent was still able to engage in some form of

team collusion. For example, while discussing college football, he occasionally glanced at me while mentioning Temple University. Bill also liked to focus on other people in the studio as he spoke, looking back and forth at his producer and me when we were the only options.

Other visual communication fit naturally with what was taking place during the performance; if the listener imagined what was happening in the studio, he/she probably would have an accurate depiction. While playing a video of an adult film actress explaining her retirement from the genre, Hunter reacted to a particularly vapid statement by laughing so hard that he needed to put his head down on the console. When he looked back up, his face was beet-red. Later, he imitated a lawn sprinkler, making the noise as he turned his head back and forth across the microphone. He also imitated peeling off sunburned skin and holding a beer as he talked about those actions. Hunter accentuated his impersonation of a theme park DJ by pulling the microphone up to his mouth with both hands. Bill injured himself one night doing clinch sparring. He demonstrated the exercises to his producer and me – albeit gingerly – the next morning on the air. He then tried to demonstrate the “Gangnam Style” dance to his producer.

The audience does not see any unintentional gestures, either. For instance, as Brian Winter gave a live on-scene report, he held his microphone in one hand, and gestured with his free hand as he spoke. Hunter kept a pen or highlighter in his hand much of the time as he spoke on-air, twirling it in his fingers; Bill made similar motions. Mark Nelson counted off on his fingers as he read the details of a live commercial. Vanessa drummed on the console occasionally. Sometimes she moved the microphone stand around as she spoke. Like Brian, she and Brent also gestured with a free hand while

speaking. However, Brent's gestures while speaking were visible to his television audience.

Announcers can also make joking gestures without having to worry about context. Drew cringed as Ali read a story about the "Octomom." Their sports reporter hid his face from Ali while reading about a lopsided loss for Ali's Baltimore Orioles. As Ali read a story about people being ashamed by their fathers' dressing habits, Drew put his foot up on the console as he declared, "I'm doing that tonight when we go out! Socks to my knees!" As the preceding announcer teased her show coming up next, Laura Donaldson put index fingers up above her head when he made a joke about "horns." Sometimes, the gestures are directed at callers. Drew and Ali both mimicked shooting themselves in the head in response to a particular song request. Bill gave me a funny look a few times after a caller or guest said something baffling. As one telephone guest was running too long, he started to make the "move it along" gesture by rotating his hand.

Another example of visual behavior that announcers can exhibit with impunity is the expression of emotions by Rick Hayes and Chris Williams while calling games, as described above. They cringed at bad plays, threw their arms up at unfavorable umpire calls, and hung their heads when outcomes did not favor the SkyFish. As Rick explained, "I think when things go sour it's harder for me to not wear it on my sleeve."

### *Dealing With the Stress of the Job*

A bad night on the field was just one of many things Rick found to be stressful about his play-by-play job, contributing to why he left the job soon after my observation. Although he acknowledged, "It's not like we're digging ditches," he said that the travel and only getting one day off per month was a grind that added up over the years. Baseball

affects everything, even when Rick can find the time to get a late Father's Day present. He frequently expressed to me how he felt he was getting burned out. However, it is typically not considered professional behavior for a radio announcer to talk about job stresses on the air. Therefore, these aggravations are left to be expressed when the microphones are off. An accounting of these job stresses brings to light aspects of being a radio announcer that listeners probably never consider when thinking about their favorite on-air personalities.

Bob James has the cool, calm demeanor of a veteran news anchor, even when the pace of the newscast becomes frantic with breaking news stories that force the W-NEWS staff to make broadcast decisions on the fly. Whenever he or Brian stumbled or something went awry, Bob repeated, "It's breaking news," expressing that there was no need to be flustered. He dealt with any stress through off-air wisecracks.

Technical issues are a major source of stress for announcers. Rick and Chris complained about their aging headsets, as did Ali. Drew had to quickly fix the bad sound quality on a prerecorded movie review segment. Brian fought with his wireless Internet connection while trying to file a story. Mark had to deal with changes to his station's automation software that forced him to download several songs he did not have in the station music library, as well as glitches in the music scheduling software. Laura Donaldson and George Brooks had occasional problems taking their mandatory transmitter readings because the remote server at FM University did not work all the time. Bill had to settle his producer down over the multiple issues that came up during the live diner broadcast. He advised, "One of us has gotta be calm. Today, it's gotta be you."

The daily grind of radio was a common aggravation that went beyond the baseball announcers. The job involves long hours, especially when an announcer wears multiple hats. In addition to his on-air duties, Drew is also the program director for 94KX, and although he enjoys both parts of his job, he admitted that there are few slow days, unless he just decides that he needs to leave early. It is also tough for him and Ali to find childcare at 5:30 in the morning, and they wanted their kids to be able to sleep in during the summer. Hunter also pulls double-duty, and he openly complained when *The Show* was about to end for the day and he now had to do actual “work.” Cameron also has management duties as part of his workday, and he admitted, “This is not the fun stuff. The fun stuff happens when we’re doing the show.” He does not get as much time off as he would like because of his promotional obligations to the station. Cameron added, “I can’t tell you when the last time was that I had a home-cooked meal.” Before leaving his job at WURD, Bill had to juggle his radio and television duties and the expectations of the people he worked for at both jobs. He also worked in sales for WURD. Brent also had to report on sporting events as part of his job, and the extra hours of writing game recaps can add up.

The announcers also have to deal with physical limitations. Hunter struggled through a break in which he had to do several live commercials and a live traffic report before he could finally start a song and get a drink of water. Vanessa said that an announcer’s voice could be harmed by lack of sleep and too much exposure to cigarette smoke and alcohol. Brent told me that with the fast pace of his show and the comparably short breaks, “some days you don’t even leave the studio.” He never ate lunch because he did not like to go on the air with a full stomach. Brian referred to the top-of-the-hour

network news segment as “the four-minute bathroom break. That’s just what it is. There’s no other opportunity to get out of the studio and go to the bathroom.” George explained, “Sometimes being a disc jockey, you can feel like a one-armed paper hanger (*laughs*). Constant motion.”

Conversely, Vanessa frequently spoke of how boring her job has become, particularly since the PPM-related changes that left her with less airtime. She also grumbled that nothing changes at her station, and that everyone advances by sticking around forever. When she forgot to play back a contest winner in a timely fashion she sighed, “It’s so hard to be responsible in a job when there’s no recourse.” After a particularly uninspired song introduction, Vanessa growled, “What the fuck can I say? I just played it an hour and a half ago!” Another source of aggravation comes from having a situation unlike most of the other announcers I observed: her station has no direct competition. Vanessa revealed that her co-workers would not read e-mails from the program director because they are not challenged. “Our brains are turning to mush,” she concluded.

As with other topics, Hunter and Josh had more on-air leeway than other announcers with regard to being able to express their job-related frustrations, due to their Rock morning-show format. Other than the on-air remarks about co-workers, Hunter made random remarks about how much he disliked his job. Stating that he has never been in a car accident on the way to work, he joked that he should use it as an excuse not to come in sometime. When the station’s refrigerator stopped making ice and water, Hunter used *The Show* as his platform to complain. Considering that job stresses eventually drove Hunter and Josh to leave 95X, such remarks have added context in hindsight.

*Dealing with things beyond your control.* Some things happen during the course of a performance that the announcers are powerless to stop, thus adding to their stress levels. Cameron's station ran lengthy commercial breaks, causing him to constantly adjust the timing of his show. He also had confused listeners complaining to him because the station's system for running text message contests was sending them the wrong message when they tried to enter. Chris had to start his play-by-play call late after a commercial break ran long, forcing him to catch the audience up on what they had missed. Brian had to run a network program one day in the middle of his anchor shift, and the rundown sheet he was given was not accurate. One of Bill's guests failed to call in on time, leaving him to fill time while his producer tried to contact her.

There are times when technical issues cannot be overcome. Brian's audio editing software crashed when he was in the middle of editing his story about the urban farmers market, forcing him to start over again. Brent and his producer had to deal with computer problems that caused problems with things they had to play or read on the air. Hunter and Josh tried to record a segment with a spokesperson from the local zoo, only to find out after she left that her microphone did not record anything. In addition, they could not post full podcasts of their show for a couple of days because the station's audio logger died. Mark's automation software jumped from a song right into the commercial break a couple of times, thus taking away an opportunity for him to talk.

### *Enjoying the Job*

It may not be surprising that an announcer is discouraged from revealing to listeners that there are aspects of the job that he/she dislikes. However, it is much more surprising that the reverse is also true. Although announcers are taught to speak with

energy and enthusiasm while on the air, they tend to keep any expressions of how much they actually enjoy their jobs off the air. For instance, Brian is working at his “dream job”; it colors a lot of what he does. He expressed that he loves being up hours before anyone else, as well as being able to report outdoors on nice days. “I am actually excited every time I go on the air,” Brian revealed, adding that the variety in his day-to-day duties also keeps things interesting.

Brian was not the only announcer to disclose what was so good about the job. Mark said he was happy with the Country format in which he works, the camaraderie at his station, and being able to do a live show. At his previous job, Mark was so busy with other responsibilities that he usually had to prerecord his show. Laura finds the sharing of cultural knowledge to be the exciting part of her job. George summed up his love of radio by declaring that at 79 years of age “I guess they’ll carry me out from behind the mic (*laughs*). I don’t know anything else... three hours work is pretty good for a kid my age.” Even Vanessa, while admitting that she hates her job at times, noted, “The truth of the matter is this is a dream job.” Josh was especially emphatic about one aspect of his job. Preparing for *The Show’s* weekly beer segment, he turned to me and yelled, “We’re drinking beer at 7AM. Put *that* in your goddamn notes!”

Other announcers demonstrated their enjoyment of their job in more understated ways. Many of the music station announcers sang along with or danced to songs they were playing. Cameron is constantly energetic and fired up during his show, pumping his fist after a particularly good song-to-song transition, even singing along with commercial jingles. Hunter expressed his satisfaction in a more laid-back manner, sitting back in his chair with his feet up on the console sometimes while he was on the air.

These announcers could tell the listeners that they love being on the radio, but they do not. The listener has to assume that the announcer loves his/her job from the exuberance and energy with which he/she does the job. The announcer will not actually say it; therefore, the listener probably finds no difference between Brian at his “dream job” and Vanessa or Rick working at jobs with which they have grown tired.

### *The Creative Process*

Announcers spend hours each day preparing for the performance they will put on for the listening audience. The degree and nature of preparation varies by job function, but there is usually some sort of creative planning process behind the scenes to make sure that the performance takes on the appearance of being organized. Most listeners either do not know what this process entails, or are not cognizant that it takes place before, while, and after their favorite personalities are doing their shows.

When he is out reporting, Brian Winter must prepare for going on the air live. This requires him to get all of his sound bites edited and ready in his laptop, and to type up a script, including cues to start playing a sound bite or to start talking again after the sound bite ends. He uses a mobile Web interface with the station’s software to see what the anchors see, so that Brian knows how they will lead into him. He can then tailor his script accordingly. He also needs to check in with the studio beforehand to make sure that his volume levels are appropriate and that he can hear the station through his remote connection.

When he anchors on the weekends, Brian is on the air every other hour. He usually has two hours to write up his first hour of news, making decisions on using and editing sound bites as he goes along. He takes stories from a variety of different sources

and rewrites them with the proprietary software they use at the station. Sometimes it takes until the last pass through his script to get everything where he wants it. Brian needs to account for the amount of commercials in each hour and the pre-planned segments (e.g. traffic, weather, sports). The software lets him know how long each story will run so that he can plan accordingly. Once he enters the on-air studio, Brian has just a moment or two to make sure that his control board is ready and that there are no potential technical issues. He also needs to make sure that he knows the name of his traffic, weather, and sports reporters because they are not always constant. Once he finishes his hour, he then has to spend his “hour off” shuffling his script for the next hour he will anchor, incorporating new stories as they come in. During the week, he only writes a half-hour of his script, relying on the station’s writers to do the rest for him, as he is on the air continuously.

The other spoken-word announcers also require a couple of hours of preparation to do their programs because they too are on the air almost constantly for their entire shows. Brent Axe used the time to find sports stories on Twitter, to set up and prepare questions for interviews, to find and prepare any sound bites he would use, and to draw up a “grid” for the program. He broke his show down by segment, first filling in segments with scheduled interviews and recurring daily/weekly segments, and then writing in topics that he could talk about if listener response was lacking. Brent also referred to any notes he had taken about something that had happened the previous night. He and his producer went over logistical information and possible topics for a daily Top-5 list, and he tipped the producer to any news stories that should be put into the updates that he read throughout the show.

Bill Anderson had a similar routine; he said that he checked between 20 and 30 websites on a daily basis for topics that he could use on his talk show. “I tend to over-prepare, if there’s such a thing,” he stated. “Very early in my career, I found out that it’s a very lonely feeling to be in the studio for three hours underprepared, so I prepare ten, fifteen, twenty potential topics, hoping that three or four will actually stick.” He and his producer also worked on booking interviews with recurring guests and people who could speak about a particular relevant topic. Bill had a lot of book authors on his show, and he admitted that with so much on his plate, he could only read what he needed to read in order to do the interview. His preparation routine at the diner broadcast involved both content and technical preparation, as he helped his producer set up everything that they would need.

Rick Hayes and Chris Williams had most of their preparatory material provided to them by the teams playing that night. Naturally, they had media guides and information for their own team, and the home team also gave them statistics, league standings, and player information. Rick and Chris used this information to prepare their scorebooks; they kept score of every game, so logs of previous games also became material to which they could refer during a broadcast. Chris also keeps information on note cards; he told me that his hotel room was full of them. The recorded pregame interview with a SkyFish player was also part of the preparation process. Like Brian, Rick and Chris checked their volume levels and made sure they could hear the station before going live. They also set up a microphone outside the press box window to pick up the ambient sound of the crowd and the ballpark during the game.

The music personalities did not require a great deal of time to figure out what they were going to say, but they varied in terms of organization. Cameron takes a printout of the music log for his show each night and fills in what he will talk about and when, often taking ideas from a prep sheet provided by the station. When he did his live broadcast, he brought the log with him so he could prepare in his usual way. Weewo and Dan Cas took the time to plan out their show topics before coming to the station; they ran through the list with the rest of their on-air team before the show so that everyone was prepared. Vanessa and Mark Nelson usually arrive for work minutes before they go on the air, so they spend the first part of their shows looking at their preferred websites for stories that are relevant to their listeners. Mark admitted that one of his go-to websites for content is Facebook: “I don’t know how we did show prep before Facebook... Some of my best friends have stuff up before anyone else.”

Vanessa and Cameron also rely on their interns to find stories for them. In addition, Vanessa’s intern loads music into the automation software. Because their music is not digitized, George Brooks and Laura Donaldson must prepare for their shows by going through FM University’s music library and selecting the music that they will play. Laura has a predetermined list; George has the freedom to choose whatever he wants. In fact, George’s preparation process starts at home, selecting LPs from his personal jazz music library to bring with him to the station. If there are any contests to run, the announcers have to prepare the sound effects or contact information or “code words” they will need. Like Brent and Bill, Cameron and George need to prepare questions if they do interviews during their shifts.

Being a hybrid of music and spoken-word content, the morning-show announcers also require some time for preparation before their shows begin. As Hunter Scott mentioned in Chapter Four, the hour between 5 and 6AM is crucial for him and Josh Grosvent to get on the same page and figure out what they will talk about, and also to get any supporting audio they will need. Drew Kelly and Ali Stevens rely on a prep service to give them audio content and topic ideas. Drew will go through the run sheet from the prep service and write stars next to certain topics. Some days are better than others: they admitted to struggling on the first show I observed because a lot of the stories on that day's prep sheet were too risqué for their audience. Drew said that he used to have the overnight DJ record the late-night shows for them; now he gets what he needs electronically, and he sorts through everything before the show. He remarked that other programs he deemed to be "lazy morning shows" do not use enough sound bites on the air. Drew and Ali also have to prepare the daily Mindbender question and the list of birthdays, and Ali of course has to prepare her half-hourly newscasts. She and the sports reporter need to inform Drew if they will be using sound bites.

The morning shows do not make all of their content decisions before the show begins, demonstrating that the preparation process often continues well after the performance has begun. During the downtime of a commercial or a song, the members of a performance team may receive new information, and they have to decide whether and how to use it. Both Ali and Mark pass along traffic information if a major roadway gets tied up. Mark called traffic reports "the station's bread and butter." The news anchors and their producer plan out what to do if breaking news requires a live report from the scene. Drew and Ali check Internet trends to see what people are talking about; Cameron does

the same with Facebook and Twitter. Brent stayed on Twitter throughout his show, so that he could go right on the air with a breaking sports story if necessary. While doing her daily classical music show, Laura was in touch with the producer and potential guests for her weekly interview show. On “Flashback Friday,” Drew has to plug in listener requests for 1970s and 1980s music throughout the show. Laura and George have to use the in-studio computers to search for live underwriter scripts and manually load commercials into an audio playback program before every break.

In some cases, the end of one performance begins the planning for the next one. Bill’s show ended at 10AM, so the process of booking guests for the next day usually took place after the show. Cameron finishes his day by writing out his “to-do” list for the next day. Brent would often talk to his producer when his show ended at 6PM to make sure that the producer was already working on booking guests for future programs. He kept in contact with his regular producer through text messages after leaving the office each day. As Brent put it, “You’re always prepping for the show.” Hunter talked with *The Show’s* producer about which segments to use for a “best-of” show when they were taking the next day off. Both Hunter and Brent compared show preparation to a disease that never goes away; Hunter said that it sometimes gets him in trouble in his personal life because he can never stop thinking about the next show.

Sometimes, figuring out what to put on the air requires some old-fashioned brainstorming. Brian bounces story ideas off of his boss and other people in the newsroom when he does not have assigned stories to cover on a particular day. The farmers market story on which I accompanied Brian is one example; he already knew the contact person from a story he had previously produced with her help, so he asked one of

his producers what she thought, then he went to the news director for approval. *The Show's* wellness expert pitched an idea to Hunter about giving away samples of his products in the hopes of getting testimonials. Cameron suggested to his program director that the last hour of his show include replays of the best moments from earlier in the evening. He and I spent a few minutes tossing around ideas about types of candy that nobody likes, so that he could post something on the station's Facebook page.

If the station hires a consultant, he/she also has a say in the creative process. Drew said that he liked hearing from someone who has been in a lot of places and heard what different radio stations are doing. Suggestions of things that an announcer can borrow from elsewhere help to keep a show fresh. Laura also mentioned some wrinkles in her classical music show's format that came from the advice of a consultant. For example, she gets a daily information sheet about the composers and pieces she will be playing during her show, in case she would like to refer to it when she is on the air.

#### *The Plight of the Speaker*

Despite all of the time and effort spent to prepare a convincing performance of self, announcers are destined to make mistakes. As Goffman (1981) explained, the process that goes into creating an ideal performance goes unnoticed by the audience, but when the announcer makes a mistake, the audience suddenly focuses on the speaker. Mistakes that go unnoticed in everyday conversation tend to be noticed when made by a radio announcer, to whom the listener ascribes higher speech standards. Therefore, it made sense for me within my observations to single out the way radio announcers react when they misspeak. If today's radio listener truly does hold their preferred announcers

to a higher standard, then mistakes will grab his/her attention, and the announcer's attempt to remedy the fault takes on a great deal of importance.

### *Handling Errors in Speech*

Consistent with Goffman's (1981) suggestion that young announcers be studied to provide a basis for comparison, it would be prudent to start with college radio DJs Weewo and Dan Cas. A verbal stumble did not fluster Weewo; he continued with what he was saying, as if the mistake never happened. At one point, Weewo's guests had to correct him on the name of one of the stars of *Real Husbands of Hollywood*. He also mangled the "entertainment name" by which one of his guests wished to be called. In all cases, he made a quick recovery. Weewo explained his thought process when he makes a mistake:

Right away, I try to think to myself, "Alright, it happened. Can't do anything about it," you know, so as opposed to saying, "Awww," or "Oooh," you know those natural things, you know, sucking your teeth... What can you do? You keep going... Sometimes I just try to think of the best transition... and if I stumbled upon myself, it might be "excuse me, I meant this." I try to find some word to plug in, or "let me take a step back" or "let me correct myself."

Dan's responses to mistakes are similar: "When I verbally trip up, when I stutter or I misspeak or I pronounce something wrong, I usually just go on and say it."

Brian Winter is also relatively young, just a few years into his professional news radio career. He has been taught to recognize mistakes and to make a polite correction when needed. "Sometimes if you realized you said something wrong, you could say, 'I should say' this," Brian explained. "I think it humanizes you to acknowledge that you made a mistake if you did. Why not? I'm afraid to sound like a real person by saying, 'Pardon me,' or something like that?" For example, as he introduced his weekend traffic

reporter, he caught himself saying the name of the weekday traffic reporter by mistake; Brian then apologized. In many cases, he continued with no visible reaction when he made a mistake, as when he accidentally looked ahead to the phrase “gay pride” in a story and said, “Taking pride in... taking part in...”

Veteran announcers also sometimes rely on certain verbal remedies to speech faults. Rick Hayes corrected his stumbles with phrases such as “rather,” “I mean,” or “I should say.” Likewise, Chris Williams said “rather” as he corrected himself with no change in pace or delivery. Referring to a SkyFish player who had hit a home run the night before, he said the player “had last night off... Pardon me, he had anything but last night off.” Laura Donaldson also used “rather” to transition from reading the wrong underwriter to the correct one. Vanessa made a bigger deal out of a mistake made while promoting a contest: “If you want the new... blah, blargh, blah... I’m gonna start over.” Later in the week, she tripped over an artist’s alliterative name: “Pleasure Plee... Blah! Pleasure P! You try saying that three times fast!” As she promptly explained after turning the microphone off, “Sometimes you can breeze over a mistake. Sometimes you have to acknowledge it.”

Although it seemed like George Brooks never made a mistake while I observed him, he admits that they do happen, and he treats them just like his colleagues do. “If it’s very obvious, I try to make a little joke out of it,” George admitted, “just like you would if you were talking to a person off-mic, you know, just two guys meeting on the corner, and you mispronounce something or you say something that’s wrong.”

At times, an error is an excuse to be self-deprecating. “You’ve just gotta poke fun at yourself,” said Brent Axe. “There’s no way I can talk for four hours and not make a

mistake. It's just not gonna happen, so you just have to be realistic about it." As Brent talked about college basketball players hurting their NBA draft status by staying in school, he uttered, "Don't leave early... I'm an idiot. Don't stay." After giving the wrong date for Election Day, Bill Anderson grumbled, "I can't even count by weekends." Hunter Scott stumbled during a traffic report and wondered aloud if he was on drugs. Mark Nelson followed a mistake by asking, "Is it Monday again?" Cameron may have the best response of all to an error: a tape of an announcer stating, "Thank you for your patience. Cameron (*bleep*)ed up again." As he explained, the tape fits in with the levity of his show, and because he knows he will inevitably make mistakes: "I do those things! I mean I have those elements working for me specifically because I know."

Some of the mistakes made by the announcers I observed were almost as comical as those in Goffman's (1981) study of radio bloopers. Many involved the unintentional substitution of the wrong word, as in this example from Goffman: "Lieutenant Blank, a defective of the Los Angeles force" (1981, p. 248). Drew Kelly tossed to a break by informing his audience, "The noise... the news is next." Ali Stevens turned rock star Jon Bon Jovi into "Jon Bovi." Teasing the segment about an adult film star retiring after reading *The Power of Now*, Hunter Scott pulled a Freudian slip and called the book "The Power of Dong." Josh Grosvent caught Hunter's error and laughed as he repeated it. Hunter came back after the break and said, "The Power of Dong" again as he introduced a song, only this time the slip was intentional.

This last example supports Goffman's (1959) notion that team members will assist in impression management if one of them makes a mistake; on *The Show*, a stumble often gets turned into a double entendre. Another example from *The Show* is the

aforementioned *Black Sheep* “row-adds” reference whenever someone mispronounces a word or name. Josh also rescued Hunter when he got flustered and stumbled to the point that he rolled his eyes and audibly slammed his fist on the console. One night, Cameron’s intern stumbled on her part in announcing a “live” call and said, “Phone-a-line number two.” Cameron repeated what she said and laughed as he started to play back the recorded call.

In a medium where sound is everything, the absence of sound is itself an error. Therefore, when the announcer is grasping for words, an extended pause gets the listener’s attention. Likewise, when Brent was late getting back into the studio at the end of a break, the “return from break” music ran out, and a few seconds of “dead air” (Brown, 2006) ensued before he rushed back in, turned the microphone on, and assured the audience, “I’m here.” Bill, Laura, Drew, and Hunter also missed cues to play or say something, leading to “dead air.” Mark left the studio and missed the start of his live weather report. After several seconds of just the weather music playing, a colleague entered the studio and started the next song.

A story Mark told me about a commercial he once recorded lends credence to Goffman’s (1981) statement that listeners may misunderstand an announcer’s inflection. The commercial script referred to a shopping center as a “gem,” but people thought that he said “gym.” “Do you really hear the inflection differently?” he wondered. Announcers can also sometimes erroneously introduce sound bites: Brent introduced a sound bite of Toronto Blue Jays pitcher R.A. Dickey talking about the way he throws his knuckleball; in the actual sound bite, Dickey explained the kinds of pitches he used to throw *before* he adopted the knuckleball. Another common mistake involving “strips of talk” (Goffman,

1981, p. 262) occurs when a music announcer accidentally talks over the vocals of a song. When Cameron made this error, his normal jovial attitude was replaced by a momentary stone-faced disapproval.

Cameron's visual response to a mistake is a reminder that some responses to errors go unnoticed by the audience. Other examples are verbal, but occur off the air. After stumbling over a word, Drew briefly turned his microphone off, said, "B-b-b-b-b..." and went back on the air. Mark had a similar reaction after he stumbled over all of the "F's" in an alliterative event title. Rick described a SkyFish player arguing a call by saying, "He's got a mouthful for that umpire." After going to break, Rick explained, "I meant to say earful." Of course, the listeners do not know what he meant to say; they may not have even considered it an error, for that matter.

Likewise, the listener does not know when an error occurs because of something behind the scenes. Although Brian's responses to on-air stumbles were mostly polite, his reaction was slightly different when his mistake was a result of another team member's inaction. When he accidentally called the weather person the wrong name because a new weather person had started her shift, Brian turned the microphone off, pounded the desk, and yelled to the producer over his intercom, "Nobody told me!" He then composed himself and apologized to the weather person at the end of her report. When a similar mistake that was Brian's fault occurred a few nights later, he simply turned the mic off and said, "Oops." Brian defended the difference in his reactions:

It's easy to blame yourself for a mistake. It's my mistake. Blaming myself is probably the easiest thing. If somebody else makes a mistake that makes you look bad on the air because they were careless, (or) they were goofing off in the newsroom when they're responsible for what appears on that monitor, that does to some degree make me angrier than when I make my own mistake.

Brent had similar thoughts: “That drives me crazy... because at least if I screw up, it’s easily correctable.” Bill alleged that the reason an announcer might take it more personally is because it is ultimately his/her name on the program. “When you’re successful, you get too much of the credit,” he said. “When you’re unsuccessful, you get too much of the blame.” Dan agreed: “When you’re the host, it kind of reflects on you and your show, so these are the people you brought in.” However, he acknowledges that in the end, he cannot control the actions of others.

Rick admitted that over the years, he has become more forgiving about mistakes made by those behind the scenes: “Nine out of ten times, it’s a young kid who... you know, it’s his first job in radio, and they’ve never been in our position.” Chris added that the best thing a young play-by-play announcer can do is to spend a year running a control board because it makes the announcer more sympathetic to what the producer goes through. Sometimes, a teammate’s mistake causes a lighter reaction, as when Brian gave a time check, cued Bob James to toss to a break, and Bob gave another time check. Once the microphones were off, they laughed.

Other times, the announcer will make it clear to the audience that an outside source caused him/her to make a mistake. I accidentally caused Mark to slip up on his way into a weather forecast. We had been talking about college football, and when he turned on the microphone, he accidentally said, “WVU” (West Virginia University) instead of the station’s call letters. He laughed it off, explaining, “I shouldn’t be discussing WVU football before I do weather. I get all my letters mixed up.” After tripping over the phrase “excellence in equity” in an announcement for a station event, Bill complained, “They did that to me on purpose.”

Had Bill engaged in avoidance techniques (Goffman, 1981), he might not have needed to blame a copywriter. The announcers I observed had various methods of avoiding potential speech faults. Mark checks his commercial scripts for correct pronunciations, seeking another recording of the word or name being said if he is unsure. While writing his anchor script one night, Brian showed me the names listed in a story about a fatal apartment fire. The names looked unpronounceable. Brian left them out of his script. Laura has a plethora of difficult names to announce on her classical music program. Sometimes they are in other languages. "It would be nice to give them a little translation," she admitted, "But then again, say for instance if someone is singing the aria from *La Boheme*, which is so well known - it's 'Mi Chiamano Mimi (My Name is Mimi)' - you're not gonna say, 'And now we're gonna hear 'My Name is Mimi.'"

In addition, Mark said that he tries to avoid lengthy talk segments at the start of a Monday show, presumably because he is just getting back into a work routine after being away for the weekend. He also double-checks the automation system when he leaves the studio to make sure that it will not stop while he is away. Announcers will also use avoidance techniques after a fault has occurred, particularly with prerecorded "strips of talk" (Goffman, 1981, p. 262), to make sure that such faults do not happen again.

*Running the control board.* When faults occur with prerecorded strips of speech, the blame typically falls on the person running the control board. As previously mentioned in Chapter Four, directive dominance lies in the announcer or off-air team member who runs the board. When the number of elements that need to be started by the announcer increases, the potential for faults increases. Hunter played the wrong sound effect at one point, leading him to play the intended clip repeatedly. Tossing to an update,

Brent accidentally started the next commercial instead of playing the update music.

Another time, Brent hit the wrong button to start a break and his producer had to come in and help him get everything back in its correct order. In both cases, the fault was obvious and jarring to the listener.

Drew proved that just like in live speech, the attempt to remedy an errant prerecorded strip of speech can cause more faults. At the end of a break, he forgot to play a jingle and the next song started automatically. When he realized too late what had happened and tried to fix the situation, he accidentally deleted the song that was playing and started the following song. Even a momentary failure to start something causes a moment of dead air, which in itself is a speech error. Bill errantly tapped his touchscreen a couple of times before getting a commercial to start. When Brian was moved into the backup studio one night, he quickly realized that the monitors were not touchscreens, so he had to use a mouse to play pieces of audio. He reflexively reached for the monitor a couple of times before he corrected himself, causing a momentary absence of audio. If the automation system fails, as it did a couple of times for Hunter and Mark, the announcer has to quickly start the next element manually, but not before a moment of dead air.

Control board mistakes also happen when dealing with older technology. After Laura finished playing a classical piece from a vinyl LP, she accidentally let the lid of the turntable slam shut, causing the CD she was playing to skip and stop. When George accidentally left the volume up on the jazz LP he had just finished playing, the next song started and George had to laugh his way out of it on the air: “Uh oh, there he is again...” However, when the announcer has superior control board skills, he/she makes the many

tasks look easy. At one point, Vanessa started a song and a recorded announcement designed to play over the beginning of the song, practically without looking.

*Holding Announcers to Higher Standards*

The announcers I observed had mixed opinions on whether Goffman's (1981) notion of higher standards of talk for radio announcers is still valid today. Brian, as a radio newscaster, engages mostly in aloud reading (Goffman, 1981), and therefore sees a higher speech standard in what he does:

I certainly think that people don't expect the radio news anchor to be bumbling and stumbling all over himself when he's reading copy, and I think that somebody will... whether or not they know much about the business, they will think that person sounds unprofessional even if they don't know exactly why... If you're listening to a news station for information, you're going to expect that person to sound professional and credible and reliable, whereas with a DJ you might be expecting that person to be goofing off.

Ali also thinks that listeners do not expect mistakes from a newsreader: "I think it surprises them when you do screw up because they expect you to always know what you're talking about." Rick said that his listeners have a right to expect professionalism and accuracy from him because what he says is dictated by events on the field, in other words what Goffman (1981) termed action override. Brent agrees that there is a higher standard: "Sports talk radio is so conversational, it's so loose, it's fun, so I don't think I'm held to the same standard Bob Costas is, but yeah, I still think there's a standard there." Laura also thinks that the higher standard continues today.

As a radio neophyte, Dan finds the expectations placed on media professionals to be accurate: "They tend to be trusted more, and that's a position that really needs to be taken a lot more seriously." Cameron understands that there is a higher standard, and he makes sure to act accordingly when he's on the air. "If you hold me to a higher standard

and expect me to be perfect,” he stated, “well I’m gonna work my damndest to be that for you, but if I mess up, I’m not gonna not acknowledge the fact that I messed up, and make you think that, ‘Oh, he’s too high-and-mighty to notice that he messed up.’”

Vanessa takes the middle ground, saying that some people have higher expectations for announcers while others do not. “Everybody messes up on their job,” she said. “We just have a job where a lot of people know when we messed up.” Mark stated that famous talk radio hosts like Rush Limbaugh have to be more careful with what they say, but as a small-market Country personality, he does not have such a high standard. Weewo also claimed that the standards differ by format. As a Rock morning-show personality, Josh put it more succinctly: “No, we’re not NPR. We’re clearly not gonna come in there and do perfect reads every time.”

Bill believes that people no longer see radio announcers as reading perfectly from scripts. Drew blames radio station owners for lowering people’s standards: “These days, I really do feel that they’ll let anybody on the radio.” For instance, he turned down the speaker volume in the studio when a yelling car ad started, imitating the announcer as he did so. George points out that there was a time when announcers could not even speak in regional dialects, “But today (*pause*), I’ll just leave it there (*laughs*). Old school.”

Drew and George demonstrate that even announcers hold other announcers to higher standards. Hunter frequently (and obscenely) made fun of the over-the-top growling voice used on certain commercials. As he explained to me, “In case you can’t tell, we don’t like stupid shit.” Cameron and his intern made fun of bad commercial jingles. I found that even I am guilty of imposing standards on a person with a microphone. Sitting in the press box before the game one night, Chris and I watched a

salute to volunteer firefighters that was taking place on the field. Chris griped about the on-field announcer, declaring, “This is so embarrassing... these are good people being embarrassed.” When the announcer proceeded to slur his words together for half a sentence, we both started laughing.

*Upholding personal standards.* In addition to the standards to which they perceive their audience holds them, radio announcers also work according to their own standards. Brent and Vanessa both advised teammates to make sure that any story that they read on the air was properly sourced, so that they did not inadvertently broadcast unsubstantiated allegations. Drew and Ali, as hosts of a family-friendly morning show, use certain standards to make sure that nothing inappropriate is used on the air. Drew decided that he needed to let his DJs know how to properly say the title of Pink’s “Blow Me (One Last Kiss)” so that it did not sound offensive. They wrestled with the decision to talk about *The Dark Knight Rises* after the tragic shooting at a screening in Colorado. Even in his college radio setting, Weewo enforced high personal standards. He replied to an off-air joke about an inappropriate song his colleagues used to sing by flatly stating, “No, we don’t do that here.”

Bill said that he has turned down personal endorsements when he did not feel comfortable with the product. Cameron tries not to put anything on the air or online that would damage his Pop station’s relationships with prominent artists. Similarly, when Mark saw the story about country singer Randy Travis being found naked and intoxicated, he mentioned the story once on the air and then let it go. When he reads pre-written commercial scripts, he sometimes changes the words if they are not

grammatically correct, substituting “entire family” for “whole family”, or “more than” instead of “over.”

Brian also chooses his words carefully when he writes his news scripts, passing on words that people do not understand or use in everyday speech. He explained to me his decision to pass on using a certain story until it was more balanced. While he was reporting on the immigration story, Brian stated that his planned intent was neither to stir up controversy, nor to put a particular local angle on the story. Bob enforced his personal standards by telling a writer not to refer to Robert Kennedy, Jr. as “Bobby” in his copy. “There’s only one Bobby Kennedy,” he proclaimed. The two anchors shared a philosophical conversation about whether or not to reveal the name of one of Jerry Sandusky’s child-abuse victims on the air after a national reporter did just that. Soon after, management sent out a memo telling reporters not to use the victims’ names. Brian was also hesitant to read the more lurid details from Sandusky’s trial on the air.

Brian’s standards not only apply to what he will read on the air, but how he will read it; in his early days at W-NEWS, trying to comply with such standards made him obsessive. Brian says that he used to listen to his anchor shifts on delay through the station’s audio logger: “As soon as I was done, when I would go to a break or the traffic or something, I would put it in cue and listen to what I had just done 30 seconds earlier, and that is the behavior of a crazy person, I soon realized (*laughs*).” He still does it occasionally; after giving his live report on the immigration story, I caught Brian listening to the delayed online stream of W-NEWS on his smartphone so he could hear the tail end of his report. Drew, Mark, and Cameron also have high standards for the sound of their stations. Between songs, Cameron often tinkers with segues between

songs, adding the right promotional liners, and making everything sound as tight as possible. During the live broadcast, he stopped what he was doing to check with the engineer when the station did not sound right coming out of the speakers in their tent.

Once again, the listeners usually have no idea that personal standards have been invoked when they hear what the personalities say on the air. Brent made a rare exception when he declared during a show, “I’m not a shock value guy... I don’t play the devil’s advocate.” However, the imposition of personal standards and other forms of communication out of character (Goffman, 1959) allow the self-as-performer to maintain a carefully crafted performance. In the next chapter, I will return to what the listeners do hear, and explain the tactics through which radio announcers entertain and inform their audiences during a performance of on-air personality.

## CHAPTER 7: SO, HOW DO YOU FILL FOUR HOURS A DAY?

Although a good amount of preparation and thought goes into a radio performance, much of what happens on the air is completely unscripted. As opposed to reading from a script, which tends to happen mostly in the production of prerecorded commercials, the primary base for vocal production on live radio is what Goffman (1981) called “fresh talk” (p. 227). Even when live announcers are reading from a script, they tend to deviate from that script at times. Listeners are often surprised when they find out that their favorite radio announcers make up a lot of what they say over the air on the spot. Bill Anderson said that when his talk show had a live online video stream, listeners would tell him that they thought he did his entire three hours from a script. They find it even more impressive to know that radio personalities mostly improvise on the fly. However, at the same time, these announcers often choose from strategies that average people use to entertain others during a performance of self. In addition, there are certain tactics that are suited only for the radio medium or for certain announcing situations.

In this chapter, I discuss the processes by which announcers seem to completely make up their performances as they go along, engaging fluently in fresh talk as they speak with each other and with the listeners. Sometimes, the setting and the type of announcing affect what will be said and how. The announcers might use action override to describe what is taking place, three-way announcing to converse with the audience and a caller, guest, or other announcer, or direct announcing with only the audience. They switch amongst the speaker roles (i.e. animator, author, principal) that are available to them, depending on what type of announcing is needed for a particular situation (Goffman, 1981). Other times, the announcer must conform to processes that are specific

only to radio or the media in general. Many of the things announcers do are actually common to all people who wish to put on an entertaining performance for someone else.

### *Effects of Setting and Situation*

I observed the announcers of eleven different radio programs; like snowflakes, no two were alike. In addition to working for different stations in different cities, the announcers have duties and expectations that are specific to the type of format in which they work. Some of these duties align with the roles, bases, and types of announcing involved; for each situation, there is an appropriate footing, or alignment of the speaker to what he/she is saying (Goffman, 1981).

As mentioned in the previous chapter, news anchors specialize in aloud reading, although they are called upon at times to engage in fresh talk when interviewing a spokesperson or asking follow-up questions to a reporter. When an anchor works a solo shift, he/she uses direct announcing; when two anchors work at the same time, it is three-way announcing. Anchors sometimes have to shift footing at a moment's notice. When a water main break snarled traffic on a main commuter route, Brian Winter and Bob James were alerted by their producer that they had a mass transit spokesperson on hold to talk about how the transit service would get people around the trouble. Brian and Bob had to immediately change from the usual three-way announcing format of reading stories from a script to three-way announcing with the spokesperson, switching to fresh talk from the aloud reading for which they prepared.

When there are two or more people in the studio chatting, three-way announcing is also taking place, but it is less formal than an interview over the phone. The morning show teams are a good example, but three-way announcing also occurred if one of the

spoken-word hosts had an in-studio guest, took a live caller, or brought his producer into the conversation. As mentioned in Chapter Four, on-air guest interviews cut across formats. Both of the spoken-word hosts conducted interviews with guests, but so did several of the music announcers. Being on television and radio at the same time, Brent Axe looked at the camera as he spoke to a telephone guest, making it seem like he was “looking” at both of the other parties in his three-way conversation. If the guest was in the studio, Brent went back and forth between the guest and the camera. When doing a monologue, Brent and Bill Anderson used direct announcing. Bill also did so when he read a live commercial or event announcement. Typically, a music announcer engages in direct announcing with the audience.

As a news anchor on a morning show, Ali Stevens frequently shifts footing, often within the same segment. During her twice-hourly newscasts, she uses aloud reading and direct announcing with the audience. At other times, she also reads stories that she and Drew Kelly have found interesting, but then she moves into the three-way announcing and fresh talk that is typical of a morning show. Ali asks most of the questions when a guest is interviewed in the studio. *The Show* does not have a live news anchor, so one of the hosts will read a story or a text or a tweet, but otherwise, Hunter Scott and Josh Grosvent use fresh talk during the main portions of the program. Hunter, as the announcer with directive dominance, engages in brief stretches of direct announcing through aloud reading of traffic and weather reports and sponsors for pre-recorded news updates. He also reads occasional live commercials during breaks. Although not a morning show, *The Weewo Show* has a similar format. Weewo or Dan Cas reads a story as a lead-in to an extended segment of fresh talk amongst the members of the show.

Cameron's interview with an up-and-coming pop singer is an interesting case. The interview was prerecorded, so in the moment it was a two-person conversation, but when it was played back on the air, the listener became the third party to the previous conversation. The interview was conducted with the inference that it would become a form of three-way announcing when played back live. The same was true when Rick Hayes or Chris Williams recorded an interview with a SkyFish player for the pregame show. Similarly, when Cameron or any other music announcer plays a recorded call back on the air, it is also three-way announcing, but the third party was absent during the original recording and comes in later. Other examples include Mark Nelson playing back prerecorded contest winners, or Drew playing back the prerecorded contestants for the "Morning Mindbender" segment.

Rick and Chris engaged in all three types of announcing while calling SkyFish games. If they were joking back and forth about something, or having a conversation during the pregame show, they used three-way announcing. However, there were times when one of them deferred completely to the announcer with dramatic dominance, and at those times Rick or Chris used direct announcing. For example, Rick switched to direct announcing to tell his "war story" about the building fire that once happened during a game. As the game action took place, the announcers used action override to describe the events as they unfolded on the field. Sometimes they took turns, as when there was a close play at the plate and they speculated about why the runner was called safe. Chris noted that only a handful of minor league teams travel with two announcers. Elsewhere, the lone announcer has to do everything.

Other differences in performances of personality occur because of the way that a particular company or program director wants a station to be operated. For instance, Drew, as a program director, has a certain manner in which he wants the 94KX announcers to do their jobs when it comes to what they say and when. Naturally, he also follows his own edicts when he is on the air. Drew also works for an owner who believes that market size should not dictate the quality of the content and spends the necessary money to have all of the technical advantages that major-market stations have. At W-NEWS, the anchors read promotional announcements and sponsorships on the air; they are also asked to record commercials, thus making them animators who speak for other principals. Brian stated that the listener should not infer any loss of integrity from such a policy, adding, "I think the listener can understand that we're not endorsing the product."

Working for a non-commercial station, Laura Donaldson and George Brooks also have a special set of circumstances that applies only to the performances that they put on. Instead of reading live commercials, they read underwriter announcements, thanking the sponsors whose contributions keep the radio station afloat, but not going into detail about sales or specials. Weewo and Dan's college station is similar in that they have underwriters, but the announcements are pre-recorded. Laura and George's station also holds fundraisers to solicit individual donations, which can come in the form of money, used automobiles, or used musical instruments.

The shift in which the announcer works also makes a difference. The morning-show announcers have the advantage of being able to speak for longer stretches, and they can be more topical and irreverent. Cameron said that his show has advantages that come from being on at night. He pointed out that his show can be more interactive and a little

less structured, whereas when he works in afternoon drive time, “it’s all about just forward momentum of the radio station, promoting what’s going on, letting the music speak for itself.”

### *Reporting*

Radio reporting is a special case, and therefore merits additional explanation. In some cases, a reporter will give a live moment-by-moment description of what is taking place at the scene, using action override and engaging in fresh talk. Other times, the event being covered has already occurred, so the reporter will be on the air live, but engaging in aloud reading of a prepared report and using three-way announcing with the anchor in the studio and the audience. Still other times, the reporter prerecords the report, which is then played on the air at the discretion of the anchor and producer. Such was the case with Brian’s story about the urban farmers market, which he recorded during the week to be played on the weekend, when there would be fewer hard news stories that would take priority.

In the process of putting together the farmers market story, Brian engaged in a two-way conversation with shoppers. As was the case with prerecorded interviews, it became a form of three-way announcing when the listeners heard the finished product. However, these were not pre-planned interviews; Brian asked people to let him record them on the spot. Being conscious of the later presence of that third party, some of the shoppers were hesitant to let Brian ask them questions. Others were happy to testify to the benefits of the market.

When he put together his report in the editing room at W-NEWS, Brian shifted footing. Where he did not actually use a prerecorded clip of an interviewee’s speech, he

became the animator of his/her words, as well as the author if he paraphrased an answer. The interviewee was still the principal, but Brian was now speaking for him/her. However, Brian acknowledged that he tries to write and edit his reports in such a way that he gives the subjects of his piece a more prominent role. "It's how I always want to do it," he explained. "I'm much less interested in hearing myself talk than hearing them tell their stories, especially if they're decent storytellers." Through his use of framing (Goffman, 1974), Brian still engages in three-way announcing and retains the animator role, but his voice becomes secondary to the piece. He used the words of the people he interviewed to frame the farmer's market as beneficial to the community both in terms of health and bringing people together in a diverse neighborhood.

Beyond the speaker roles and types of announcing involved, the radio reporter's day-to-day activities are different from any other radio announcer. He/she has to travel from story to story, depending on the number and importance of events that occur during the day. He/she stays in contact with the station with a cell phone provided by the station, and therefore may only need to come to the station to edit a story. Other than that, according to Brian, the two most important things to being a field reporter are "when and where you're gonna eat, and where and when you're gonna go to the bathroom."

#### *Industry-Specific Processes*

Announcers' on-air personalities are defined in part by what separates them from other announcers of different formats. The on-air personality also derives from the commonalities shared by all radio announcers. They all engage in specific processes, regardless of job description, and these processes allow them to define the situation as only a radio announcer can. As Goffman (1981; 1959) noted, an announcer can hide

mistakes from the audience by editing the performance before the listeners can hear it. Announcers also must speak within the linguistic confines imposed by the institution of radio (Holstein & Gubrium, 2000), including the use of technical jargon and adherence to standards that prohibit on-air indecency. Finally, announcers on live radio programs must often make content decisions in the moment, making up the performance as they go along or adapting to an ever-changing broadcast situation.

### *Editing*

Radio announcers use several types of editing to decide what their listeners will or will not hear during a broadcast performance. I outlined Brian Winter's process of editing news stories above. When Brian has to go on the air with a live report, the process of selecting and editing sound bites becomes more hurried. When he puts together his anchor scripts, Brian often repurposes the audio of live reports that had just aired, isolating the few seconds that will perfectly capture what he teases in his top-of-the-hour headlines.

As mentioned in Chapter Five, Chris Williams edited the SkyFish player calling him the wrong name in their pregame interview, but Rick Hayes accidentally brought it up on the air, making the mistake and the editing thereof public knowledge. Brent Axe took recordings of interviews he did during his sports talk show, and posted them online for listeners who missed them. Not only did it give people a chance to hear interviews on their own schedule, it also allowed Brent to edit out awkward moments. In one instance, he edited out a portion at the beginning of an interview where his guest had a bad phone connection.

All of the music station announcers record their phone calls, which allows them to make edits before the calls air. As mentioned in Chapter Four, Cameron re-records his voice sometimes to make a call sound better. Ali Stevens and Drew Kelly explained how they edit their calls:

Ali: We never manipulate them to say things that people didn't say.

Drew: I would never do that, but what I can do is I can turn a really bad phone call into a really good phone call by just taking out dead space, "ums," (and) errors. Anything that I wanted to say but forgot to say, I can put it back in.

Mark Nelson admitted to taking the same approach. He edited one contest winner call because the winner stumbled over the name of the radio station.

Hunter Scott has to edit phone calls because when he and Josh Grosvent talk with callers, they are off the air, so they use language that is consistent with the relaxed off-air standards that announcers use. Therefore, Hunter has to bleep out any indecent language to meet the different standards that are in place when he plays the call back on the air. Like the other announcers, he will also edit out extra, unnecessary audio. Vanessa told a story about recording a contest winner who would not stop cursing, so she started cursing back at him. Of course, she then had to bleep both of them before she could play the call on the air.

Most radio stations have a delay system that also acts as a form of on the spot editing when an announcer crosses lines of indecency. If something is uttered that the announcer does not want the listener to hear, he/she pushes a "dump" button that immediately deletes the previous few seconds of live speech, thus preventing the utterance from going out over the air. To the listeners, it sounds like what they are hearing just jumped ahead by a few seconds, which is jarring but necessary to keep

indecent speech from airing. Josh crossed the line on two occasions in one show, forcing Hunter to press the “dump” button so that Josh’s offending comments would go unheard. In one case, Josh said something that could have been taken as racially insensitive; the other instance was Josh saying, “You’ve gotta lay it down on a lot of puss,” the last word of which was too close to an offensive term for Hunter to let slip.

In a lot of cases, the announcer has to edit for time when he/she is on the air. This occurs most often in music formats, where the preferred techniques include speaking over the introductions of songs. These introductions have varying lengths, forcing the disc jockey to tailor his/her presentation accordingly. When he works with his recording software to edit calls, Cameron deletes pauses and other extraneous audio to make the call fit better within time constraints of his format. Cameron, Drew, and Vanessa also have to speak during a 10-second space in their stations’ top-of-the-hour jingle (known as a “donut”). If they go even a half-second too long in these situations, a speech fault occurs: they talk over the jingle or the vocals of the song. Vanessa’s station allows for such little DJ talk that sometimes all she can say is the name of the radio station before the next element begins. Mark explains that when he trains announcers, he teaches them to be economical with their word choices: “When I give the weather, I don’t say ‘degrees.’ It’s 72. People already know it’s 72 degrees. I don’t say, ‘We have partly sunny skies.’ First of all, we only have one sky. So, you don’t need the word ‘skies.’ Word consolidation and consumption is very important.”

The all-news format is also rigidly timed, so that everything fits within a repeating 30-minute cycle. Although Brian uses the editing process to frame his reports so that his interviewees can tell their own stories, he also has to isolate the most important parts of

their stories so that he can fit the finished product within the time constraints. He usually has to limit live or produced reports to a minute. When he produced a longer report of his immigration story for a daily feature that the station does, Brian could extend it to two minutes.

Commercials also must conform to a specific length (e.g. 30 or 60 seconds). As Cameron produced a commercial for the “haunted hayride” attraction, he recorded a quick announcement about the station’s upcoming live broadcast. He then went back and edited out his mention of the location because it was already said earlier in the commercial. Doing so allowed him to cut the commercial down to 30 seconds. If his/her read runs long, an announcer will sometimes edit out pauses to make the finished product fit within the time required.

Most often, however, the editing process is used to expunge the announcer’s own errors from the record. The most obvious part of an announcer’s job where this kind of editing would occur is the production of commercials. As Mark recorded a commercial for a golf tournament, he first got the month wrong, then stumbled over the name of the course where the tournament would be played. He not only edited out those speech faults, but he also used his digital audio software to zoom in to and delete an instance of “popping p’s,” where his use of the “p” sound had caused his volume level to spike. While recording commercials, Mark sometimes reads a certain line a couple of times, each time with a different inflection. He can then choose the one he likes and delete the others. An announcer can also start over completely if need be, disregarding a previous attempt. Cameron stumbled over the name of the “haunted hayride” attraction where his live broadcast was taking place, and he decided to rerecord it.

Editing also saves an announcer from possible misinterpretation. As Drew edited an unscripted commercial he had recorded with a car dealer, he played the first take in which the dealer asked, “Have you ever wanted a Hummer?” Knowing that “Hummer” is what Goffman (1981) would have called a “leaky phrase” (p. 251) that would be open to an off-color misinterpretation, Drew told me matter-of-factly, “We started over.”

Three of the music station announcers that I observed do voicetracking as part of their job duties. The primary purpose is to allow them time to do other job duties, although Mark and Cameron also voicetrack programs that will air at other times, such as weekends. Voicetracking allows a music announcer to simulate a live radio program, but he/she records all of the talk segments. The prerecorded segments air at a later time with no indication that the performance is not live. Therefore, voicetracking shifts the time boundaries of a performance (Goffman, 1959).

Because a voicetracked talk segment is recorded, announcers can start over again if they commit a speech fault, and the listener will be none the wiser when the segment airs. Cameron and Mark both admitted to allowing a slip or two when they voicetrack so that they sound more natural. Drew disagreed with that approach: “Please, you’re just being lazy. No listener on this planet is going to hear a voice break, live or recorded, and think to himself, ‘He *must* be live because I heard him hiccup.’” He said that voicetracking is one of the few things where you get a second chance to get it right, and he will record over and over again until he is satisfied with the result. Mark acknowledged that he tends to make more mistakes when voicetracking than he does live, adding, “If I mess up more than once, it’s a disaster. I can’t get the break right.” He had to voicetrack all the time at a previous job, and he found himself getting into ruts, saying

the same things all the time. “Listening to my own show wasn’t satisfying,” he concluded.

### *Institutional Talk*

The term “voicetracking” is one example of language that exists only within the institution of radio. “Donut” (the 10-second space in a jingle where a DJ can speak) is another example. If the announcer fits his/her talk in perfectly before the vocals begin on a song, then he/she “hit the post,” and it is a point of pride among DJs to hit the post consistently. The audio that an announcer hears over a remote connection to the station is called “mix-minus.” The schedule of elements to which an announcer must adhere each hour is called the “clock.” Such terms are part of the discourse of being a radio announcer, or what Holstein and Gubrium (2000) call institutional talk. It is within this discursive framework that an announcer must craft a performance.

Baseball announcers must invoke the discourse of baseball when they describe the game on the air, making it a second kind of institutional talk to which they must conform. Chris and Rick used phrases such as “fires a seed to first” to describe a hurried throw, “crooked number” to describe two or more runs on the scoreboard, “slab” to describe the pitching rubber, and “smokes,” “tees off,” and “hit on the screws” to describe a particularly hard-hit ball. As part of his news script, Brian must write headlines and teases. The difference between the two terms is in the timing: Headlines are read right before the top of every hour, and they preview the entire hour. Teases are read before commercial breaks or other elements to let the listener know what is coming up immediately afterward. When Brian and Bob James anchored together, they called the

sound effect that prefaced a live report a “whoosh.” Bob told Brian that he would give the weather forecast and cue Brian by saying, “I’ll weatherize you.”

Other announcers exchange technical terms and terms specific to the formatics of their stations. For example, Vanessa told her intern that there are “red liners” and “blue liners” that she can read between songs, depending on what her program log says. The program log used by Laura Donaldson and George Brooks at FM University has shorthand directions like “LV” for a live read, or “R” for a recorded underwriter. At Mark’s Country station, the instructions are a little clearer. Before a space where he has to talk on the air, there is a message on the computerized program log that simply reads, “SAY SOMETHING INTERESTING.” The names of software programs are tossed around without explanation because every team member should know what they are and what they do. For instance, Drew casually refers to RDS, the software that allows drivers to see the names of artists and songs on their car radios. At one point, a frustrated Ali said to me, “(Drew) talks like a doctor when it comes to radio.”

Part of the institutional discourse of radio comes from the FCC-mandated standards against indecent content. In order to make a point without using the actual offending words, announcers have to do a linguistic dance of sorts, selecting or inventing terms or double entendres to stand in for what they are not allowed to say. Aside from the *Star Wars*-inspired “put Captain Solo in the cargo hold,” Hunter and Josh used phrases such as “slaying some ass,” “laying pipe,” and “rail” to describe sex. A workplace affair was “dipping your pen in the company ink.” Parts of the male anatomy were referred to as “schween,” “Timbits,” or just “down there.” Hunter also used “Willard” as a verb to describe masturbation after comedian Fred Willard’s arrest for lewd conduct, but he

acknowledged his preference for the phrase “beat off,” adding, “Beat off is a hilarious word.” In other instances, they shortened a bad word to its first letter, like “F” or “D.” As Josh explained, “People are in on the joke that we have to dance around these FCC regulations. They’re in on it and they like to do that kind of stuff too.”

Weewo used the slang of his age cohort on his college radio show. He saluted Dan Cas’s control board skills by praising him for “holding it down on the 1’s and 2’s,” an expression referring to turntables used by club DJs. He said that getting a good haircut would result in “swag dripping down your head,” another common expression among young adults. Weewo also used double entendres. He referred to Mike Tyson and Robin Givens “gettin’ jiggy” during their divorce, and he also started a new show catchphrase when he mentioned a fellow student who was walking around campus using the unseemly pickup line, “Hey, what that mouth do?”

Sometimes, the choice of words is a little sillier, as when Brent Axe read Boston Red Sox star David Ortiz’s profanity-laced tirade on his sports talk show, and replaced the multiple instances of the word “shit” with “poopy.” He also adhered to the institutional standard that announcers not insult sponsors by only referring to “a certain unnamed Mexican chain” during an on-air rant about a bad fast-food experience.

### *Timing is Everything*

These decisions to self-edit on the fly are representative of the many reflexive actions that radio announcers must take while in the middle of an on-air performance. Live radio programs may sometimes seem to be completely scripted, but most of the decisions of what to say and when take place in the moment. Goffman (1981) referred to this type of announcing as “fresh talk” (p. 227), but radio professionals call it “ad-

libbing.” Every radio announcer, regardless of format or typical method of announcing, must be skilled at ad-libbing in order to maintain a compelling radio performance.

Vanessa, Mark, and Cameron play off of the titles of the songs they play, a tactic used by disc jockeys since the days of Top-40 legends like Dan Ingram (Fisher, 2007). Mark deftly segued from “Lovin’ You Is Fun” by Easton Corbin into a promotional announcement for a concert by saying, “Lovin’ You Is Fun... You know what else is fun?” He used Craig Morgan’s “That’s What I Love About Sunday” to proclaim his excitement about the start of the NFL season. Vanessa introduced Mykko Montana’s “Do It” by adding, “Why not? It’s Friday!” Over the beginning of Kirko Bangz’s “Drank in My Cup,” she declared, “Almost quittin’ time. I could take a drink in my cup. Cheers!” Cameron used “Some Nights” by Fun to segue into a story about rapper Nelly getting busted for possession of drugs: “Apparently, some nights in Texas on Nelly’s tour bus are different than others!”

Vanessa and Cameron even played off of song lyrics. Vanessa turned on her microphone after the line “won’t run from a Black man,” and yelled, “But I will!” Cameron followed Karmin’s song “Brokenhearted,” which features the frequent use of the British slang word “cheerio,” by stating that the band members “love Cheerios.” Preparing such wordplay is not always a smooth process. As Vanessa put it, “Sometimes, it’s like 5-4-3-2... Oh, shit!”

Cameron also resorted to a different kind of ad-libbing that involved the music. He announced over the introduction to a Taylor Swift song that her new album was coming out at midnight on October 22. He then realized that midnight would be the beginning of the next day, the 23<sup>rd</sup>. In a stunning break from announcer protocol,

Cameron stopped the song to announce, “Sorry, it’s the 22<sup>nd</sup> at midnight, which means it’s October 23<sup>rd</sup>. Sorry, Taylor. Now back to the song.” A few nights later, as he played The Ting-Tings’ song “That’s Not My Name,” he played his record scratch sound effect and stopped the song in the middle of the chorus. He then referenced being called by an unflattering nickname, a set up to the punch line that came when Cameron started the song again: the titular lyric, “That’s not my name.”

Even though Brian speaks from a script that either he or a writer put together for him, he regularly deviated from the script. He explained that when he reads copy that someone else has written, he ad-libs so that it sounds like something that he would write and something that he would say. Brian added, “To be a good news anchor, you have to be able to ad-lib because when breaking news happens, you’re not gonna have a script.” Therefore, his day-to-day live alterations of the script prepare him for a time when he has to improvise for a longer period of time. Brian also uses a bit of wordplay at times. Coming out of a commercial that ended with the phrase “think clean,” his first words were “think sunshine” as he segued into the weather.

Bill Anderson was not the only announcer who ad-libbed his live commercials. Drew, Vanessa, and George also worked from a set of talking points provided by the client, and they went from there to whatever came to their minds. Drew used the hot July weather to set up an iced coffee commercial. Vanessa read live commercials for a cell phone carrier, throwing in her own thoughts about weekend minutes and other carriers that lock people into contracts. Reading a live announcement for a jazz festival, George explained how to type the number “0” in the festival’s website address by referring to zero as “the round numeral that comes before the number one.”

Ad-libbing is a skill that comes with time and practice. Mark recalled that he used to read the liner cards provided by the station verbatim, but he added that a good program director would tell a DJ not to do that. George agreed that an announcer does not want to sound redundant in reading the regular announcements that make up much of a typical performance. He stated that when an announcer has gained years of experience, “you feel like you can step away from what’s comfortable and go into uncharted territory, and just rely on your poor noggin to carry you through (*laughs*).” During their baseball broadcasts, Rick and Chris ad-libbed from all of the preparatory material at their disposal – stats, media guides, and their own memories – to give the listeners background information on the players. They also played off each other, as good team members do; one announcer would give an observation, and the other would back it up with statistics or other observations.

Drew and Ali take a similar approach when ad-libbing from the various offbeat news stories they use on their show. As Ali read about President Obama’s initial refusal to kiss his wife when they were featured on a “kiss cam,” Drew replied, “Play along, dude.” They also play off of each other for show elements such as the Morning Mindbender. As Drew explained the prize pack they were giving away from a local steakhouse, Ali interjected, “Delicious.”

When an announcer has to fill a large amount of time with content that comes off the top of his/her head, it almost becomes a stream-of-consciousness approach. Asked about the catchphrases that he used on the air, Brent answered, “I don’t even notice it... I guess it’s just natural. You just have a few things that you come back to, but it’s not on purpose, I’ll tell you that.” Vanessa added, “I just go with the flow. It’s like I just start

talking, and whatever comes out comes out. I kinda let the universe guide me.” Hunter is the best example of this “natural” approach. He occasionally jumped from topic to topic or thought to thought in mid-sentence. Talking about the way he and Josh begged their friend from the zoo to let them make an exclusive announcement, he compared it to Ming the Merciless from *Flash Gordon* demanding alms, adding, “That’s a great word... alms.” Hunter explained his thought process:

You just kind of go into this... you just go into this place... It’s like telling a baseball player, “Well, how do you hit the ball?” It’s like well I practiced it a million times, but then once you’re in there, you’re not sitting there going, “Okay, I’ve gotta hold my arm up the right way, I’ve gotta plant my foot the right way, I’ve gotta twist my hips forward.”

Hunter added that he forgets most of what he says on the air. He said that one of the reasons he works so well with Josh is because Hunter riffs on a topic, and then Josh, working with the mind of a stand-up comedian, adds a well-crafted joke that fits the moment perfectly. Weewo, the less-experienced announcer, slowed down the process: “In (my) mind I’m thinking, ‘Alright (real name), you took a look at this story a couple times before you jumped on the air. You’re pretty familiar with it. Don’t feel like you have to just stare down and read word-for-word. It’s there in case you find yourself kind of losing your train of thought.’”

In a large group setting such as *The Weewo Show* or *Wake Up With Bill* where there were often multiple guests in the studio, team members rallied together to take a topic and run with it for as long as the segment required. It is here that Goffman’s (1967) metaphor of the dinner party hostess applies; Weewo, having dramatic dominance, kept the conversation and topics flowing, but aside from that, there was little structure. In one segment, Weewo started to talk about the people who had come and gone on the show,

saying it was like when actors aged out of the show *Mighty Morphin' Power Rangers*. Dan promptly (and sarcastically) replied that there was nothing he liked to be compared to more than a Power Ranger. Another team member added that he almost got a Power Rangers tattoo once, and the conversation took off from there.

Bill preferred the metaphor of a traffic cop because there could be crashes if he did not step in. If things got too far out of hand, he could step in and restore order. He could also turn a monologue into a dialogue by bringing his producer into the conversation. Bill could deftly use his fellow team members to segue into his many live, ad-libbed commercial reads. Referring to his lawyer guest, he said that a local apparel store could help the listeners out “if you don’t have skills to coordinate like the Counselor does.”

*Using off-air conversations.* In the moment, an ad-libbing announcer may be inspired to bring an off-air conversation on the air. Between innings of a SkyFish game, Rick and Chris’s producer relayed to them the following update on the Miami Marlins game: “The guy who hits after Ramirez just homered.” Rick decided that his producer’s ignorance of the hitter’s actual name was too funny not to share once they came back from the break. After Josh said off the air that he felt bad for the criticism an 11-year old national anthem singer was receiving, leading Hunter to criticize both Josh and the singer, they had almost the same exchange in their next on-air segment. Josh took Hunter’s off-air comment about boat crashes on Oneida Lake and ran with it moments later on the air. Immediately afterward, Josh used two jokes that got big laughs off the air, referring to Central New Yorkers has having “FAF: Fetal Alcohol Face,” and stating that a “10” in Central New York is “a Miami corpse.”

It may have seemed to be idle chatter in the office when Brent and I talked about various sports-related things before the show, but these conversations probably helped Brent with his show prep. For example, when we were talking about the use of video review in baseball to correct certain umpire calls, I joked that he was a “replay hipster,” someone who liked replay before everyone else did. The conversations in the office were two people talking sports, just like Brent did on the air. Therefore, it was natural for him to insert the “replay hipster” joke in his monologue about video review. This was not the only instance where something I said off-air was used on the air. One of Bill’s in-studio guests took an idle off-air comment I made about saying, “That’s a good question” when someone does not have a ready answer, and used it on the air in response to a caller’s question.

Cameron openly admitted to taking off-air conversations and bringing them on the air. Looking over the results of an online listener vote one night, he said he was glad that The Wanted won because now their fans would stop complaining about the group not getting played enough. He then went on the air and gave a more listener-friendly version of his off-air comments. As we watched *The X-Factor* in the studio another night, we joked about what we saw, then Cameron talked on the air about watching the show, and then we promptly went right back to our off-air commentary. During another show, Cameron and his intern teased each other about his use of the made-up word “truesies.” Shortly thereafter, he went on the air and referred to the singing duo (and real-life twins) Megan & Liz as the “twinsies.”

*Other forms of improvisation.* Not all decisions made in the moment involve what to say next. An announcer will often need to quickly press a button or make some other

move to get a performance that is in danger of going awry back on track. During the postgame show one night, Rick needed to throw to a commercial break because his laptop froze up while he was trying to give the major league scores. When the sound effects for Mark's contest failed, he had to improvise a way to congratulate the winner without playing back the phone call. Other improvisation involves quickly finding the right prerecorded sound bite to fit the moment. Brent followed his producer's allusion to a scene from *Bull Durham* by looking up the scene in question and playing it during the next segment. Most uses of sound effects by Drew, Hunter, and Josh were based on in-the-moment decisions. For instance, as Hunter played the audio of the young anthem singer, Josh played sound effects of a buzzer and a dial-up modem.

Brent used a strict grid to prepare his sports talk show, but even the grid left room for improvisation. He admitted that it was difficult to plan four hours ahead for the last hour of his show, not knowing how or if any of his previous hour's topics would gain traction with the listening audience. He added that when a big story breaks, especially a local one, "the energy just kicks up about five levels." However, when an opening-segment interview ran very long, Brent had to scramble to rearrange the rest of his hour.

The above example shows how many spur-of-the-moment decisions are made with the format clock in mind. Needing to fill time one hour, Brian turned to the Associated Press wire to find an extra news story. He then ad-libbed from the provided copy. "When all else fails," he told me later, "read the weather forecast." When the opposite occurs, and they are running behind the clock, the news anchors will rearrange commercial breaks, moving commercials to shorter breaks as needed. After learning that they would have to fill an extra five minutes in their pregame show because of a later

start time, Rick told Chris that they would just “BS for a while... I’ve based a whole career on it.”

As his jazz music show ended each night, George had to make sure that his last song and concluding announcements timed out just right so that he could switch over to the live NPR newscast at exactly 9:00. Laura had to do the same thing during every hour of her classical music show. She summed up the process nicely: “Radio is all timing... first, above all, and under that, you fit everything in.”

### *Techniques for Entertaining the Audience*

Radio announcers may have to work within certain industry-imposed constraints, but when it comes to specifically how they entertain their listeners, the things they do are not so different from what any person would do to entertain another person. Sometimes a person engages conversationally with another person by sharing information. Other times, he/she makes light of something or tries to be humorous in some way. Still other times, the person may enhance the conversational experience by sharing opinions or even by trying to be outrageous. The announcers that I studied used many of these tactics at various times to make up the content of their performances.

### *Adding Humor*

For an announcer to have any kind of connection with a listener, he/she must be able to make the listener laugh. Aside from the serious news format, where funny moments are seen as a break in character, announcers of any format have to be humorous and display some sense of comic timing. The music station morning shows are designed to be funny. Drew Kelly and Ali Stevens tease each other like the married couple they are. When Ali said that she couldn’t find the three sports in which the United States has

never won an Olympic medal, Drew joked that one of them was reading, and she kidded him right back about not reading the story. Most of their humor was topical. They laughed about the story of a woman who beat up her boyfriend because he bought the wrong brand of beer. Drew started a segment with the following weather forecast: “Accuweather says it’ll be South America today.” He also suggested that the Emmy awards create a category for best YouTube video.

As previously stated, *Drew and the Crew* is a family-friendly morning show; *The Show* is aimed at adults, and therefore specializes in adult humor. The humor was based in current events, but usually had more controversial themes. The cast members speculated about whether Olympic gymnastics coach Bela Karolyi was a pedophile. As previously noted, Hunter Scott and Josh Grosvent made fun of the young national anthem singer for her poor performance. They also commented on Chinese accusations of steroid use by American swimmer Michael Phelps, saying that it was like starting a war in the food court between Subway (for whom Phelps is a spokesperson) and a Chinese restaurant. There was more innocent humor as well. For instance, Hunter asked the zoo spokesperson if “Siri” the elephant gave bad directions, like the iPhone “assistant” of the same name.

The music announcers who worked other shifts did not have as much time to be funny, but they could still make jokes. Cameron told his listeners that by winning Justin Bieber tickets from him, “You don’t have to cry because Mom and Dad would rather spend money on, oh, the car, the mortgage...” Vanessa frequently made humorous church references when playing the song “Amen” by Meek Mill, such as “Shall everyone stand as the choir marches in?” Mark Nelson referred to his Facebook page as “a great

way to waste time at work. It's what I do." He also laughed about going to a live country music show because it was free, so he could afford it. Telling his audience about the daily giveaway, he said not to call for it right now. "You can call, and we'll just chat, but you won't win anything," he kidded. George Brooks followed a jazz version of the theme from *The Odd Couple* by declaring, "Don't say there's no levity in jazz."

Rick Hayes and Chris Williams frequently found laughs in the day-to-day experiences of minor league baseball. They joked about the "Taco Bell K-Man" promotion, in which fans would win a free taco if a designated player struck out during the game. One night when there was no strikeout, Rick remarked that the fans would have to settle for paying "the princely sum of 89 cents for a tasty Mexican treat." Rick also referenced a "Fire Safety Night" promotion, during which children were taught to "get low and go" to avoid smoke during a house fire. He described a pitch by stating that it "got down low, but it didn't go." He then embellished that the safety demonstration caused dozens of young children to go "screaming for the exits." When a foul ball glanced off a young fan in the stands, Rick lauded the child for his good defensive positioning and commented, "As the saying goes, 'rub some dirt on it.'"

Amidst the serious discussion topics on *Wake Up With Bill*, Bill Anderson found many opportunities for comedy. He kidded his guest about coaching youth football, making jokes like "How long's your contract" and calling him "Coach Reid," after former Philadelphia Eagles head coach Andy Reid. At the diner broadcast, Bill told the congressman that his lawyer friend said he might need a good attorney for his Achilles injury. Recapping an earlier discussion, he told the audience, "If you were sleeping in... lazy! Should be at work with the rest of us!"

Brent Axe's humor was evident throughout his sports talk show. He and his producer made frequent jokes about zombies and "bath salts." Brent often referenced Washington Nationals star Bryce Harper's dismissive comment, "That's a clown question, bro." During a rant about the disappearance of television show themes, he remarked, "It's as if we don't have the attention spans to... what was I saying?" Brent joked with a guest about the Italy-Germany soccer game, and then interrupted their conversation to yell "GOOOOOAAAAALLLLLLLLL!" when Italy scored.

If an announcer is skilled at doing impersonations of other people, he/she will bring those impersonations into the on-air performance. During the week that I was with Brent, he impersonated Yankees announcers John Sterling and Michael Kay, George W. Bush, Kermit the Frog, and George Costanza from *Seinfeld*. Sterling was his most frequent target, as Brent used the line Sterling occasionally says to his broadcast partner: "That's baseball, Suzyn." He also frequently lapsed into a grumpy old man voice, mocking smart phones, pining for the days when people sent letters, and proclaiming that baseball in cold weather "puts hair on your chest!" In addition, he imitated a Boston accent and a Southern accent.

Hunter also relies on impressions for a lot of his humor. He compared the president of the International Olympic Committee to the cartoon dog Droopy, and then used a Droopy voice to impersonate him. During much of their discussion of Bela Karolyi, Hunter and Josh both tried to imitate the Romanian-born coach's voice. Hunter also did impressions of Bob Costas, Sean Connery, Sarah Palin, an old man voice, a snobby voice, a stoner voice, an exaggeration of a DJ voice, and many foreign accents.

Bill also did a Palin impression on his show. Cameron imitated the way rapper Pitbull says, “Dahling!” as well as the Mr. Mackey character from *South Park*.

*Being Opinionated or Outrageous*

The ability to entertain by giving opinions is a major strength of the talk radio format, so it makes sense to focus first on the talk show hosts, Brent and Bill. Brent spent most of the week in which I observed him talking about the NBA Draft, and he recommended that college players who are projected as high draft picks should not return to school and risk diminishing their value. However, he admitted, “I feel like a horrible person for suggesting it.” He agreed with former NFL star LaDainian Tomlinson’s opinion that being voted into the Hall of Fame is more important than winning a Super Bowl. Brent also declared that the days of Little League Baseball as a rite of passage are long gone, citing other sports, video games, and lazy parents. In addition, he gave opinions on the new college football playoff system, video review in baseball, and the NFL moving the kickoff time of late football games.

My week with Bill coincided with the revelation of Mitt Romney’s infamous “47 percent” speech. Much of Bill’s monologues were devoted to his disgust with what Romney said. Bill declared that the speech reinforced how out of touch Romney was, in that he did not even realize that members of that “47 percent” were serving the food and performing other menial tasks right in front of him. He added that Romney is not even comfortable saying the things he is saying, although Bill added, “Just my theory. Can’t prove it.” His callers tended to agree in their opinions of Romney. He replied to a guest’s comment about Romney by stating, “Nothing you say is off the record... (The guest) was nice. He meant ‘nothing you say is off the record, dummy.’” Bill even gave his opinions

without needing to say much, responding to parts of Romney's speech with dry mock laughter or a sigh.

He also speculated on other important local and national issues with his guests and callers. Bill referred to a person who threatened the district attorney as "clearly... touched." He gave his support for truancy legislation, and criticized the Pennsylvania Supreme Court's ruling "not to rule" on Voter ID. Bill's in-studio guest, "The Counselor," reacted both to that ruling and to the demonstrations over an anti-Islamic film, using his own Muslim beliefs to guide his opinions. At the live diner broadcast, the congressman also gave his opinions on Romney, as well as negative campaign ads, and the difficulty of passing legislation in a time of hyperpartisanship.

Even when their job descriptions do not call for them to be opinionated, other announcers occasionally find the time to sound off. As a former sports talk show host, Rick threw in his two cents on topics that were not related to the game he was calling. At one point, Chris mentioned the tantrum by Boston Red Sox star David Ortiz that would later cause Brent to use the word "poopy." Rick interjected, "Not that you asked, but I'm gonna give my opinion." He went on to say that the controversy did not appear out of nowhere, and added, "If you don't like it, you can go play in Kansas City." Chris later asked Rick for his opinion on the Miami Heat closing out the NBA Finals. As previously mentioned, Vanessa was known for being opinionated on the air despite her status as an Urban station personality. She called out Bobby Brown for waiting until ex-wife Whitney Houston had passed to finally go to rehab. She also gave her views on rapper Ginuwine and reality show star Tamar Braxton. Mark's opinions were limited to stating how much

he liked a particular country song. George and Laura did the same with certain jazz or classical pieces, respectively.

Although the intent of music station morning shows is to entertain, the hosts have much more time and freedom to be opinionated. Drew spoke about the ongoing reactions to the Penn State scandal and the Freeh Report because of the continuing importance of the story to residents of his Central Pennsylvania market. Ali said that she was “one of those stupid people” who watches all of the specials surrounding the finale of *The Bachelor*. She and Drew both opined about watching sports in high-definition, as well as the story of a female panhandler soliciting donations for breast augmentation surgery. Both Drew and Josh expressed on their shows that they were tired of people posting pictures of their car thermometers on hot days. Hunter gave his opinion that parents need to tell their children they are not good at something. He also expressed disapproval at motivational books and speakers. Hunter and Josh both said that even the nicest woman could develop road rage. They also gave their views on soccer star Hope Solo, swimmer Michael Phelps, baseball star Derek Jeter, Facebook, the “Octomom’s” payday loan venture, and whether “sexting” should be considered cheating.

As a personality-driven college radio show, *The Weewo Show* also includes a lot of on-air opinionating. Weewo expressed mixed feelings about 2 Chainz being named “Man of the Year” by *The Source*. Weewo and Dan Cas debated about the percentage of men who cheat on their significant others; Weewo’s guess was far higher than Dan’s. Their guests joined in the conversation, sounding off about the Kardashians, reality shows, and Tyler Perry movies, and giving nominees for Weewo’s “Hater Hall of Fame.” Weewo also asked them for their opinions of top songs.

Sometimes, the announcer tries to be outrageous on purpose. Hunter opened *The Show* one morning by belching into the microphone; it would not be his only on-air belch that week. During his rant about the non-functioning station refrigerator, he declared that tap water “tastes like marriage.” As previously noted, the humor on *The Show* is much edgier in general than on *Drew and the Crew*, where the rare borderline-inappropriate joke was Drew’s comment that the new Katy Perry movie was being shown in “Double-D... I mean 3D.” Weewo also made an occasional attempt at being over-the-top, most notably in asking his guests each day to reveal whom they would honor for “National Ass Day.” The many jokes surrounding “What that mouth do?” also pushed the limits of on-air propriety. “Although I take risks sometimes, and I might make a statement here that some people... that maybe their jaw might drop,” Weewo explained, “it’s all with the good intention to just incorporate a little humor and get people a little relaxed, break the ice a little bit. That’s it.”

### *Sharing Information*

Naturally, the primary job of a news or sports announcer is to share information with listeners. However, an informational approach also works for announcers in other formats. A good music announcer will pass along information about the artists he/she plays for the benefit of the listening audience. Because so much of the music is not as well known as in popular music genres, artist information is particularly valuable in the Classical and Jazz formats, making Laura and George’s shows a truly educational experience. Laura gives the composer, conductor, orchestra, and the names of any prominent soloists for each piece she plays. Comparing herself to a teacher, she said that such an approach is successful because “you love the music and you know why.” George

gives the title, album, and record label for each jazz song he plays. He also gives background information on the artists whenever possible. For instance, while mentioning a song on which Count Basie played organ, George remarked, “Do believe I read somewhere Fats Waller was one of his tutors.”

One of Mark’s strengths is his ability to talk about the country music artists he plays. He often gave the names of the members of bands like Lady Antebellum, Rascal Flatts, and The Band Perry. He mentioned the background stories of singers like Jana Kramer and Heidi Newfield, and noted the origin of the band Lucky Ned Pepper’s name (a character in the movie *True Grit*). Mostly, Mark told his audience whether or when their favorite artists were touring or working on new albums. Other music announcers shared information as well. Cameron occasionally mentioned new pop album releases and artist background information. Drew mentioned Katy Perry’s divorce as he introduced one of her songs.

*Repeating material.* Announcers frequently repeat previous things they had said during their shows because the audience is always changing. Although the most devoted fans listen all the time and hear content repeated multiple times, there is always the chance that someone is hearing it for the first time. Brent took an important interview he conducted one afternoon as his show began at 2:00, and reran it during the 5:00 hour. He also repeated the groan-inducing joke, “It’s very drafty in here,” in reference to the NBA, NHL, and Major League Baseball drafts, and repeated his joke about a smartphone application being “a-p-p, not ‘OPP,’” as in the Naughty By Nature song. The format of a news station dictates that Brian and Bob must repeat certain segments (e.g. traffic,

weather, headlines) at certain times, and most of the top stories are repeated every 30 minutes, or more frequently as updated information arrives.

Drew repeated his joke that “moderate humidity” is “Michael Smerconish humidity,” referencing the centrist talk show host. Ali declared on a couple of occasions that they like to educate people about what not to do. Mark reused his transitional phrase “Lovin’ You Is Fun... You know what else is fun?” as well as the origin of Lucky Ned Pepper and other pieces of artist information. Bill recycled ad-libs in his live commercials. Cameron reused jokes about listeners having to wait outside for their friends if they could not win Justin Bieber tickets. Hunter replayed *The Show’s* initial segment on Bela Karolyi the next day for the people who had missed it. He also frequently referenced an unflattering picture of himself from a promotional appearance the previous weekend. Of course, catchphrases are also repeated with regularity, as well as running gags, such as Dan teasing Weewo about his inability to give a list in its correct order.

Many of these different techniques often came together during a daily segment on Brent’s sports talk show called “The Blind Side,” where his producer would ask him ten questions of which Brent had no advance knowledge. Many of the questions were sports-related, requiring him to be opinionated or repeat things he previously said, but sometimes they were silly questions like “What is the ugliest dog?” or “Can you grill without a beer in your free hand?” Brent used a couple of his impersonations during the segment. Often, the silly questions required silly answers. When asked what his producer had in common with a former college basketball star, Brent guessed, “You were both kicked out of school early?” When asked what he would do if he were going 164 miles

per hour on a motorcycle and a snake fell on his windshield, he answered, “Pee my pants... You just described my personal hell.” Brent’s reply to the question of what someone should do if he/she kicks and punches in his/her sleep: “Drugs?”

As evidenced by the above examples, radio announcers have many ways to engage with their audiences and put on a convincing performance of on-air personality. Although some of these tactics are limited in use to those who work in radio or even in a specific format, many of them are common to all people anywhere at any time. The next chapter describes how announcers use their audiences to help determine what tactics to use and when, so that a performance of personality will be as compelling as possible.

## CHAPTER 8: THE ROLE OF THE AUDIENCE

Having worked long hours behind the scenes honing and shaping an on-air personality and preparing to perform that personality on a daily basis, how does an announcer know whether he/she has performed to the expectations of the listening audience? The most direct method is through listener interaction, and this interaction can vary in nature from phone calls to exchanges on social media to meeting in person. Listeners give their feedback to announcers in different ways, and it is the task of the announcer to determine what feedback is salient and how to improve the performance accordingly. In addition, announcers must understand that they need to be ever mindful of those who are listening but do not directly engage with the station or personality through interaction or feedback.

In this chapter, I detail the ways in which listeners guide the performances given by an announcer. I first examine the direct interactions that listeners have with their favorite personalities. Next, I break down some of the feedback that personalities receive from their audiences, ranging from glowing reviews to criticism and outrage. Finally, I look into the ways in which an announcer holds to the commercial imperative of radio to attract and hold an audience during a performance of on-air personality.

### *Interacting with Listeners*

The most traditional method of interaction with an on-air personality is over the phone. Vanessa has her “regulars,” listeners who call her occasionally just to say hello or catch her up on their lives. She does not put them on the air, in part because the management of her Urban station has frowned upon airing phone calls as part of their response to PPM data. However, she still gets to interact with them, and she will at least

give them an on-air mention. These callers have a better chance to get to know Vanessa than the average listener does because she can talk to them individually for far longer than she can talk to the audience as a whole. One of Vanessa's regulars called in one afternoon, and upon request gave her a detailed weather forecast. In turn, she asked about his cousin and told him to say hello to his daughter for her. Another regular, to whom she referred on the air as "the mail carrier," called in to chat about the reality show *Here Comes Honey Boo Boo*. Vanessa told me that these people see her more as a friend than as a disc jockey, although she admitted that she does not get as many calls as she did before the PPM-related limitations were imposed.

Laura Donaldson has regular callers to her classical music show as well. She has pleasant conversations with them and asks about their lives. For example, she received a call from a blind opera singer, who wanted to relate his memories of a particular piece that she played. She also got a call from a man who used to play the piano at Nordstrom's, as well as a former co-worker. Laura explained, "She calls to tell me I'm still her favorite announcer (*laughs*). She's sweet."

Cameron deals with callers to his Pop station with an abundance of energy and a carefree attitude. He tries his best to draw a caller out of his/her shell, especially with younger callers who might be shy. Of course, in some cases, he does not need to do that; a male caller insisted on giving his number out over the air to get calls from attractive women. This caller was just an easy mark for Cameron to have some fun and engage in entertaining conversation. However, he never played the call back on the air. He did air the "restarted" call mentioned in Chapter Four. The initial call was from a mother looking for Justin Bieber tickets for her daughter. Cameron started a snappy conversation with the

mom, but then asked to speak with her child. After a quick back-and-forth with her, he changed topics and asked the daughter to help set up the “Question of the Night.” In so doing, he set up the call to be repurposed in different ways later. He also tends to talk to the callers as if he is on the air right at that moment, thus making it more believable that the call was taken live on the air. For example, Cameron called out the person who stole a female caller’s sweatshirt, even though the only people who could hear the phone call at that particular time were the caller and the people in the studio.

Like Cameron, the morning-show announcers pre-record their calls. Hunter Scott admitted that he and Josh Grosvent do not solicit phone calls because they have no producer to screen them. They periodically answer the phone during a commercial or song, and the interaction becomes compelling content. Hunter took a call about the Olympics and proceeded to roll with his stream of consciousness, doing his impressions of Droopy and Sean Connery. The caller kept up with Hunter, as a good team member should, and made everyone laugh by saying that London smelled like sulfur. Later in the week, Hunter took a call about the bad national anthem singer, and a female caller gave her perspective on scratching during intimacy. As mentioned in the previous chapter, Hunter and his callers often use language unfit for on-air standards, so he has to edit the calls before putting them on the air.

For Drew Kelly and Ali Stevens, the process of taking calls is hit-or-miss. They always know when a call is coming in because of an indicator light in the studio. If the call is worth airing, they will air it, as they did after Drew read a story about rapper Pitbull going to Alaska. Pitbull mentioned bear repellent, and a listener called in to

explain how it works. Drew and Ali tend to air most calls when playing back guesses for the “Morning Mindbender.”

Vanessa, Mark Nelson, and Cameron all have a problem that is likely common to most contemporary music personalities: Some people call a radio station only when they can win something. In fact, these listeners call as soon as they hear that they can win something, but they often ignore the details of *how* they can win, which usually does not involve calling the station at that moment. Despite a promotional announcement for a contest at Mark’s Country station that includes the phrase “but don’t call right now,” listeners still called in when they heard the announcement. Cameron’s listeners constantly called for Justin Bieber tickets, despite his repeated announcements of certain times when the tickets would be given away.

There are many possible reasons why these calls only occurred at stations like Vanessa’s, Mark’s, and Cameron’s. All of them have frequent contests, give away prizes that involve artists with massive followings, and do lots of promoting of station events and giveaways. The music morning shows do contests, but they are either regular features (e.g. the “Morning Mindbender”) or they pop up here and there with much less fanfare, as when Hunter and Josh occasionally give away concert tickets. As a result, I did not hear anybody call in to *Drew and the Crew* or *The Show*, asking, “Did I win?” despite these shows airing on stations with contemporary music formats.

Other listeners of music stations call only to hear a particular song or artist. Vanessa does the time-honored professional courtesy of telling callers “I’ll get it on for you as soon as I can.” Mark says something similar. Cameron’s variation goes something like “Yeah, I can hook you up with that... laterz!” Vanessa explained that most people

will request a song that is already in rotation, but if they ask for an older song, it is far less likely to be played. Most stations keep request logs; Vanessa's Urban station has a pre-printed list of songs, with tallies marked next to them each time someone calls for a particular song.

Mark received multiple calls from one young listener who wanted to hear the new Taylor Swift song, although she did call again to thank Mark when on one occasion, he played it for her by replacing a song that was already scheduled with Swift's song. Mark's Country station has a similar policy as Vanessa's with regard to playing calls on the air; he has been told that it encourages more request calls. I found it curious that such a thing would be considered bad. Cameron told me that well organized fanbases of certain pop artists gang up on him over the phones, calling in a few at a time to hear the same song. Such behavior makes him less likely to answer the phones at all; he relies instead on social media to get song requests. Vanessa also gets occasional calls from aspiring hip-hop artists who want a place to play their music. She funnels them to the station's website. In addition, she gets calls for artist or song information. She is polite with most of the calls she receives, although I could tell that people who called only to give "shout-outs" to friends annoyed her.

FM University has a different kind of listening audience. People mostly call Laura and George Brooks for information about a particular artist or song that they just heard. George said that he usually does not play requests, although he did make an exception for someone whom he knew was a regular listener. George added that older listeners would call him to talk about things that happened many years ago because nothing else in today's media interests them. Young jazz fans and musicians talk to him

to get a sense of the way things used to be. Talk show hosts do not often have to deal with selfish callers, although Bill Anderson did have a couple during the week that I observed him. During Bill's interview with the district attorney, his producer screened out a call, leading Bill to explain to me off the air that the caller had a personal feud with the DA.

Bill and Brent Axe used the talk show format to give listeners the chance to speak their minds through phone calls, but there seemed to be more conversation with the callers on Bill's show. On Brent's show, the caller tended to say his piece, and then Brent responded. Bill played the aforementioned role of the dinner party hostess (Goffman, 1967) or "traffic cop" with the callers, just as he did with his in-studio guests. He made sure that everyone could speak, facilitated discussion, and carried on a conversation; he apologized when he accidentally stepped on a caller's words. One caller admitted that she was telling Bill things that she could not say around her own family because they were Romney supporters. Therefore, Bill's show served as a sort of confessional for the listener, a place where she was free to express herself.

One type of caller interaction on a talk show is the classic "I'll hang up and listen" situation. This variety of call is not quite three-way announcing as conceptualized by Goffman (1981); the caller asks for a reaction to his question or statement, then by "hanging up and listening," he/she rejoins the audience and makes it a two-way, host-audience conversation again. A good in-person analogy would be someone asking questions in a "town hall" meeting format. Brent took a few of these calls during my week with him.

*Interacting Online*

Weewo and Dan Cas rarely got phone calls at their college radio station; therefore, their primary method of interaction is through Twitter. The many outlets through which a listener can now contact an announcer (e.g. e-mail, texts, Twitter, Facebook) make it easier than ever for listener interaction to take place. Listeners and fans could e-mail Chris Williams and Rick Hayes through the SkyFish team website, making it their most direct form of contact with the two broadcasters. Brent said that the rise of new and social media changed the way that he did his sports talk show:

I think people are more willing to express an opinion on Twitter, and this sounds ridiculous, but in this era we live in today where people text message and they tweet and they Facebook, making a phone call and sitting on hold for four minutes has actually become archaic in my mind. I don't play to callers anymore. We have a phone number; if you'd like to call in, great, but I have completely changed the way I do my show. I don't do my show trying to drive phone calls. I just don't do it. It's just not worth it; I'm not in a market big enough to do it.

Talk shows like Brent's and Bill's rely on their status as a forum for the exchange of opinions. In the age of social media, this exchange takes place over multiple platforms. Within the radio studio, the announcer takes listener opinions from these multiple platforms and puts them out over the air as program content. Brent read e-mails and tweets from listeners and replied to some of them in the same manner as he would reply to the "hang up and listen" callers. He also posed questions to which the audience could reply via Twitter; they could also submit their own lists for the daily "Top-5" topic or propose topics. Bill read Facebook posts from listeners about Romney's "47 percent" comments.

Josh will also throw in the online or texted comments that he receives from listeners if and when they fit into the conversation. For example, during the discussion of

Applebee's blow-up dolls, Josh related that many of *The Show's* listeners told him they do not have a lunch break at all. A texted question about whether "sexting" would be considered cheating prompted *The Show's* on-air discussion about it the next day, which in turn prompted more texts from listeners. One listener texted, "If you hide it, then it's cheating." Female listeners sent texts about their (mis)treatment of male friends and their obsessions over Derek Jeter. The listeners also contributed texted questions to the weekly "Wednesday Wellness" segment. Drew also receives frequent text messages for his morning show, although he does not share them on the air quite as often. Drew and Josh try to respond to all texts that they receive, although Josh admitted that it is becoming more difficult to do so as *The Show's* audience grows. Drew even sent a message to a listener who asked to quit the 94KX text club. In all cases, one-to-one interaction is taking place.

### *Interacting in Person*

Brian Winter does not take calls as part of his job, and he has limited interaction with listeners through online channels. His primary avenue for listener interaction is in person, when he goes out and about to report for W-NEWS. People recognize the name of the station displayed on his microphone, even though they may not recognize Brian because he works in an audio medium.

The most direct listener interaction often occurs at station promotional events. Hunter and Josh had two live events during the week that I was observing them. The first was a "Pimps and Hoes Party" at a bar in downtown Syracuse. Hunter and Josh wore pimp costumes, played dance music from the 1990s, and sat in an elevated DJ booth, which required them to climb down stairs to chat with listeners. Both of them descended

to the dance floor intermittently to hang out with the patrons. Josh explained, “I have come from this mentality of stand-up (comedy) and punk rock where you’re like, shake every fan’s hand, give every fan a sticker, make sure everyone talks about you because they’ll tell the next person, they’ll tell this person and this person, and it’s worked for us.” Josh’s approach was also on display at the weekly taping of his *Walk-Up Radio* podcast. He chatted with regulars as he set up for the show, and also for a while after the show, thanking everyone for coming.

At the “haunted hayride,” Cameron was not very different from how he is in the studio, but he was definitely putting on a show for a live audience. However, the show was personalized for each listener or group of listeners who approached the station’s tent. Cameron played “rock-paper-scissors” with a girl for candy. He “officiated” a game where another girl had to shake Ping-Pong balls out of a tissue box attached to her back. He had a picture taken with his hood pulled tight like Kenny from *South Park*. For other pictures, he made faces. Cameron complimented a boy on his sweatshirt, and personally showed a girl how to apply for a station internship with his laptop. In a way, he was similar to the actors inside the “haunted hayride,” who were doing their best to scare each truckload of visitors they received. On the other hand, Cameron is a prominent media figure whose voice can be heard on the radio six nights a week, so the young listeners were just as likely to remember Cameron pulling them aside to do an on-air greeting than they were to remember the anonymous scary clowns on the hayride.

Bill’s live broadcast at the diner may be the best example of one-to-one interaction with listeners. During every break, people came up to Bill and the congressman and shook their hands. It was clear that some of these people were

“regulars” at either the diner or the monthly broadcasts there. Other people handed Bill flyers or cards; Bill gave an on-air mention to a political fundraiser, reading from the card he was given. Bill asked a patron for his take on a topic during a break. Bill and the congressman kidded around with some of the patrons, but it was mostly respectful interaction with constituents. The elected officials spoke with patrons during breaks. In terms of a listening audience, the diner patrons and employees were also Bill’s constituents. Even the waitress told me that Bill and his producer were “good people.” Even if the waitress was not a WURD listener, they continuously made a good impression on her.

### *Getting Feedback*

The waitress at the Oak Lane Diner is a great reminder that radio personalities interact with people who are often willing to give their positive and negative feedback. Although many sit in awe of their favorite radio personality and want to express how much they enjoy him/her, others express their displeasure at certain isolated or recurring parts of a performance. In either case, a radio announcer can learn how to better tailor his/her performance to audience expectations through feedback.

In the age of social and digital media, audience feedback comes sooner and in greater amounts than in the days when the most immediate form of interaction was through a phone call. Brian Winter said that he gets far more feedback online than he does from anyone in person. Mark Nelson states that compared to Facebook, even e-mail is now considered more of an official form of feedback: “Facebook is where I get people that may want to complain about a song, you know, something that’s not that big a deal.”

Brent Axe's listeners took to Twitter when they learned that he was leaving his sports talk show, posting tongue-in-cheek rumors about what he might be doing next.

Josh Grosvent monitors the texts that come in from listeners, and will often tell Hunter Scott right away if they responded well to a bit they had just done. The immediate feedback can be negative at times. During my week with *The Show*, Josh got into an online argument with a listener who was upset that the station had dropped advertising from head shops in the wake of DEA raids over the selling of illegal "bath salts." Older methods of feedback are also appreciated; above Josh's desk in *The Show's* office at 95X, beside the many personal items, was an appreciative letter from a prison inmate.

Talk show listeners may suggest show topics or people to interview. Sometimes they may not realize that the issue or guest was already addressed. Bill Anderson received a call from "Charles" one morning, asking if Bill had contacted a certain political figure for her views about congressional pensions and benefits. Bill told "Charles" he had interviewed her the previous week. However, he did imply that he could use the topic when speaking with the congressman at the diner, and he let the listener know that he appreciated the call.

### *Being Treated with Reverence*

In most cases, listeners are respectful and appreciative toward an on-air personality. At the "haunted hayride," Cameron was in the midst of a love fest. Many of the listeners already recognized and respected him. They asked for hugs, handshakes, pictures, and autographs, and they gushed over his approachability. Mark Nelson explained that a personality always has to take some bad with the good when being approached by listeners at events: "There's gonna be people that offend you or that you

just don't... they annoy you or whatever, that you try to shy away from... You're gonna enjoy some of them more than others."

Other raves tend to come from everyday interaction. Brent said that he ran into a teacher to whose class he had once spoken. The teacher told Brent that he had just been at the home of Syracuse University's then-head football coach Doug Marrone, who had nothing but praise for Brent and his show. Cameron mentioned the praise he gets from listeners and artists alike for the quality of his interviews. Laura said that when she is out doing random errands, people would recognize her voice and tell her that they love what she does. Dan Cas said that he has received mostly positive reviews from his campus community. He stated that the best feedback comes "when someone who maybe isn't your closest friend or someone who you wouldn't expect says, 'Oh, I listen to your radio show. That's a good job.'"

In-studio guests also expressed their respect for the performance they were seeing. Drew Kelly's guest from the local heritage festival told him it was like watching a well-oiled machine to see Drew run the control board. *The Show's* beer expert told Hunter that he says everything that the beer expert is thinking, but does not have the guts to say out loud. A friend and listener presented Weewo with a cookie cake at his last show. Rick Hayes's longevity in minor league baseball earned him the respect of clubhouse workers, stadium ushers, and even former players: one former SkyFish player paid Rick the ultimate compliment, asking him to officiate his wedding. Advertisers sometimes honor announcers as well. In addition to his building-sized billboard for a clothing store, Bill also had a special dessert named after him at a local water ice parlor.

Reverence also comes in the form of awards voted on by the public. Readers of the *Syracuse New Times* picked *The Show* as the best morning show in Syracuse. A local magazine's readers voted Mark's Country station as the best radio station in their city. Referring to his over four-dozen awards, George Brooks stated, "They call me a jazz czar or something (*laughs*). It's very flattering." Reverence even extends to others in the media. When he was invited into the home team's broadcast booth for an in-game interview, their play-by-play announcer called Rick "an exceptional human being" and referenced his many Sportscaster of the Year awards. During Brent's appearance on an out-of-town sports show, the host read off a litany of Brent's many job duties, past and present. Weewo's own colleagues paid him a lasting tribute by continuing his show after his departure, and during his last show, each praised him for the impact he had on them. Bill and Cameron received recognition of a different kind from local publications, each being included in an issue profiling the most eligible bachelors in their respective cities.

Rick had what may have been the best story of listener adoration. He once received a letter from a 12-year old girl, asking for an autographed picture and saying that she wanted to become a sportscaster because of him. He felt so honored by this young listener's words that not only did he send her the picture, he also invited her and her family to a SkyFish game as his guests. Rick bought them each a baseball cap, gave them media guides, and chatted with them in the broadcast booth before the game. "This girl was like she was... (with) the Beatles or something," Rick said. "I was like you've gotta be kidding me (*laughs*). If I could get that reaction everyday from somebody, it'd be amazing." She also gave him a painting with his name and the team logo. "I've been in

this for 25 years,” Rick marveled. “I’ve never gotten a letter like that before... you know, you make an impact.”

### *Crossing the Line*

Although the listening audience may treat a radio personality with great respect, they will let the personality know when he/she has abused that privilege with a certain comment. Vanessa said that she took some heat from listeners when she announced that singer Rick James had died, “but the good news is I just saved a bunch of money on my car insurance by switching to GEICO!” People called both to praise and criticize her; later, her boss came in and told her that the joke was in poor taste. Another time, she criticized the lifestyle of an overweight celebrity who had just passed away, causing a flood of angry phone calls.

Mark told me a story about crossing the line with a sponsor. While working at a Rock station, he followed Jackson Browne’s “Lawyers in Love” by joking, “I always worry about lawyers in love because that means they’re at home frumping up a whole ‘nother generation of lawyers.” An attorney whose commercials Mark produced complained to his boss. A caller to Bill’s talk show at the diner asked Bill and the congressman to address previous comments they had made about bottled water. During the next break, Bill noted that this listener had held onto their casual comment for three months.

Listeners may also signal their disapproval at more innocuous aspects of a performance. Chris Williams said that a listener once asked him to identify more pitches (e.g. fastball, curveball, slider) as part of his play-by-play. The request motivated him to get better at recognizing the pitches from his vantage point in the broadcast booth. Chris

also cited an unusual case of feedback from a SkyFish coach, who asked him why he always describes the uniforms for both teams. The coach did not understand because he was watching video while listening to the broadcast. Therefore, his was an atypical case in which he did not need the descriptive information.

Weewo said that when he started to shift the music on his college radio show away from the Latin music he originally played, “Some people made it a point to let me know, ‘Hey bro, you selling out or something? All you’re playing is pop music now (*laughs*)? You’re not playing any Latin music or any kind of independent type of music!’”

The on-air personality, as the public face of his/her radio station, may also have to deal with listener complaints about the station and aspects over which the personality has no control. These complaint calls are common to announcers of all formats, and vary in nature. George received a call about problems with one of FM University’s repeater transmitters. Vanessa took a call from a listener who complained about the same songs being played over and over again on her Urban station. Mark received a complaint call from a female country music listener about a Taylor Swift song; the listener stated that Swift couldn’t sing. After finishing his conversation with the listener, Mark pondered, “And yet, we never get a call saying Toby Keith or George Strait can’t sing... We only pick on our female artists.”

### *Fulfilling the Commercial Imperative*

The main purpose of a performance of on-air personality is to attract and retain an audience. This imperative is particularly true within the world of commercial radio, where big ratings lead to big revenue, but it is also true in noncommercial radio. The

presence of an audience makes it easier to attract underwriters, and a loyal listener base is necessary for those times when a noncommercial station needs to raise listener donations to stay afloat. Regardless of status or format, announcers must promote the station, recognize the presence of their audience, and pay close attention to understanding what their listeners want. They hope that their listeners will appreciate their efforts and support the station in the many ways that one can do so.

### *Promoting*

As part of the larger team that makes up a radio station, announcers must promote both themselves and the station to keep people listening. Josh Grosvent showed me the T-shirt that he and Hunter Scott would be selling at the New York State Fair. In keeping with *The Show's* sense of humor, the T-shirt featured the summer's catchphrase, "YOLO" ("You Only Live Once"), above a silhouette of an obese woman with a mullet hairstyle, holding a corn dog on a stick. Weewo had a promotional poster for his show displayed at his college's student center. As he joked on the air, "I like self-promotion. All day, every day."

Vanessa made frequent mentions of the major summer promotion at her Urban station, a "sticker spotter" contest where station staffers would give money to listeners who had station bumper stickers on their vehicles if they knew the "phrase that pays." Vanessa also promoted a contest on her station's website in which listeners could win free music downloads, and a weekly station appearance at a high school football game. Mark Nelson had his daily giveaway to promote, as well as a text contest for concert tickets. Cameron promoted the upcoming revelation of the lineup for his Pop station's Christmas concert, as well as the text contest for Justin Bieber tickets.

Promotions often link the station with advertisers. Hunter and Josh made sure to give frequent mentions of the new sponsor of their call-in line – a barbeque establishment – when the sponsorship began in the middle of my week with them. They also had a beer sponsor for their text line. Brent Axe finished each hour of his sports talk show with a beer-sponsored preview of “What’s on Tap” for the next hour. Brian Winter and Bob James read promotional announcements for a sponsored small business seminar during their newscasts.

Advertisers are usually the driving forces behind station promotional events as well, so they must be mentioned in tandem with the event. Whenever he mentioned the call-in line sponsor, Hunter also noted an upcoming appearance at the same barbeque establishment. Cameron promoted the “haunted hayride” appearance he would have later that week. Drew Kelly frequently promoted an upcoming broadcast he had at a local RV dealership, as well as a text contest sponsored by a local car wash. Vanessa, Hunter, and Josh also had to work in the prerecorded announcements from their colleagues at Rita’s Italian Ice and Tim Horton’s, respectively, and give their own promotional mentions of the events. Mark mentioned station bus trips to concerts, sponsored by a local charter bus company, and events at Burger King, a local casino, and a furniture store.

Radio stations also promote themselves by associating with community events. Mark occasionally told his listeners about a charity race for which his Country station was a sponsor, as well as a community festival that featured concerts by station artists. Bill Anderson promoted community educational events sponsored by WURD, and even interviewed the station’s president one morning to help spread awareness. The announcers also promote each other. Even if they are poking fun at absent team members

on the air, the intent is to increase name recognition so that listeners will tune in for other shows on the station. Bill promoted other hosts on WURD, most notably the show that came on after his, so that the audience would continue listening after his show ended. Weewo did the same for WHIP. Cameron naturally promoted the concert to be given by his temporary teammate, the pop singer he interviewed.

Rick Hayes did promotional work for the SkyFish during his broadcasts. He promoted the team's next homestand, and also encouraged fans to vote for their favorite players for the All-Star Game. However, in promoting the team, he also promoted the broadcasts because fans knew that if they could not make it to a home game, they could still listen to Rick and Chris Williams calling the game on the radio.

### *Recognizing the Audience*

Announcers must not become so involved in a performance of on-air personality that they fail to recognize the unseen listeners for whom they perform. As Brent explained, "When you're in there for four hours, you kinda have to remind yourself that people are tuning in and out and it's not just you in a room. It's the most basic thing in radio, but it's also something you forget. You are talking to a lot of people." Announcers often take the time to thank people for listening. As George Brooks frequently told his FM University audience, "It works better when you're on the other side of this."

On-air personalities frequently recognize their audience by reminding them that they can be a part of the show; they give out phone numbers, e-mail addresses, or Twitter accounts. Bill and Brent let their listeners know that they wanted to hear what people thought of the topics they had covered that day. They also recognized the contributions their audience made to their performances. Bill and his guests thanked callers for their

insights. Reading some listeners' tweeted predictions of NBA draft picks' careers, Brent replied, "You guys got the snark on today." Like Brent, Hunter and Josh asked their listeners to share their opinions on certain topics discussed on the program. Drew and Ali read listener birthdays on the air each morning.

Announcers also recognize their audiences when listeners win prizes. If the winning call itself is not played back on the air, or the contest required a different activity than calling, the winner's name is read on the air. Music station announcers often mention the name of a listener who called for a request, as Drew and Ali did frequently throughout "Flashback Friday." Cameron mentioned listeners who had used Twitter to request songs or just to say hello. Sometimes he recognized whole fan bases, introducing a One Direction song by asking, "Where are my Directioners? Oh, there you are. Sweet." Dan Cas saluted the cafeteria workers at one of his college's residence halls for playing *The Weewo Show* live over their sound system.

Vanessa frequently offered "shout-outs" to people listening at work. When the Jay-Z/Alicia Keys hit "Empire State of Mind" was in heavy rotation, Vanessa would give "shout-outs" to various cities in New York. She then got phone calls from former New Yorkers who appreciated the recognition of their hometowns. Laura Donaldson recognized the intelligence of her classical music audience by presupposing their knowledge of certain famous works when she talked about them on the air. However, she acknowledged that the things she says have to be accessible to everyone, so she cannot be condescending toward listeners who love the music but do not know anything about it.

Hunter also recognized his listeners by cautioning them about some of the more irritating pieces of audio that he and Josh were about to criticize. He apologized to the

audience before playing the bad national anthem singer, and also before a Ryan Lochte-inspired parody of “Call Me Maybe.” Weewo warned listeners not to be offended by a particularly edgy story he was about to tell.

Bill’s former station, WURD, emphasized its importance to Philadelphia’s African-American community. This recognition was evident in the station’s slogan: “On-air, online, and in the community.” Bill noted that it was a source of tension within the radio station because some hosts felt that the station should only concern itself with the African-American audience. He estimated that it was likely a 50-50 split between these announcers and other hosts (like Bill) who felt that the station should welcome all listeners without anyone feeling uncomfortable that the content is not meant for them.

Weewo and Dan understood the importance of being involved in their campus community. Weewo asked one of his guests to tell the audience about upcoming events that the guest’s African dance group had scheduled. Weewo stated that he liked to attend various events on campus, not only to promote the show, but also to establish to possible listeners that he is out among them on a regular basis. “I don’t want to live under a rock and not know what’s going on my own campus, so I can’t just stay in class or in the station and that’s it and back to my dorm to sleep,” he explained. Dan added that they do not have to know everything happening on their campus, cautioning, “It’s important to be super-involved in the community, but not forcibly.”

The most noteworthy way of recognizing an audience is to give them a nickname. There are examples among audiences of nationally syndicated radio programs, such as Rush Limbaugh’s (1992) “dittoheads,” (p. 295) or *Opie & Anthony’s* “pests” (“Howard Stern Admits,” 2006). In the course of my observations, I found an instance at the local

level as well. Hunter and Josh salute members of *The Show's* audience – individually or generally – by calling them “Show Bros” or “Show Girls.” Josh bragged, “They love it. They’re loyal to us. I mean it’s the same element as the ‘KISS Army,’” referring to the devoted fans of legendary rock band KISS. Hunter agreed, “I think that’s exactly what it is... I mean the whole thing about most things that work is inclusion. I mean WWE does a fine job with that. I think KISS is probably the best example of that.” By feeling the common bond of being “Show Bros” or “Show Girls,” *The Show's* audience becomes an imagined community (Douglas, 2004).

An announcer’s appreciation for his/her listeners is quite evident on the last show he/she performs for them. At the end of Weewo’s final show on WHIP, he took the time to thank his listeners for their support over the years, noting that in college radio it is tough to convince people to care about a show. As mentioned in Chapter Three, Bill Anderson and Brent Axe left their respective talk shows late in 2012, a few months after my observations of their programs. In a YouTube video announcing his departure from WURD, Bill thanked his supporters repeatedly. On Brent’s last show at The Score 1260, he thanked the people who listened and called over the years, even saluting particular regular callers by name. Weewo, Bill, and Brent each thanked their listeners through their social media outlets as well.

#### *Understanding What the Listeners Want*

In addition to recognizing his/her audience, an announcer must be able to understand what the listeners want from the performance. Announcers take the feedback they have received and change aspects of the performance to satisfy audience expectations. For instance, Drew noted that his station has an audio logger program that

records their show, just as Brian and *The Show's* stations do. However, Drew and Ali do not post podcasts of their show because there was a lack of listener interest in having a downloadable version of *Drew and the Crew*.

Radio stations and their announcers operate on the principle that there is a target audience, and that their wants and needs should be addressed first and foremost. Some argue that it is this strategy that explains why Rock stations are so overwhelmingly hypermasculine in their presentations to serve an idealized male target listener (Crider, in press; Goodlad, 2003; Wollman, 1998). Josh countered that *The Show's* listenership is nearly 50-50 in terms of gender, so they address the needs of female listeners as well. "They like to hear what their guys are thinking about, that guys are talking about," he declared, "and everyone is so afraid of talking sexuality or man-type things with women, but they like it just as much as guys do." Hunter added that guests such as the vendor of adult-themed products for women appeal to female listeners because they are reading books like *50 Shades of Grey*, so there is a desire to talk about similar material. Both Hunter and Josh cited the conflict between their desire to be mass appeal and the hypermasculine approach of their 95X colleagues as one of the many reasons why they left the station.

The target audience is not just a collection of demographic categories, but also localities. Drew said that they give a lot of attention to Danville, Pennsylvania, the county seat of tiny Montour County, located to the east of their primary municipalities of Sunbury, Selinsgrove, and Lewisburg. Despite its small population, it is home to the massive Geisinger medical system, and therefore very affluent; Geisinger turns to 94KX for charity fundraising. In addition, the Sunbury market's proximity to Penn State

University necessitates discussion of news events surrounding the school, such as the Jerry Sandusky scandal.

Cameron said that he sometimes has to balance the interests of the audience with the interests of a record label. A rabid fan base may want to hear a particular song that is not part of the label's strategy for that particular pop artist. He also understands that he has listeners who only care about what he can do for them:

There's always that, where the kids are, "What's in it for me, Cameron? What can I get from you at this moment in time?" And I just deal with it and I take it for what it's worth, and it's no skin off of my teeth... I don't want to say nobody really cares about you, but people definitely care about getting tickets to see Justin Bieber *way* more than they care about hearing what I have to say about anything, and I get that and it's fun, and I love playing that angle... and then it comes off (as) "I understand why people aren't calling me to talk to me. You're calling me to talk to me about Justin Bieber tickets, aren't you? Yeah, okay, so okay, forget about what Cameron has to say." (*Kid voice*) "Oh, I'm sorry, Cameron."

Vanessa noted that when she first started working at her current Urban station, her air shift did not have any giveaways, so she needed to build an audience on her own. Once she started to get good ratings, the contests were added to her show. During one random off-air conversation, Vanessa told me that the Country format knows how to treat its fans. When I told Country announcer Mark what she said, he agreed, adding, "The interaction on all levels is so much better than any other format... We have the ability to (treat people better)." He said that there are many more opportunities for country music artists to interact with both radio announcers and listeners through public "meet-and-greet" appearances. From his experiences of working in other formats, Mark believes that record companies are too overprotective of their artists in other genres of music. He also stated that Country listeners are more passionate about the music, so although his station

does think in terms of what the listener may want, “we look at it from a proactive perspective, rather than a reactive stance.”

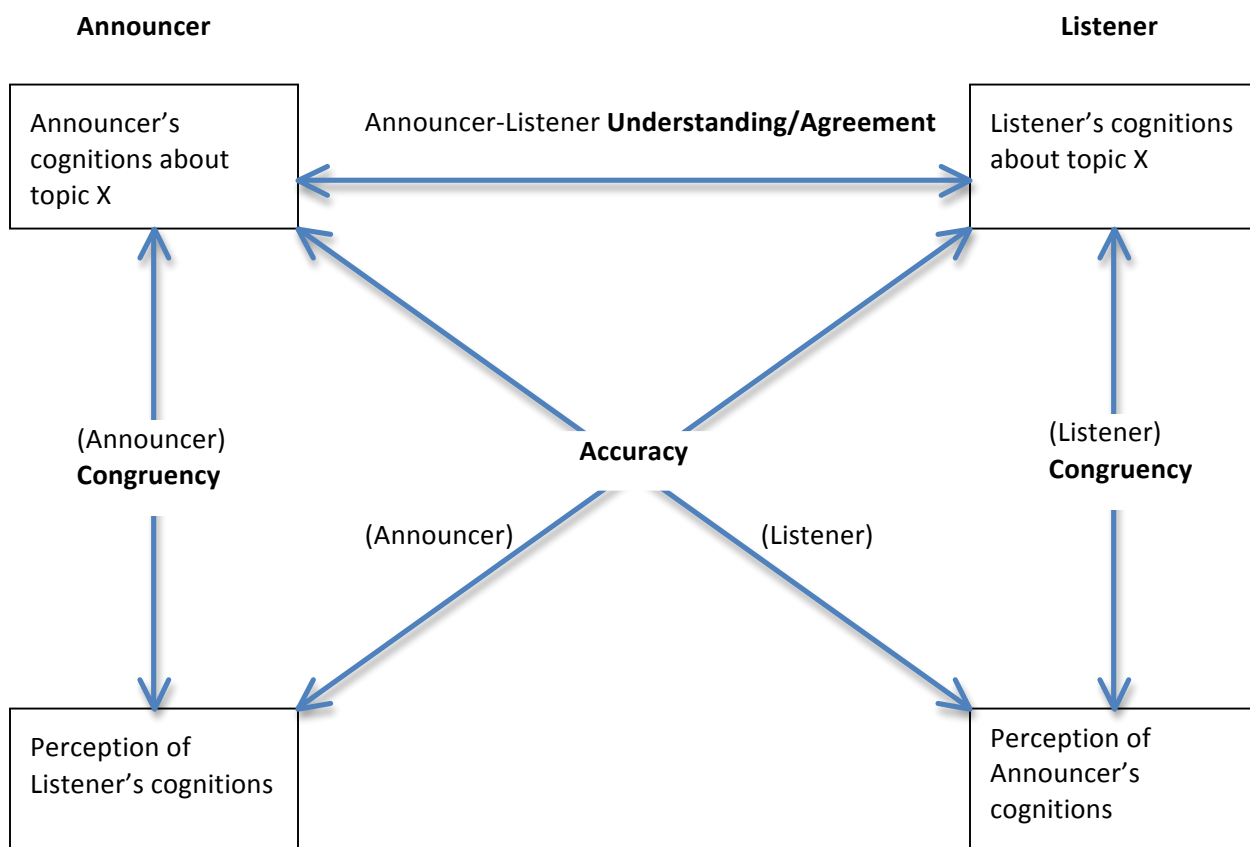
An announcer may not always choose to abide by listener feedback; in fact, some announcers attack unwanted criticism on the air. After a long segment about television show themes and the movie *Abraham Lincoln: Vampire Hunter*, Brent received a complaint about devoting too much time to popular culture over sports. He chose to call the listener out on the air for it, bringing up all of the sports-related things he had done on the show that day, which the listener then admitted to missing. Brent later told me that such criticism bothers him: “We’re not robots here. This is supposed to be fun, you know? Yes, I’m a big sports fan and that’s what I do and it’s a sports show, okay, but sports fans watch TV too. They watch movies.”

Understanding what the listeners want is an inexact science. Josh said that there are times when he and Hunter do something that they think the audience will love, but the response is minimal; conversely, there are times when a random topic that comes to them in the moment will result in a flood of text messages. As is the case with the development of an on-air personality, the quest to determine what the listeners want to hear is forever ongoing. The overwhelming majority of radio stations broadcast 24 hours a day, 7 days a week, even if the station is not staffed all the time. Therefore, the need to deliver compelling content never stops. As George put it, “People flip that button or turn that knob, they want to hear somethin’.”

#### *Achieving Coorientation with Listeners*

Because there is always a need to attract and retain an audience, announcers constantly work on connecting with listeners through their performances of on-air

personality. McLeod and Chaffee's (1973) model of coorientation provides a helpful description of this process. Like any other human beings, radio announcers search for consensus with as many listeners as possible (Newcomb, 1953). Therefore, in preparing for each performance, whether they realize it or not, they deal with the three main variables involved in achieving coorientation: congruency, accuracy, and agreement/understanding. The coorientation measurement model (McLeod & Chaffee, 1973) applies to radio communication as seen below:



**Figure 8-1. The Coorientation Measurement Model Applied to Radio**

Announcers use audience feedback as a means toward improving the similarity of orientations about particular topics. They try to figure out which topics have salience and pertinence to the listeners. They seek to improve congruency by choosing material that

elicits the same response from listeners that it does from them. In their interactions with listeners, announcers try to improve accuracy and make sure that the listener's perception of him/her is what he/she believed it to be, thereby improving interactions and making repeated listening more likely. Agreement is not necessary; in fact, disagreements often make for livelier content, particularly in spoken-word formats. However, understanding of the listeners and what they perceive as important is critical, as noted in the previous section.

Often, the on-air activities that require recognition of the audience are based in improving congruency. Brent Axe opened one hour of his sports talk program by informing his listeners that he had no guests for the next hour, "so why don't you be my guest?" In doing so, he operated on the presumption that the audience was interested enough in the topics Brent had already discussed to want to call, tweet, or e-mail him. The owners of Cameron's Pop station set goals for their stations and personalities with regard to how many "likes" and comments they can get on their Facebook pages. Therefore, Cameron has to make conscious decisions to post material that will elicit the desired response from listeners. The efforts to improve congruency, therefore, are not only geared toward achieving coorientation with the listeners, but also the achievement of corporate mandates.

Working to improve understanding of what the listeners want also, in turn, improves accuracy. Years of experience in the business and with a particular show or station help in this regard. The announcer comes to get a better sense, through interaction and feedback, of what the listening audience wants out of the experience. It could be something as simple as placating the "what's in it for me" listeners. Cameron explained

that sometimes when he gets a lot of requests for a song from an active artist fan base, he uses the station's online stream to his advantage. His station has two very similar computerized playlists: one that plays over the air, and another that goes to the Internet. Usually, the only difference is in the commercials that are included on each playlist. One night while I was observing, Cameron replaced some of the commercials on the online stream playlist with an Adam Lambert song, making sure beforehand to send a Twitter alert to Lambert's fans to start listening to the station online. While the radio audience heard commercials, the Lambert song played on the online stream. "They got their song; I didn't jack up anything locally," said Cameron. "Now they're happy, and I'm happy."

How an on-air personality handles his/her interactions with individual listeners can often have a profound effect on achieving coorientation with the audience as a whole. Brent acknowledged that in hindsight, he should have perhaps treated some "bad callers" better. He had to walk a very fine line: be too belligerent and people may be turned off; go too far in the other direction and you sound like you do not have control of your own program. Bill Anderson was quick to tell a caller that he/she made an "excellent point," and like Brent, he always thanked the listener for calling. Such a positive interaction probably makes a big difference in the listener remaining loyal to the announcer.

Brent added that when he met listeners in person, a simple explanation could smooth over the roughest of differences:

There's been plenty of times where somebody will come up to me and say, "Well, you did this," and then I'll explain it to 'em and by the end of the conversation, they're like, "Oh, okay," or someone will come up to me and in some way, shape, or form either say they disagree with me or they don't like my show, and by the end of the conversation they're my best friend, you know?

A similar case occurs when people call the announcer to complain about something. During my observations, Vanessa, Mark Nelson, and George Brooks dealt with their complaint calls in a diplomatic manner. The problem may not be fixed immediately (or at all), but at least the listener knows that his/her concern has been addressed. Bill and the congressman super-served their complaint caller; after clarifying their original remarks about bottled water, Bill asked the congressman if he would look into the matter if it were brought to his office. The congressman was more than willing. Brian Winter added that responding to critical correspondence can also change a listener's opinion of a broadcaster: "People you respond to with an explanation usually back off, and say, 'Oh, thank you. I can't believe you actually got back to me.'"

Guests also must be diplomatic with callers. Those who are not will likely reflect poorly on the announcer. If they are elected officials, it also will not go over well with their constituents. The district attorney appearing on Bill's show gave examples of good and bad behavior in dealing with callers with dissenting opinions. He responded to one caller by saying politely, "I'll agree to disagree," but later implied that another caller was a friend of the man who had made an online threat against the DA. In both cases, Bill reacted visually in ways that either endorsed or denounced the DA's handling of the caller. Another of Bill's guests, "The Counselor," addressed caller inquiries in such a diplomatic, constructive manner that one caller suggested that "The Counselor" should have his own show.

When listener feedback has a direct effect on program content, the decisions to air or change such content are made with audience coorientation as the desired end. Ali Stevens said that she and Drew Kelly have tinkered with how much they talk about their

personal lives and their children on their morning show in response to occasional listener complaints. When listeners call in to add to a show topic and give their own comments, the announcer definitely feels like he/she is doing something right. Vanessa recalled one instance when she made an on-air remark about White men wearing shorts well after the time of year when the weather is appropriate for such attire. She immediately received several phone calls from listeners who told her that they had just seen someone fitting that description.

There was direct listener input in the content of Brent's show. He sometimes, in his words, "let the people decide" his Top-5 list topics. He solicited Top-5 topics from the audience on the last show of my week with him, eventually settling on a list of NBA draft failures. He also tried asking listeners to volunteer to take the producer's role in coming up with ten questions to ask Brent during "The Blind Side." Brent had no luck in getting a willing participant during the week of my observation. Listener input also drives the content of "Flashback Friday" on *Drew and the Crew*; they request the songs from the 1970s and '80s that get played. The listeners also contribute birthday requests. The traffic tips that Ali and Mark give often come from listeners. A listener informed Ali via text message about a painting project that slowed down a major bridge. Later in the week, a caller gave her updates on the closure of a major roadway. By comparison, Vanessa received a call about a backup, but chose not to mention it on the air, most likely because of a different station policy on such calls.

Even Laura Donaldson's classical music show sometimes has listener-driven content. On Wednesdays, she and the station's midday personality do an "all-request" show, driven mostly by e-mails from station members. Due to the massive size of the

station's music library, there is usually no request too obscure for them to play. The station even did a Labor Day weekend "countdown" of requested pieces. Laura raved about how it keeps things fresh and makes the station that much more approachable. Some announcers ask for their listeners' help whenever the opportunity presents itself. Hunter Scott asked for "fanboy" suggestions for *Star Trek*-related double entendres, and Josh Grosvent asked for listener feedback and possible names for a new sports-related segment.

Brian recalled an instance where listener feedback led to a change in how W-NEWS reported the story of a murdered prostitute. Initially, the anchors and reporters referred to the victim every time as either a prostitute or a similar term (e.g. "sex worker"). After listeners complained that such coverage degraded the woman, the news director decided that the announcers would no longer call her a prostitute the first time they referred to her. In this case, a simple change in language improved coorientation, and it is likely that the offended listeners appreciated being heard.

On a much smaller level, Brian has to achieve coorientation with individual listeners through interpersonal communication in order to produce a good news story. His contact for the farmer's market story was already familiar with his work (and had previous radio experience), so she told Brian that she trusted his judgment when it came to editing her story. As a result, they built off their prior work to achieve coorientation. Any time Brian works with official spokespeople, the status that W-NEWS has in the community is also helpful. In many cases, however, Brian is dealing with *potential* listeners rather than actual listeners, so he has to rely on the salience and pertinence of the story to enlist the assistance of potential interview subjects.

Loyal callers who say things like “great show” likely spur the announcer to think that he/she is doing a good job. One morning, Drew got a call from a listener in Brooklyn who was listening to 94KX online. The use of new technology to broaden the reach of the station was also a positive sign, and it probably led Drew to put the call on the air.

Weewo summed up the listener feedback he received for his college radio show: “I’ve heard both good and bad, but I really appreciate any type of feedback because it tells me what works and what doesn’t work, and even if it was negative, it tells me, ‘Well, at least someone’s listening.’”

Sometimes, achieving one-to-one coorientation through the mass medium of radio can pay off. Drew and Ali threw out an on-air personal request of sorts to their guest who was scheduled to speak about the local heritage festival. Knowing that the guest would be speaking about the bygone days of the coal industry, Drew wondered aloud if the guest would be bringing dynamite. Ali declared, “If you’re listening, bring dynamite!” When the guest arrived an hour or so later, he announced that per their request he brought “dynamite”; it was actually a road flare. The best example, however, came as a result of Hunter’s on-air rant about the quality of water at his station. A “Show Bro” who delivers bottled water happened to hear Hunter’s complaints, and dropped off a case of water at the station. After starting his next break, Hunter happily exclaimed, “My rant got us water and a card!”

Although moments of actual one-to-one communication through the airwaves are rare, announcers and most listeners are conditioned to believe that a radio performance is a one-on-one conversation. Therefore, coorientation can occur between an on-air personality and the mass audience, and also between the personality and individual

listeners. In the next chapter, I will discuss how announcers resolve the social distance between themselves and their listeners by making their perceived one-on-one interaction as genuine and relatable as possible.

## CHAPTER 9: THE PROBLEM OF SOCIAL DISTANCE

A radio announcer seeks coorientation with a listening audience through his/her performance of on-air personality. There are a number of ways in which the announcer tries to form this bond, but most have to do with reducing the perceived social distance between the personality and the listener. The announcer must deal with the mystification (Goffman, 1959) that listeners attach to the personality. The announcer must also deal with the internal struggle to put forth a personality that is “real” and relatable, while at the same time separate from the self that the announcer has off the air.

In this chapter, I discuss the ways in which a radio announcer handles these struggles and tries to reconcile the performance aspects of his/her job, the on-air identity he/she has created, and the obligation to connect with an audience. I explain how the announcer communicates seemingly contradictory opinions of self-image, playing up the importance of his/her job but also being self-deprecating, all the while claiming that what the listener hears on the radio is what the on-air personality is like “in real life.” I also give examples of how announcers relate to their listeners, often by sharing personal details, and consider the necessary limits to how much the announcer can reveal.

### *Communicating Self-Image*

American society places a great deal of value in being a professional entertainer. We learn to respect and look up to the people who make us laugh, make us think, and bring us the world on a daily basis. As such, Goffman (1959) indicated that we tend to attach some degree of mystification to a radio personality, particularly because the listener in most instances cannot see the radio personality as he/she does his/her job. The movie *American Graffiti* provides a great example. The voice of Wolfman Jack emanates

from car radios throughout the film, as the main characters wonder what their favorite disc jockey is really like. In the end, Curt (played by Richard Dreyfuss) learns that Wolfman Jack is just a regular person, sitting alone in a darkened studio on the outskirts of town, eating popsicles (Fong-Torres, 1998).

The announcers whom I observed communicate their self-image in ways that are often contradictory. They understand the power that comes with speaking into a microphone to thousands (or hundreds of thousands) of people at a time. They enjoy dropping names of celebrities with whom they get to speak as one of the perks of their profession. They may even willingly assist in the mystification brought upon them by listeners. However, they are also quick to resort to self-deprecation, downplaying the importance of their job, and making it clear to everyone that they are more dysfunctional than “normal” people.

#### *Emphasizing the Stature of the Job*

In many cases, an announcer will try to reflect the great social importance of his/her job. Referring to the impact he had made on the young listener he met, Rick Hayes declared, “That’s why I never take it for granted. You never know who you’re gonna touch or who’s listening.” His play-by-play partner, Chris Williams also emphasized that a new listener could tune in at any time, and it could be a player’s relative listening anywhere in the country. Mark Nelson recognized that even in his small market, “The number of people I have the potential to influence (or upset) is substantial.”

Brian Winter pointed out that even when he is anchoring on a weekend, he is reaching a comparable listenership to when he works on a weekday. He is awed at the massive number of listeners who hear his voice on a daily basis:

Every time I think about that, it kind of scares me a little. You don't feel like when you're sitting in a studio that anyone is listening to you. I actually get very nervous when I have to speak in front of people. I'm not good at public speaking. I never have been, but I'm never nervous when I go on the air for the most part because it doesn't feel like there are hundreds of thousands of people (listening).

Reflecting on the water delivery that resulted from his on-air rant, Hunter Scott called it "weird" to think that so many people listen to *The Show* when they are broadcasting within what he considers a "bubble." Josh Grosvent added that they take the responsibility seriously:

There is a power to it, and I like to use that power positively as well, you know, to make sure that people know that we're pro-gay, we're pro-big girls... skinny girls, fat guys, little guys. We don't judge, and we want to use that power to our benefit, and to let people know that hey, we're all people. We need to love each other, and I think that it's deeper, it's big... it's a big responsibility. I don't like to get too political on the air, but by the same token, we do have a responsibility to kind of be a voice of the people, and we try to do that, you know?

Vanessa sees a responsibility to try to counter some of the more negative images of African-American culture that come from her station's music. "I think that in between all the ignorance (*laughs*) that's played," she stated, "if you can drop some enlightenment in between, then it doesn't balance out, but it allows people to know that there are two, you know, two levels of this thing that we do." Vanessa was also quick to point out that her big ratings shatter the myth that people do not listen to Urban stations during the workday. Her ratings are better than those of her station's morning show, and First Lady Michelle Obama appeared on that show during the week I was observing at the station. Part of the responsibility that goes with having such a loyal audience is the ability to call on them in times of need. Drew Kelly was quick to point out the charity work that 94KX

does for the United Way and Geisinger. Mark Nelson noted his station's "radiothon" that raised \$400,000 for St. Jude Children's Research Hospital.

Referring back to their broadcast during the 9/11 attacks, Drew and Ali Stevens noted that they had become a part of people's memories of the day. They also recognized that they were part of some of their listeners' happier moments as well. Ali brought up a listener who was pregnant at the same time Ali was. Drew concluded, "I definitely think we've benchmarked a lot of people's lives with our events too: 'I remember when Drew's daughter was being born,' and things like that, so that's the kind of stuff that is to me radio gold, and if somebody can carry that with them for years and years and years, how can you question the loyalty of that listener?"

Brent Axe acknowledged the importance of his job when he announced that he would be leaving The Score. Such a time is perfect for reflection and recognition of the high value placed on a person's work. Although his audience was much smaller, Weewo still recognized the importance of the job, stating in his final show that *The Weewo Show* would continue because he wanted to "give back" by creating opportunities for interested college students to be on the radio.

*Name-dropping.* Because radio is seen as such an important medium, important people gravitate to radio announcers in the interest of publicity or the common thread of being entertainers. These and other chance encounters also become part of a radio announcer's attempt to emphasize his/her importance. Mark frequently brought up the various country music stars that he met through working in radio. Often, he would talk about them on the air: he talked about chatting with Alan Jackson at a concert he just attended, and he talked about his association with Gwen Sebastian, a former contestant

on the NBC singing competition *The Voice*. Mark was not the only announcer I observed to openly discuss crossing paths with a celebrity. After mentioning a European basketball scout that he knows, Bill Anderson threw in a random on-air story about the time he played pick-up basketball against future NBA superstar Dirk Nowitzki. Cameron introduced a Bridget Mendler song by referring to an interview he did with the Disney Channel star.

Sometimes, the announcers slip their connections into the performance in subtle ways. Among the brief produced pieces that welcomed listeners back to *Wake Up With Bill* were messages recorded by Rev. Al Sharpton, boxing champion Bernard Hopkins, and President Obama. After the latter message played, Bill turned on his microphone and coyly stated, “Thank you, Mr. President.” Cameron tweeted to Justin Bieber and Taylor Swift his Halloween costume idea for them: Dressing as competing teams from the 1980s Nickelodeon show *Double Dare*. He later told me that Swift panned his suggestion.

Off the air, announcers were just as forthcoming about the famous people they have met. Bill told me a couple of times during my week with him that Ron Howard had just brought a film crew to WURD as part of a documentary he was making. George Brooks talked about meeting legendary jazz performer Dave Brubeck; sometimes in the local magazine columns that he writes, he will mention when a famous singer listened to his show or offered compliments. Laura Donaldson landed an interview with famed violinist Itzhak Perlman during my week with her, and she also shared with me that she attended Julliard with noted pianist Van Cliburn.

Mark told me off the air about meeting Taylor Swift, and how nice a person she is. He showed me a picture that he had taken of himself with Carrie Underwood, and

disclosed that at one point, he had Brad Paisley's phone number. He also had a good "war story" about dining with Baseball Hall of Famer Jim Palmer at a Baltimore Orioles media event, and having to reveal that he was a Pittsburgh Pirates fan, much to Palmer's chagrin. Mark explained that he likes the opportunity to develop relationships with up-and-coming country music artists:

There are times where I see people winning awards for the first time, and it's like I start to tear up a little bit, 'cause it's like, oh, it's so great to see them finally get (recognition)... Even to see Brad Paisley now, you know, I look forward to seeing him and saying hi and getting to share a few words with him every... maybe once or twice a year.

Cameron also mentioned meeting Taylor Swift; he and Mark told similar stories about her post-concert interactions with young fans. Cameron told me about meeting professional wrestler John Cena, and interviews he did with Swift and Demi Lovato; he also noted that Carly Rae Jepsen posted his video treatment of "Call Me Maybe" to her website. Cameron expressed his hesitance to bring up an unflattering story about Justin Bieber on the air, stating, "We've got an awesome situation going with this kid." As we chatted before a broadcast, Rick mentioned that he met Bill Cosby when he was a student at the University of Massachusetts.

*Mystification.* Through these mentions of celebrity ties, radio announcers may add to the social distance between themselves and their audience. However, there are other ways that they intentionally or unintentionally add to the mystification attached to them by their listeners. Sometimes, it is visual. During their promotional appearance at the bar, Hunter and Josh were situated in a DJ booth that sat atop a steep staircase, overlooking the dance floor. They were literally above the other people in the bar; in order to chat with listeners, they needed to descend to the listeners' level. The window that separates

the on-air studio (the front) from the hallway is a see-through barrier that enhances mystification when outsiders peer in, as was the case with the visitors to Mark's "fishbowl." Bill's image on the side of an apparel store makes him larger-than-life.

A common tactic used by announcers that increases mystification is the use of a fake on-air name. Hunter, Drew, and Ali all use fake last names. Vanessa and "Weewo" are fake names. Cameron only uses his first name on the air. "Dan Cas" uses his real first name and a shortened version of his last name. Part of the reason is to keep their personal lives private, but it also creates a literal separate self that is performed for the job. Drew Kelly is only "Drew Kelly" at work or work-related functions; when he is at home, he is not "Drew Kelly," unless he decides to post something to Facebook or Twitter. Mark said that a lot of people do not understand that many announcers use fake names; he, however, does not. Mark explained that when he first started in radio, his family and friends were about the only people listening, so there was no point in using a different name. However, in his profile picture on the station's website, he wears sunglasses, so there is still a small element of mystery at work. Cameron and Weewo both related themselves to brand names, getting themselves the most attention possible so as to help both their "brand" and the brands of their stations. During an off-air discussion, Weewo recalled learning in one of his classes that people change their names as a way to gain power.

The kids at Cameron's live broadcast recognized the change in social standing that comes with being on the radio. A lot of them asked to be on the radio, and Cameron willingly obliged, although some of them were a little intimidated. Kids still want to be on the radio; they still get excited about being on the radio. Some of the teenagers even cracked jokes about their Halloween costumes. Long after the experience was over, they

will never forget the DJ who let them be on the radio. In turn, Cameron got hugs and high-fives. At one point, he turned to me and laughed, “I’m a minor celebrity!”

Some announcers acknowledged that the nature of their performance could hide personal flaws. Brian was not the only announcer to admit to shyness when it comes to public speaking. George, who frequently speaks to community groups, said that he does not relish public speaking, adding, “You can kinda hide a little bit behind the mic.” As Bill and I chatted on the air about my research, I alluded to Kruse’s (2012) article about “The Fabulous Sports Babe” and her struggles to adhere to the persona she created for herself. Bill admitted that he had seen both sides of the struggle during his years in radio, although he later joked that he was trying to get his own page on the Internet Movie Database and Wikipedia. Vanessa seeks a middle ground between anonymity and overexposure. She aspires to be a regional celebrity, so that people will recognize her in the local grocery store, but she can go on vacation without anyone knowing her. She also said that being so accessible on social media was a negative in that it takes away the mystery of being a disc jockey.

Having some degree of mystification in an on-air performance does not come without problems. Following his discussion of threats against the local district attorney, Bill declared off the air that people who use freedom of speech as a defense for such behavior have never been threatened themselves. He pointed out that there is a difference between “Bill sucks on the radio; I wish he was dead,” and “Bill sucks on the radio; somebody kill him.” Laura told me that she once had a stalker, who showed up at her station one night, claiming that she had invited him there for a sexual encounter. “Being in media is dangerous,” she concluded.

*De-mystification*

As such, many radio announcers take steps to de-emphasize their importance and stature, engaging in a sort of de-mystification. A lot of this work occurs off the air. As they chatted before a game, Rick and the home team's play-by-play announcer joked that they needed to go "pretend to do something." When I asked Chris if the SkyFish made him and Rick produce video material at their stadium, Chris joked, "No, we're not on the video board at all. We're not important enough." As we watched an interview with Rick running on the video board, Rick cracked jokes about how bad he looked: "I am not meant to be in high (definition), that's for sure." A common refrain of announcers is to joke that they do not have a "real job." As Chris put it, "With patience and time, anyone could do this," although he added it would be a matter of degrees.

George's humility is a great example of how announcers downplay their importance. Referring to the wonderful compliments that he receives, he stated, "I'm a DJ. I didn't save anybody. I'm not a physician, didn't give them a new heart, and I'm not a lawyer, didn't save them from the electric chair, just a DJ, but they seem to note something friendly." Cameron had similar thoughts: "I get to come in, press buttons, listen to music, answer the phone, and a paycheck shows up." He added, "It's not rocket science." Dan said that when guests come in and get excited about what he does, "In the back of my head, I'm like, 'I'm really not doing that much.'" Vanessa sighed about her "boring day" on the job. Brent joked that ten years from now, he will be sitting in a café, drinking coffee, and waiting for people to notice him.

Announcers also crack jokes about the quality of their programs. Shortly after my arrival at 94KX, Drew remarked that his was the least professional program I would

observe. He later introduced me to a guest by saying that I was there to research “horrible morning shows.” Responding to an erroneous headline in the local paper, Drew said, “I make about 100 (mistakes) a morning on the radio for all the world to hear.” Bill introduced me to a guest by saying, “He’s finding out how dysfunctional we are.” Talking about how unorganized his show was in the beginning, Weewo joked that some people would say that the show is still like that now. Cameron responded to Taylor Swift’s putdown of his Halloween costume idea by stating, “This is why she’s the professional, and I’m not (*laughs*).”

In addition, announcers will see themselves as atypical, but in a self-deprecating way. Vanessa alluded to her “not normal” hairstyle, and also speculated that she probably has “adult ADD.” After recording his remark about “whipped cream, a helicopter, and three rubber bands,” Cameron said, “People probably think I’m the biggest dork on the planet.” After his intern agreed, he replied, “I probably am.” After recording a voicetrack in which he played off of the title of Carrie Underwood’s song “Blown Away,” Mark kidded, “How cheesy can you get?”

De-mystification also occurs on the air. In the midst of a rant about television critics, Brent realized that when he talked about sports, he was no different than they are. He concluded, “Critics suck... let’s move on.” As he and his producer searched Twitter for soccer updates, Brent quipped, “This is just enthralling radio.” He also likely brought himself down a peg or two with his frequent attempts to sing during his show. After singing the old New York Telephone “Reach Out and Touch Someone” jingle, Brent joked that an entire generation just asked what he was talking about, then added, “Every generation says that when they listen to this show.” Bill remarked that he could not use

his name for his website because there was a more popular Bill Anderson (an old-time country music star), who grabbed it first. Referring to my presence one morning, he remarked, “Dave is having his research set back ten years.” He also joined in the jokes about his apparel store billboard, saying, “I’ve got my fake model cheesy grin.” Weewo referred to himself on the air as “The Triple Threat Kid,” but often joked that he had yet to figure out what the nickname meant.

Throughout my week with *The Show*, Hunter and Josh made frequent on-air jokes about an embarrassing picture of Hunter taken during their appearance at the bar. They tweeted the picture repeatedly as well, providing a visual de-mystification to counter the visual mystification they had at their event. Hunter later explained to me, “It was funny, it was ridiculous, and I deserved to get all the shit that I took from it, so it doesn’t really bother me.” While trying to convince the spokeswoman from the local zoo to give them an exclusive on the identity of a new animal, Hunter argued, “Nobody listens to this show!” Obviously, as evidenced by Hunter and Josh’s previous comments, people do listen to *The Show*, but this fact went out the window in the interest of getting the spokeswoman (and listeners’) support. Hunter was a little more blunt earlier in the week; when Josh asked if they were professionals, Hunter replied, “We’re two idiots who got a radio show.”

Drew made a similar joke at the end of one program, telling the audience, “Our apologies that it was an awful radio program.” He also kidded that he and Ali are not smart enough to do political discussions on their show. Dan declared on the air that *The Weewo Show* would be the biggest show in the world, and then remarked that he could

not have said that with less enthusiasm. Soon-to-be college graduate Weewo joked that he was leaving the show because he was getting old.

As part of mystification, people often perceive that radio personalities have a lifestyle that matches their elevated social status. These perceptions are often far from the truth; when perception meets reality, another form of de-mystification occurs. George said that women believed that he had money because he worked in radio. Bill added that the challenge of working in smaller media is that you are very visible, but not paid very well. His Philadelphia television colleagues could not understand when he was too tired to make it to an evening event because he had been awake since 4AM, nor could they understand why he could not go to \$1,000-a-plate functions. Hunter explained that the life of a Rock DJ is not what his listeners think it is: “People think we’re out there just raging 24 hours a day. You can’t. It’s impossible.”

#### *Claiming to Be the Same On the Air as Off*

Recognizing that their audience has attached mystification to them as a result of such errant perceptions, radio announcers often try to reduce the social distance that their listeners put between them. One method that announcers use to reduce social distance is to claim that their on-air personality is no different (or not really different) from who they are when the microphones are off. They express this similarity in a variety of ways. They identify themselves as “real” or human, and also tend to define themselves in opposition to people who are not “real,” such as television announcers.

Mark Nelson takes it as a compliment when people meet him and get to know him and think that he is just like he is on the radio “because that’s who I try to be. I try to be me.” Bill Anderson promoted his show with a recorded message in which he described

*Wake Up With Bill* as “me just being me.” Both Laura Donaldson and Cameron agreed with the importance of authenticity in an on-air performance, saying that listeners can tell if a personality is not genuine; Cameron went one step farther and said that he wants to be “tangible.” Vanessa said that she did not want to sound like a recording or some “cookie-cutter” version of an announcer.

Drew Kelly explained that he and Ali Stevens fill certain roles on *Drew and the Crew* because of who they are: Ali is a football fan, while Drew likes to shop for clothes. They can therefore talk about those respective topics, and they define their roles accordingly. These certain aspects of their identity become assets in the on-air performance. Cameron had similar thoughts when discussing his ad-libbing style; he said that when he was in school, he could not take notes verbatim, and he could not follow scripts when taking drama classes.

Vanessa said that she could never create a completely embellished on-air persona:

I’ve worked with people like that, and stuff like that, and I see that, but again that would... I’ll have to keep up with that shit in my head (*laughs*), you know, and I think I’m enough of a character that I don’t need to embellish it. Like, I’m sure when people listen to me and they hear me being so stupid about football, they think I’m overdoing it, but I’m really not (*laughs*). I’m really not, or if I’m like, “Yay, it’s raining! My garden is so happy,” I’m really happy about that, and I’m sure there’s somebody out there thinking, “She is not into gardening like that.”

Despite his occasional use of improvised details in live commercials, Bill agreed with Vanessa’s statement about the difficulty of keeping up with half-truths. In Bill’s on-air conversation with the young film actor (mentioned in Chapter Four), he stated that one reason why his radio performance differed from a movie performance was because most actors “aren’t just being themselves.”

Hunter Scott juxtaposed his current situation with when he started out as an on-air personality working for a Country station. He stated, “I always kinda felt like I was half of myself or a quarter of myself or whatever,” whereas now at Rock-formatted K-Rock, he is free to be irreverent. Josh Grosvent said that he and Hunter are the same on the air as on Twitter, and he added, “It’s what you’re gonna get if you meet me out having dinner with my family.” Rick Hayes felt the same way when it came to extending what he does during baseball broadcasts to Twitter. Weewo recalled that when he was trying to figure out his on-air persona, he wanted to take something from established personalities, but he also wanted to stay true to himself. Acknowledging that she may be getting too old for the Urban format, Vanessa said that she could easily move over to her cluster’s Urban Adult Contemporary station. “I would tone it down just a little bit, but I’d still definitely be me, and I think I’m ready for that transition,” she declared.

One way that Drew and Ali are able to “be themselves” on the air is by playing up their real-life status as a married couple. As Drew talked about watching the Olympics in 3D, Ali informed him that she would not let him watch women’s beach volleyball in 3D. Talking about the story of a woman who slapped her boyfriend for buying the wrong kind of beer, Drew asked women to call in if they would do something similar, then he told Ali, “And don’t you call.” Ali later joked that she would not slap him over beer, but she would over wine. When Drew remarked that he always finds his grill cover down the street after a storm, Ali threatened to put it in his bed. They even traded one-liners over their planned movie date to see *Ted*, and their recap the next day was very much what one would expect to hear from a husband and wife.

However, Drew and Ali also used their status as morning-show personalities to hold themselves up as examples of proper or improper relationship behavior. One morning, Ali read a list of five things women say or do that send men running. As she read them, Drew played a sound effect of either a bell or a buzzer to indicate which of those things Ali did or did not do. When he played the bell for saying how cute their kids would look, Ali kidded, "I didn't mean it when I said it to you." Upon completing the list, they hinted that they were good role models of what not to do. Later in the week, they did the same thing for a list of secret male insecurities.

Brian Winter repeatedly said that he and his fellow W-NEWS anchors and reporters would take steps to "humanize" themselves. In addition to taking responsibility for mistakes (as mentioned in Chapter Six), they also ad-lib in a way that turns straight news into something that will evoke feelings in the listener that these stories are happening to real people, and told by real people. Brian declared that doing so is far better than just reading the news at listeners. Brent Axe felt the same way about his sports talk show, saying that what he says on the air is exactly what he would say off the air. Ad-libbing sounds more genuine.

A key aspect that lends authenticity to a radio performance is the way an announcer sounds. Many of the announcers said that a conversational tone is critical to engaging with an audience. Rick said that in his line of work, it should sound "like two guys sitting at a bar talking about sports." Vanessa criticized a colleague who screams at 6AM on a weekend, saying that a good DJ can be energetic without resorting to phony screaming. Drew and Hunter certainly made their disdain for over-the-top announcers known in their comments in Chapter Six. Hunter contrasted himself with the big-voiced

announcers he started with in Pittsburgh: “Honestly, you’ve got voice guys around the country that have these deep, awesome voices, and they’re perfect, and people are accustomed to that... but the problem is there’s no humanity to it.”

However, many of the announcers I studied had slight differences in diction or inflection when speaking on the air, most likely also a product of their training. Although he wanted to sound conversational on the air, Weewo also admitted that delivery is crucial. Rick and Chris Williams projected their voices more when on the air, sounding louder than they did when speaking off the air. As noted in Chapter Four, Vanessa purposely sets her headphone volume at a high level, forcing her to speak louder on the air so she can hear herself. She played me a sample of her voiceover work, which included a variety of different inflections for different announcing situations, like commercials or video games. “If you sound like a DJ, they don’t want you,” she noted. When Mark spoke on the air, a hint of a twang came through in his voice, perhaps befitting of the Country format. Like Vanessa, he also spoke at a higher volume on the air. Cameron spoke faster on the air, perhaps because of the time constraints of his format. Bill even said that he was jealous of people with powerful radio voices.

As a veteran of nearly a half-century in radio, George Brooks embodies the idea of “being me” on the air. His delivery on and off the air is smooth and relaxed; his FM University colleague Laura called it “folksy.” As George put it, “They can’t say, ‘Well, he’s two-faced. He’s this way, and I met him outside. He’s not that way on the air, and he’s not a good person...’ so if you think I’m bland or whatever (*laughs*), I’ll be bland tomorrow, the next year, you know?” Ali showed a similar defiance, stating that she is

not going to change because of listener perceptions. Brent used a *Popeye* reference to make the same point: “I am what I am. You like it or you don’t.”

### *Criticizing Television Announcers*

The various announcers I observed had a tendency to define themselves as real and human by defining themselves in opposition to television announcers. Hunter and Josh constantly made jokes about the local television morning news show they watched during commercial breaks. They laughed at a fencing demonstration being given because of the popularity of the sport during the Olympics. Hunter called it “television gold.” He later asked if one of the anchors even knew who Snoop Dogg was. Later in the week, the same station showed a beach volleyball demonstration, causing even more derision.

Hunter and Josh also made fun of Matt Lauer from NBC’s *Today*.

Josh explained why they poke fun at television news announcers:

Because they take themselves so seriously! We’re in market... I think we’re 87 now. It’s somewhere in the 80s, low 80s, and TV news people believe that they’re in major markets all the time... I don’t know if it’s news directors, I don’t know if it’s whoever works in that world, but they’ve convinced them to act a certain way, and it’s not reflective of the community that you’re in.

Drew pointed out that television news people in his area tend to come from other cities, and therefore cannot pronounce local town names like Mocanaqua. Vanessa said that when television announcers react the same way to everyone, it is not genuine. She noted that when her idol Wendy Williams started her television talk show, it was bad at first because Williams was trying to do radio on television. “On radio it sounds good,” Vanessa said, “but on TV, you look like you don’t know what you’re doing.”

While listening to a news report voiced by a TV announcer, Brian declared that he does not like when they have to put television news people on the radio. He later

explained that television news announcers are trained to speak along with video, so they do not make enough of an effort to describe the scene. Brian also stated, “TV people tend to have a phonier way of speaking with their delivery, that they... it just seems to be, you know, (*fake TV voice*) ‘I have to sound like a TV broadcaster.’ There’s no broadcaster voice. There isn’t one, but lots of people think there is and they think they have to sound like it.” Mark agreed: “I tend to shake my head at anyone who ‘sounds’ like a radio or TV guy.”

Comparing them with Brian Williams, who often pokes fun at himself, Hunter commented, “There’s this thing about (TV) news people that they feel that they’re so much above the rest of us, and they really aren’t, and I think news would benefit if they’d be a little more loose... I’d much rather see somebody just be a person, instead of a talking head.” As someone who has worked in television and radio, Bill agreed with that assessment. He acknowledged that his television colleagues could not be themselves on TV, and that when they came on his radio show, they were free to cut loose a little bit. He said he was fortunate in that he got to be himself on television because he was brought in to give opinions. When he tried reading from a teleprompter, he felt he was no different from anyone else on television. Brent has also been on television in roles other than the simulcast of his radio show. He admitted to not having the “TV mechanics,” but added that television announcers tend to be stiff. Like Bill, Brent declared, “You brought me in for what I am, and that’s what I am. I’m excitable... We’re not talking about anything serious, so yeah, that’s how I am.”

The unifying theme of all of this criticism is that radio is a more effective and purer form of communication. Laura said that television announcers have a “crutch” that

comes with the visual, and that radio is more about projecting knowledge and emotion. George hinted that he could have moved into television during his early days, but he would have had a far different career. Although he would have made more money and retired at a younger age, he made it clear that he has had a more enjoyable career in radio, and that is why he does not mind continuing to do a show at age 79. As Brian put it, “In TV, you’ve gotta worry about graphics and makeup and all that bullshit. Radio is still hit the sounder, open the mic, and tell the world when it comes down to it.”

### *Relating to the Audience*

If an announcer wants his/her on-air personality to come off as real and genuine, then the personality must be relatable. The listeners must be able to see some similarity between their lives and what the radio personality tells them is his/her life. On-air personalities do this in a number of ways. Those who are on the air in their hometowns emphasize this fact. Many invoke references to popular culture that their target audience should understand. Announcers also convey emotion in different ways. For instance, sports announcers convey the excitement of big moments in a game; music announcers convey a love for music that they hope their audience shares. On-air personalities also become relatable by telling stories about their day-to-day lives.

Something as simple as a friendly demeanor and appreciative tone can make an on-air personality relatable to an audience. All of the announcers greeted their audiences in various ways during their shows. Amidst the frantic pace of the all-news format, Brian Winter welcomes his W-NEWS listeners with a quickly ad-libbed “Thanks for being here!” Chris Williams alluded to the 93-degree heat in telling the listeners that he hoped they were cooler than he and Rick Hayes were. Chris also reminded listeners on the last

night of the team's road trip, "While you're tucked in bed, we'll be coming home." Rick added, "We will try not to make any noise when we get back." Such statements are repeated throughout a broadcast because listeners may tune in for long stretches or join midway through. Brent Axe acknowledged the distinction when he yelled, "Welcome back, or welcome aboard!" Such statements are not only a way for announcers to recognize the audience (as noted in Chapter Eight), but also to come across as warm and inviting.

Being friendly to guests also makes an on-air personality relatable to the listener. Cameron explained that his interviewing style comes from treating pop music artists as normal people, asking them about things like what they do to make the moment special before a new release comes out, or whether they sleep with one leg under the covers and one leg out on a hot night. He acknowledged that talking about everyday things makes the interview more relatable to listeners. After pleading with the zoo spokeswoman for the right to reveal the new animal before anybody else, Hunter Scott and Josh Grosvent thanked her for being a good sport. The centerpiece of Josh's *Walk-Up Radio* podcast was an unattended microphone that was set up in the middle of the audience. Audience members were free to use the microphone to join the performance at any time. Josh made sure that they felt comfortable enough to join the conversation and contribute something that would enhance the entertainment value of the show. Listeners should come away from all of these examples with the feeling that the announcer is treating the guest as he/she would treat anyone, including the listeners themselves.

A positive attitude also helps; if the listener might be having a bad day, perhaps the announcer will pick him/her up. Mark Nelson opened his week of shows with the

universal sentiment “It’s Monday. We’ll just leave it at that.” He regularly told his audience that they were getting through the workday together. In his Friday opening monologue, Brent declared that because it was Friday, “We’ll have some fun.” Vanessa reassured her listeners by proclaiming, “Come on, you’re having a terrific Tuesday, aren’t ya?” During a Friday morning “donut,” she asked her audience what they had planned for the weekend. Her interplay with the song “All the Way Turnt Up” came off as helpful advice: “You gotta keep it ‘All the Way Turnt Up’ all weekend long, and get a little stupid, but not too much.” Vanessa explained that positivity can make a big difference: “That’s what I strive for more than anything else, to know that somebody was having a bad day, and I made them laugh or something like that, ‘cause I know little things in things like that, when life is not perfect like we want it to be, can make a difference.”

On-air personalities also come across as friendly and relatable by offering serious words of caution to listeners. On a particularly hot July morning, Drew Kelly reminded listeners to check on pets and the elderly. Bill Anderson noted to his talk show audience that when he would appear at local health fairs for WURD, he always tried to go first with whatever screening was being offered. He explained that it makes those who are hesitant more comfortable when they see other people go first. When they finish their performances for the day, the announcers ask their listeners to stay tuned to the station; Mark framed it as asking them a favor. Naturally, they part with more thanks for the audience and wishes for a great day or night. Bill’s daily sign-off was a perfect example: “Stay tuned and God bless.”

Such sentiments enhance the two-way conversation that appears to be taking place between on-air personality and listener. Whether it is one announcer engaging in direct announcing or multiple announcers engaging in three-way announcing (Goffman, 1981), the words are always directed at that person (the listener) who cannot physically join in the conversation. Cameron does so by asking listeners a question and then responding to the presumed answer, as when he announced, “You don’t mind if I press play on this 90-minute (nonstop music marathon)? *(pause)* Okay, cool.” One of Vanessa’s listeners once told her that when she says, “Good morning” on the air, the listener says it back to her.

In all of these cases, the listeners should feel that the on-air personality is like them on some level, either by treating the listeners in a friendly manner, or by conveying that they are going through the same experiences and spurring them through the good and bad times. As Dan Cas put it, “You’re kind of more inclined to listen to someone who you feel more friendly with or who you feel like you’ve known.” Josh said that one reason people love *The Show* is because he and Hunter are in different life stages: Hunter is 12 years older than Josh, and has been married for 13 more years. Josh believes that he and Hunter are more relatable to female listeners because the women recognize that Hunter and Josh’s wives ultimately call the shots in their respective marriages. Brent recognized that he had become more relatable to his sports radio audience once he became a father:

I’ll tell you what’s really changed the dynamic of what I do and how I do it is becoming a father and having a family and getting older... I’m older and I have a family and the life is different when you have a kid, and it’s just... I relate to those... that’s my audience. My audience is 35-to-54-year old men and a lot of them are in the same boat I am.

*Acknowledging Local Roots*

Brent is also a native of the area in which he aired his daily sports talk show, so when he said he would love to see Syracuse's minor league baseball and hockey teams make the playoffs, listeners knew he had long memories of many losing seasons by both teams. He made his local upbringing known in more obvious ways as well, making a couple of references to his high school alma mater when a couple of fellow alumni were inducted into the Syracuse Sports Hall of Fame. Brent added that one of the inductees was a former neighbor of his parents before he was born. He pointed out to me that the relatability that comes from being a local is not just his opinion; he hears it in feedback from listeners as well. "That will always be my greatest advantage," Brent declared.

Drew also sees his local roots as an asset: "That's probably one of, I think, my biggest attributes, to have the ability to relate to people who are lifers from here, and can recognize the changes that we've seen over time, know the mindset of the people and how they're very conservative, very Christian." He sees an added value in his small-market setting because he can personally interact with a greater percentage of listeners just by being out and about. Ali agreed: "My God, when we go to the mall, it's like every freakin' person in the mall knows him, 'cause he's been here so long, and I just think that he's a celebrity. Even though it feels weird to say that, he is. Everybody knows him, recognizes him."

Josh brings up his hometown of Fulton, New York from time to time on the air. When Hunter criticized the way some Fulton natives looked, Josh replied, "No one has told us that we're unattractive." He later acknowledged, "Fulton guys will throw down for any reason." Laura Donaldson cited George Brooks's local background as an

important quality. George added that being on the radio for 40 years in his hometown allowed him to progress in a certain way. Bill and his actor guest were both able to tout their Philadelphia roots; the actor proudly stated that some of his Hollywood connections came from fellow Philadelphia natives. Bill told me that Philadelphia is very territorial, and an on-air personality needs to know the city to be successful there.

Vanessa is not originally from the city where she currently broadcasts. She argued that an announcer does not necessarily have to be from the city to know the city: “If you just go out in the community and learn people, you can gain that same connection with your audience.” Therefore, she tries to be relatable to the local audience by referring to her stock of knowledge about the area. For instance, as students returned to local colleges for the fall semester, she saluted them and welcomed them back to the area. Vanessa explained that there is always something she can say to which at least one person could relate, “but it depends on your personality ‘cause I think you can be there forever and people still not really take to you like you’re one of their own.”

Hunter acknowledged on the air, “I’m not from here, and I get shrapnel for that.” Off the air, he had the same attitude as Vanessa, saying that when he moves to a new town, he gets immersed in that area. He added that a lot of blue-collar cities are very much the same: “Most people do the same thing. They go out to eat. There’s always the one part of town that everybody busts on, and most places are pretty much the same in the way the culture affects them.” Because he is not from the market where he currently works, Cameron also sought information about the area so that he could be more relatable. As we sat in the studio one night, he asked his intern to compile a list of the local high schools and their mascots. He later explained to her that when teenagers call

the show, he could then ask them where they go to school and refer to the mascots.

Cameron stated that he tries not to bring up the touristy aspects of his city, and that such aspects should not define himself or the city.

Certain formats privilege local roots more than others. Brent said that one of the strengths of sports talk radio is that the local stations have local natives on the air. “That’s very important,” he explained, “Especially in this world of radio where things are becoming corporate and things are sanitized, and you know, if you have that local edge and you can relate to people, then you’ve gotta take advantage of it.”

#### *Using Popular Culture References*

On-air personalities make themselves relatable to audiences by drawing on a common discourse of cultural knowledge. When they throw a reference from a movie or television program out on the air, they hope that their listeners will not only understand the reference, but also appreciate its relevance to the topic at hand. Morning-show personalities are most adept at this tactic because their programs tend to be commentaries about popular culture. For instance, Ali brought up a story about life-sized cutouts of David Hasselhoff being stolen from convenience stores. *Drew and the Crew* wove other references into regular on-air conversation. Drew said that he would toss his toothbrush out if someone else used it, using a *Seinfeld* reference to punctuate his point. He referred to country group Lady Antebellum’s commercials for Lipton iced tea. While talking about male insecurities about height, Drew remarked that he felt like Tom Cruise when Ali wears high heels, a reference to the actor’s small stature.

Popular culture references permeated throughout *The Show*, albeit with different standards for dialogue in place because it is not the family-friendly show that *Drew and*

*the Crew* is. Some of Hunter's references have been noted in previous chapters, such as the "Captain Solo" *Star Wars* reference, Michael Phelps's commercials for Subway, Fred Willard's lewd conduct arrest, and the reference to "alms" in *Flash Gordon*. Hunter also said that the Applebee's blow-up dolls looked like the inflatable "Otto Pilot" from the movie *Airplane!* In addition, he referred to the cult classic movie *Monty Python & the Holy Grail*, said, "I'm all about 'Hulk smash,'" and called the late former Beatle George Harrison "the Dark Horse" after Harrison's record label. Josh's references were mostly musical, including rock drummer Neil Peart and rap group Wu-Tang Clan. When Josh confused the "hair metal" bands Poison and Warrant, Hunter replied with a *Ghostbusters* reference: "Don't you cross the streams!"

Again, Hunter credited the difference in age between Josh and himself as an asset to *The Show* because each has his own generational set of references. "I don't look at us as a Rock show," Hunter declared. "I look at it as a pop culture (show)... I think hopefully on a good day, we're a mirror of our listeners, and maybe sometimes we mirror them more than others." As examples, both Hunter and Josh pointed to having deep on-air discussions about the comic book series *Deadpool* and the Morgan Freeman TV series *Through the Wormhole*. Josh also mentioned the "row-adds" reference from *Black Sheep*: "Even if you don't get the reference, people now will just say, 'row-adds' for no reason." He added, "You'd be surprised how geeky this town is, like a lot of them watch History Channel, and they know all the references."

*The Weewo Show* also has a heavy focus on popular culture, so references to current entertainers abound. Weewo brought up stories about singer Rita Ora cheating on her boyfriend, a *Forbes* list of most overpaid actors that included Eddie Murphy, Reese

Witherspoon, and Katharine Heigl, and rapper DMX's version of "Rudolph, the Red-Nosed Reindeer." The full cast of the show made fun of comedian Katt Williams, and also joined in the aforementioned allusion to *Mighty Morphin' Power Rangers* in Weewo's last episode.

Although they may not use them as often, other announcers I observed were quite skilled at incorporating references to popular media in their on-air performances. Rick did so when he remarked that the stadium's public address announcer sounded like "Butt-Head" from *Beavis and Butt-Head*. Later in that same game, he noticed an ad for an upcoming pregame appearance by a performer from *Dancing With the Stars*. He and Chris then proceeded to have an extended discussion about the show between pitches. When the SkyFish manager bounded away from a hard-hit foul ball, Rick said, "He looked like he was in *Riverdance*!" When a pitch was thrown behind a SkyFish player's head, Rick exclaimed that the last time he saw a pitch like that was "Nuke Laloosh" from the baseball movie *Bull Durham*.

Brent peppered his sports talk commentary with popular culture references, to the point that (as discussed in Chapter Eight) it provoked a listener complaint. As an avid *Star Wars* fan, when his producer remarked that he hated the franchise, Brent replied, "Don't say that in my presence." He referred to some projected late NBA draft picks as the "Pips," after Gladys Knight's backup singers. He mentioned *Ferris Bueller's Day Off*, the Michael Jordan movie *Space Jam*, the movie musical *Rock of Ages*, and such television shows as *The Newsroom* and the new version of *Dallas*. As noted in Chapter Seven, Brent made a couple of references to the song "OPP" by Naughty by Nature. Some of his other references were just lines from movies, such as *Office Space* (the

“Jump to Conclusions” mat), *Spaceballs* (“When will then be now?” “Soon!”), and *Ace Ventura: Pet Detective* (“Finkle is Einhorn. Einhorn is Finkle.”)

Bill also dropped in the occasional popular culture reference. He told his audience about his producer’s recovery from a leg injury by stating, “You’ve progressed from Fred Sanford to a George Jefferson kind of walk.” Later in the week, he said his own injury made him look like the Jackson 5’s music video for the song “Dancing Machine.” He then chided himself over his references getting older, and referred to more recent dances like the “Dougie” and “Gangnam Style.” Bill warned children about the dangers of truancy by mentioning the A&E show *Beyond Scared Straight*. A caller said that Mitt Romney was “Thurston Howell,” the millionaire from the 1960s television sitcom *Gilligan’s Island*.

In their limited time frame, music station announcers can mix in a quick reference or two as well. Vanessa talked out of a Kanye West song by simply referring to him as “Kim (Kardashian)’s future husband.” After Cameron accidentally played the wrong song and played his “just (bleep)ed up again” message, he referred to Christina Aguilera, the artist he should have been playing, and her TV show, *The Voice*: “Christina’s over here saying, ‘You wanna push the button and spin my big red chair around?’”

#### *Conveying Excitement and Emotion*

Another method used by announcers to show that they relate to their audience is to share in the emotion and excitement of the moment. Sports announcers are best at this tactic. When an exciting play happened, Rick and Chris matched the excitement with raised voices and appropriate descriptive language. Even after a great play by the opposing shortstop, Rick respectfully stated, “Gotta tip your cap.” Conversely, when the

SkyFish had a particularly rough inning, I could feel the energy sucked out of the broadcast booth, both in the words being used on the air and the body language being exhibited. Chris described a hitter walking away with slumped shoulders after being caught looking at a called third strike.

Play-by-play announcers adeptly inspire empathy for players who have suffered hardships. Referring to a former major leaguer who had just been hit hard, Rick lamented, “Poor guy’s been hurt so much.” After a key error, he remarked, “When that happens... you want to crawl into a hole.” They also play to the hope found in any sports fan when a team is behind. During an attempted 9<sup>th</sup>-inning comeback, Chris noted that there was no quit in their team. As Rick explained to me, the listeners “want to be entertained, they want to be pleased as they listen, so if something good happens, yeah, you play it up... but you know, I’m not fired up about a double play in the first inning or something like that.” Chris noted that Philadelphia Phillies broadcaster Scott Frantzke would call a play in a more excited manner during the late innings of a game than he will early in the game. He described Frantzke as sometimes passive to the point of sounding disinterested, but added that it was better to be that way than the opposite.

Music announcers also convey passion for what they play in a manner that should echo the listeners’ interest in the music. Mark introduced a new Jason Aldean song with a friendly “Give this one a listen.” He explained that his love for music is what keeps him excited about his job; being an on-air personality allows him to explore his passion for both music and broadcasting. Dan agreed, citing the ability to expose other people to new music as a reason for getting into college radio.

Such passion is not limited to contemporary music formats. George's love of jazz is apparent both on and off the air at FM University. He told me that he buys a lot of vintage albums online through resellers, amassing a large amount of music that nobody else has. At one point, he had between 7,000 and 8,000 vinyl albums. He has since whittled the number down to 1,000, giving away albums as he obtains CD copies. Laura's background as a classical musician comes through in her on-air discussion of the pieces she plays. "Music is your language," she declared. "Art is truth, what expresses our whole life." She followed one selection by asking her audience, "Did you hear that basso profundo?" She admitted that she would not be good at another radio format because she does not understand other music as well as classical music. As we sat in the on-air studio listening to a piece of chamber music, Laura asked if I thought the music was boring. I shook my head; we agreed that it was peaceful.

A bit of natural emotion can help make any announcer relatable to listeners, regardless of format. Reading a news story about a criminal whose getaway car ran out of gas, Brian chuckled as he informed the audience that the crook tried to call a taxi. Cameron's natural exuberance is evident to the listener as he cheerfully promotes contests and introduces songs. Vanessa offers a fired-up approach on the air that matches the tempo of the music and is designed to get the listener excited as well. Brent started his sports talk show in an exciting manner every day by yelling his opening words. As Weewo put it, "The energy you bring... can make it ten times more interesting."

### *Telling Stories*

As discussed in Chapter Five, radio announcers are given to telling stories about their lives, as all people are, because identity is a narrative construction (Bruner, 2004;

Vila, 2003; 2000). Although in some instances, the stories that announcers tell on the air are about their radio careers (i.e. “war stories”), most of the time, on-air personalities tell stories about themselves or about people they know (e.g. friends, family members). In doing so, they hope that the audience can relate and find them appealing enough to listen to them consistently. The announcer is either narrating the story of his/her own character, or incorporating the role of narrator of someone else’s story into his/her performance.

Storytelling is one way to pass the time during a baseball game when there is no action currently taking place. As Rick explained, “I’ve got this bank of stories that, if it fits, I’ll fit it in.” Rick and Chris’s stories were often about other people. As they laughed about the Taco Bell strikeout promotion, Chris brought up a fan in another city, who chants, “Taco! Taco!” every time the designated “K-Man” has two strikes on him. Many of the stories concerned the opposing team and its players, as a means of educating the listeners who are only familiar with their beloved SkyFish. Other stories could be about any of the people that Rick has met through his years in minor league baseball. For example, he built off an appearance by an Elvis Presley impersonator by telling the story of a former SkyFish manager who unwittingly played basketball with Presley in his driveway when he was a kid. By telling these stories, Rick added to a line of storytellers who are adept at relating the essence of baseball through the many “characters” (literal and figurative) who populate the game (Silvia, 2007).

Other times, the stories were about the announcers themselves, as when Rick talked about watching MTV’s brief revival of *Beavis & Butt-Head* during the previous off-season. As he told the story, Rick noted, “It was a long, slow winter,” making himself the sad, pathetic figure in his own story, and thereby engaging in an act of de-

mystification. Chris used the hot weather to set up his own sob story of suffering in Texas heat at a previous job.

Brent increased his relatability factor, particularly as a local native, by telling occasional stories about growing up in his hometown. He punctuated a discussion about bath salts by saying, “When I was a kid... we had beer, (and) weed.” Brent also inserted himself into stories about other people. During his interview with a sports station in Cleveland, he was asked about the Cleveland Cavaliers’ drafting of former Syracuse University star Dion Waiters. Brent recalled being awake at 1AM working on game recaps, and seeing Waiters posting pictures of himself in the gym on Twitter. He also told a very entertaining real-life story after being asked a “Blind Side” question about getting carrots instead of celery when ordering wings. Brent griped that during a recent trip to a certain Mexican chain restaurant, he ordered a fajita, and they left the tortilla out.

Drew and Ali tell stories about themselves more often because their morning show is as much about them as it is about other topics. During my week with them, they told stories about recent interactions with listeners, as well as older stories about beach vendors. While discussing the story about President Obama on the “kiss cam,” Ali told a story about being shown on a stadium’s “kiss cam” with her brothers. Drew told a story about the mileage his father racked up on the family car when he was young. All of these stories had some degree of relevance to the topic being discussed on the air, and seemed to spring naturally within the flow of conversation.

In these cases, Drew and Ali constructed a narrative identity of themselves based on their relatability to the listeners; they are regular people with whom listeners can identify. The best example comes from their story about going to the movies to see *Ted*.

This story was a segment in itself and was therefore planned, but there was still some degree of spontaneity in recalling details. Ali brought up a movie patron who was talking throughout the movie until Drew gave him the “stink eye.” After she noted that Drew is usually not confrontational about such things, Drew said it was a sign of him getting old. Ali concluded that he was finally starting to be like her, boasting, “I finally trained him!” Once again, they were able to play up their personal relationship to sound real and relatable.

Hunter and Josh tell stories on the air for similar reasons, but of course they are dealing with a completely different target audience and much different standards of content. Josh, for instance, finished *The Show*'s segment about the Applebee's blow-up dolls by randomly bringing up a time when he received a “rub” from a girl with poison ivy. In so doing, he demonstrated the comedic timing (discussed in Chapter Seven) that makes a good segment great. Hunter's weekend trip to a local amusement park had enough “material” to allow him to tell two different stories about the experience on two separate days. The first story was about the nature of the other people who go to this park; the second story was about an annoying DJ at the park who kept hitting on all of the women and would not stop talking over the music.

The best example of Hunter and Josh's storytelling came from their recap of the “Pimps & Hoes Party” appearance at the local bar, including Hunter's drunken embarrassments. Josh received the same on-air comeuppance the following Monday after the Snoop Dogg concert, as everyone recalled his drunken behavior that resulted in him sleeping through the concert in the limousine. These stories made Hunter and Josh real and relatable and not without human flaws. Josh became a sympathetic character when he

told his story about being strung along by a girl in college in an attempt to support a young sidekick who was in a similar situation. He told a relatable story for local listeners about going to a local “diamond mine” attraction as a kid. As with Drew and Ali, Hunter and Josh’s stories spring naturally from conversation, like Hunter mentioning that he wrestled in high school, and Josh recalling his past experiences with certain beers during *The Show’s* weekly beer segment.

Bill told stories in the same way as the other morning shows; they sprang up spontaneously from the current topic, a natural part of ad-libbing as a means of filling airtime. One example is his story about playing basketball against Dirk Nowitzki. In such a free-flowing format, Bill’s guests could contribute their own stories as well, from the district attorney’s ShopRite story to “The Counselor’s” stories of coaching Pop Warner football to the congressman’s story of his Achilles injury. Some stories were serious, as when “The Counselor” talked about his family being intimidated by a random coward after 9/11. These stories made the guests (particularly regular guests, like those mentioned above) more real and relatable as well.

As mentioned in Chapter Five, Weewo and his colleagues used the occasion of his last show to tell stories about things that happened on the show and in their off-air lives. Weewo talked about some of the old bits that he did, such as reading from the website *Texts From Last Night*, and doing a “Top Cinco” list. Colleagues explained how they met Weewo and got recruited into the show, some of the stories involving his off-air life as a resident advisor at his dorm. The story of *The Weewo Show* is also shared for the audience on the WHIP website.

As a newsperson, Brian's job is to tell stories. Of course, his stories must be based in verifiable facts as per the high standards of his job. In Chapter Seven, I noted how Brian prefers to let the people that he interviews tell their own stories in the way that he edits and frames his reports (Goffman, 1974). Of course, as the animator in his stories (Goffman, 1981), Brian also retains the role of the narrator.

Mark and Vanessa do not have time to tell lengthy stories on the air, being confined to the time constraints of their music-intensive formats. Mark is at least able to tell stories about things in his life that relate to sponsors during live reads. He frequently mentioned a sponsor's diet plan he was on, and how much weight he had lost. He related his story of Lasik eye surgery as a spokesman for the clinic where his procedure was done. As previously noted, Mark also tells personal stories of interactions with artists. Vanessa has even less time to talk, so she was completely unable to tell any on-air stories during my week with her. Cameron's "Question of the Night" sometimes allows him to tell a brief story as a way of inducing listeners to call with their own. However, as noted in previous chapters, he is given to embellishing what really happened in these stories. In addition, many of the listeners' stories are prefabricated or told by pre-chosen callers, so the narrative identity of the caller is either a fiction or is changed at the whim of Cameron, who has directive dominance over the performance and can edit calls before airing them.

During fundraising drives at Laura's station, she turns to telling stories as a way of spurring donations. She talks about her days as a classical musician, thus appealing to the music-loving nature of her listeners, and becoming relatable. George's stories are more often about jazz musicians than about himself. Even when George does tell stories

about himself, they are in the context of conveying love for the music. George's on-air stories also fit what he is trying to do with the audience: be relatable, be knowledgeable, be the "elder statesman." He explained that jazz musicians are "playing their life for you," so in that sense they themselves are storytellers, and George aids in the telling of their stories. Perhaps George's greatest strength as a personality is his ability to tell great stories, so it is no surprise that he also does so in his magazine columns.

### *Revealing Personal Details*

When telling these stories on the air, announcers often embed details of their personal lives, giving the listener some insight into what the person is like off the air. As with many of the other topics in this chapter, the nature and depth of revealed details varies by format and situation. The morning-show personalities had the most time and the most freedom to reveal things about their lives on the air. Drew Kelly stated that their personal lives are the number one thing that listeners ask about when he and Ali Stevens meet them in public. Ali noted that the lunch lady would tell her daughter, "I heard you lost a tooth," leading her daughter to wonder how she knew. Drew added that people still ask them about when their house was flooded in 2011. He and Ali pointed out that when their show first started, they were married to other people, so they were sharing two separate personal lives. Now they both know the stories before they tell them on the air.

There were plenty of examples of Drew and Ali talking about their personal lives during my week with them, including talk of their lives as husband and wife, and the spontaneous personal stories that come from the news stories Ali reads. Sometimes in these discussions, details of their off-air lives seemingly come up out of nowhere. When a "Morning Mindbender" guessed that the most inconsiderate thing someone could do at

work is flatulence while someone else eats, Ali remarked that her 6-year old does that. She also said that her daughter asked if Pitbull has to be in every song. Drew kidded Ali for getting her hair cut during their honeymoon. Ali wished that her father would get a makeover. After playing back the recording of the caller who talked about bear repellent, Ali suggested that Drew's mom have it handy when she takes out the garbage. Drew responded to the David Hasselhoff cutout story by mentioning a cutout of *Twilight* characters that Ali had in their house.

As with so many other topics, the personal details shared on *The Show* pushed the envelope of on-air propriety because Hunter Scott and Josh Grosvent catered to a different target audience. The hot weather prompted Hunter and Josh to talk about how they “powder the Timbits,” both in normal on-air discussion and with their guest who sold adult-themed products. They both talked about their wives and children as well; Hunter's wife factored into his story about drinking too much at the live bar appearance, and he said that his children gave him a hard time about it the next day. Josh mentioned his young daughter on a few occasions, saying that his daughter got him to sing, “Pee's in front, poop's in the back.” He also disclosed that his mother was on welfare while raising him and his brother.

Hunter and Josh's discussions of fatherhood, using their own off-air experiences, made them relatable to their audience, regardless of the subject matter. Josh also noted, “We get really kind of psychological and admit our flaws, and admit things that most guys are embarrassed about, you know, like hey, maybe I don't have the libido I used to have, and guys who are afraid to admit that are like, ‘Oh, I'm not alone. These guys have

the same thing.” During an on-air discussion about self-mutilation, Josh admitted that he used to pull out his eyebrows; he later sought therapy for his problems.

Callers also feel free to give personal details of their lives when they call into *The Show*, although they can hide behind a greater level of anonymity by not giving their names. The female caller (mentioned in Chapter Eight) who revealed that she was into scratching during intimacy is one example. A male caller joined the discussion about whether “sexting” is considered cheating; he revealed that he knows his girlfriend does it. Although he said it is easier for him to not have to tell his girlfriend she is beautiful when she has multiple male co-workers telling her, he also said that when they get engaged, she would need to stop. As soon as the caller was off the line, Josh declared, “She’s cheating on him.” After playing the call on the air, Hunter sighed, “Poor bastard.”

Throughout the daily discussions of sports that made up *On the Block*, Brent Axe found time and reasons to drop nuggets of personal information. When asked the ugliest dog question during “The Blind Side,” Brent replied by revealing the breed of dog he owns. He volunteered his favorite ice cream flavor while telling listeners that they can ask him anything during “The Blind Side.” A reference to NBA star Anthony Davis’s “unibrow” (a term for when a person’s eyebrows connect in the middle) prompted Brent to make several jokes about his own “unibrow” for the rest of the week. While talking about the declining popularity of Little League Baseball, he noted that he has never seen kids in his neighborhood playing baseball, adding, “Just my little slice of life... At least they play outside.” Brent even occasionally mentioned his wife and daughter on the air, though obviously not with the frequency that Drew and Ali bring up their own family. One afternoon, he confessed, “My wife is constantly trying to get me to shave my

unibrow and not dress like a 65-year old... and that makes me the embarrassing one.” He later proclaimed that if his child went through life as a B student, he would be happy.

As part of his daily talk show, Bill Anderson and his producer also revealed aspects of their off-air lives, as did Bill’s guests. In addition to the injuries mentioned earlier, there was also the story of Bill’s producer running into the district attorney at the grocery store, the personal stories told by the congressman and “The Counselor,” and a conversation about the producer’s son. Bill brought up his prominent father on a couple of occasions; he compared his parents’ marriage to that of an in-studio guest who knew Bill’s father. He said that he is criticized about his views on truancy because he has no children; in this case, the personal details of Bill’s life affected listeners’ evaluations of his opinions. “The Counselor” volunteered tenets of his personal faith during the discussion of the worldwide protests over an anti-Islamic film. There was also the caller (mentioned in Chapter Eight) who vented to Bill that she could not talk about Mitt Romney around her family because they supported him. Like *The Show’s* callers, she could hide behind anonymity and reveal something about herself to the listening audience.

Bill also added details of his personal life to his live commercials with regularity. During his cleaning products ad, he disclosed that he has a lung illness, and the cleaning products help him avoid health problems. He also mentioned that he has a puppy in order to state that the products are safe to use around pets. After his clinch sparring injury, Bill read several commercials over the next few days for a chiropractor who helped him recover quickly. However, as mentioned in Chapter Four, Bill was given to embellishing or inventing personal stories for his commercials at times. *The Weewo Show* being

personality-driven, Weewo also sometimes gave personal details, such as his switch from contact lenses to glasses. He also thanked his mother at the end of his last show, although as noted in Chapter Four, this degree of sharing was out of character.

Rick Hayes did not really have much of a place to share personal details with his audience; the performance he was giving was secondary to the game he was calling. However, back in the broadcast booth of his former employers, he recalled memories about weather and food, and then got more personal by talking about nights when his young daughter (now in college) would fill out coloring books in the booth while he called the games. There is no place in the News format for personal revelations; therefore, Brian Winter did not give any personal life details during his anchor shifts or his live reports.

Similarly, the music announcers did not have much of an opportunity to reveal personal details on the air, and those that were revealed were trivial in nature. For instance, Vanessa admitted her addiction to watching *Toddlers and Tiaras* and *Here Comes Honey Boo Boo*; she had previously talked about the latter show off the air with some co-workers. Her occasional playing of a recording of her then-four-year old daughter is another way that her personal life comes out on the air. Vanessa told me that her daughter has asked to re-record it, but Vanessa refuses, saying that children have grown up with that tape, and some of them probably went to school with her daughter, never realizing that the voice was hers. Cameron mentions family birthdays or visiting his nephew or godson. George Brooks shared a personal story after playing a song by legendary jazz singer Dakota Staton; he revealed that he first heard her sing “Misty” when he was washing trays in the military. “I’m not gonna tell you what year it was,” he

added with a laugh. George acknowledged that he has been on the air for so long, regular listeners will inevitably know a lot about him.

When radio announcers reveal much about their personal lives on the air, it only makes sense that they will also do so online. As Bill noted, his Twitter account is where people can see more of his life. Brent posts about his favorite musical artists on his Twitter account. Drew and Ali said that they have let listeners into their lives through Facebook in a way with which many other radio personalities would not be comfortable. On their Facebook pages, listeners can see pictures of Drew and Ali's children, their home, their vacations, and even pictures of their wedding. Hunter and Josh sometimes use their Twitter accounts in a similar manner; Josh posted a screenshot of a text Hunter sent him about his son.

Vanessa gave details about her background and off-air goals on her Urban station's website, in addition to the personal story about how she got into radio. Even news announcer Brian posted a couple of pictures to his Twitter account about his work with his college alma mater's radio station. Laura Donaldson and George also revealed details about themselves in FM University's now-defunct magazine. Laura admitted to being a "cat lady" and her love of tango music and dancing. George revealed that he is a people-watcher.

### *Separating the Personal from the Professional*

Although on-air personalities seek to be relatable by putting as much of their personal lives as they can into their performance, there is always a line that cannot be crossed. When talking about how they go about their daily performances, announcers may not always admit the presence of that line. At one point as I was observing or

interviewing them, some of the announcers purported to be “an open book.” However, all of the announcers expressed that there is a limit to how much of their off-air lives are included in their on-air performances.

Bill explained where the line is between personal and “too personal.” He stated that he signed up for the on-air life, but his friends, family, and significant others did not, so he limits how much he will say about them on the air. He acknowledged that he had to learn where the line is over time. During our on-air conversation about my research, Bill stated that the problem with being honest on the air is how to turn it off before it affects one’s personal life. As we spoke off the air about being careful with what someone says to whom in the wake of Mitt Romney’s “47 percent” remarks, Bill noted that he has also had some comments made in casual conversation thrown back at him. He added that when he meets listeners, they want to talk about things he said on the show, which makes him feel like he is doing his show all the time. Bill lamented that sometimes he needed to get out of town for a little while and go someplace where he was not so easily recognized.

Josh had similar views as Bill, saying that his wife did not ask to be a part of his show, so he does not say much about her or their relationship on the air. He does not reveal where she works because he does not want it to affect her job. He also does not put out his children’s names or photos of them. Josh did say that he talks about his father on the air, concluding that it is about “respect. You know, I respect my wife, I respect my kids; (I) don’t necessarily respect my father, so I’ll talk about that.” Hunter said that he sometimes finds out where the line between personal and professional is when he gets home from work. His wife sometimes hears someone else’s version of what he said, and

then they have to discuss it at home. Hunter stated, “I’ve had to say to her that this is me ‘on cocaine.’ They’re separate lives, but sometimes she doesn’t get that.”

Cameron was one of the announcers who said he was “an open book,” but he prefaced that statement by saying that listeners do not need to know if he has a girlfriend or where he lives. He also keeps matters of friends and family off the air unless it involves a fun or memorable occasion. Like the other announcers, he is trying to protect the people he cares about the most. “I wouldn’t say that I’m somebody else,” Brian noted. “I would say that there is a limit to the extent of me that comes out on the air... I try not to be that news guy who is a totally different person on the air. I try to put as much of myself as I can into the format.”

Brent expressed the internal debate an announcer has when deciding where the line is:

People like when I talk about my real life... but at the same time, it’s like... all it takes is one wacko, you know? It is scary. I do catch myself sometimes. When I talk about that stuff, sometimes... if there’s anything I get really nervous about, it’s that, but sometimes you just forget and you’re just flowing, and it’s... you know, you just get into it, but it’s a real thin line, and honestly I probably shouldn’t do it as much as I do. I need to be more cognizant.

Despite her openness online, Ali had similar concerns: “I just pray that everything’s okay with this because people know exactly what my kids look like and where they go to school and where we live, and I just pray that, you know, that’s okay.” Weewo said that it might sound paranoid, but he does not want people to know too much about him or his family because he would not want any of it to be used against him. He added that he was developing good habits for his future work after college.

When they are performing on the air, radio personalities take steps to ensure that unwanted personal details do not get revealed. Ali told me that when Drew was about to take a trip to the beach, she insisted that he not say that on the air because people know where they live and they knew she would be home alone. After Ali made her on-air remark about her father's dressing habits, she pointed out that he lives in Minnesota so he cannot hear what she said. Although her statement went out to thousands of listeners, she was still cognizant of who she did not want to hear it. When Drew brought up beer pong, Ali started to tell a story about one of their friends, but immediately made it known that the friend's name would not be disclosed. Even guests censor themselves when performing on the air; one of Weewo's guests refused to answer his "National Ass Day" question because he knew his girlfriend was listening.

Certain details are always kept secret. For instance, those on-air personalities who use fake names naturally keep their birth names from the audience. Ali said that she and Drew do not say where their children go for day care. Hunter does not reveal where his children go to school; Josh blacked out the name of the school in his screenshot of Hunter's text message. Josh said that he thinks about what he is going to say on the air because "I don't want my kids to be 18 and hearing it someday, and be embarrassed."

As noted earlier, Bill occasionally placed personal details in his live commercials, but he also talked about his personal life throughout his talk show. By contrast, Mark only mentioned details of his off-air life on the air when they were tied into promotional or sponsored ventures for his Country station. The laser eye center and the diet plan are not the only examples; Mark also read promotions for a limousine company's bus trip to a Carrie Underwood concert and disclosed, "That's how I'm going to the show." He

admitted that the fun things about his life that he wishes to share with the audience are related to the station, adding, “My day-to-day life’s kinda boring outside of that.”

However, Mark did say that when he has to fill in on the morning show, the personal subject matter would broaden because it is a different situation.

Mark also separates his personal self from his professional self on Facebook. He has a personal Facebook account, and also a fan page. He sometimes directs people to his fan page through posts on his personal page. Mark said that he is always cautious about “friending” listeners on his personal account. If they begin to post “spam” or objectionable content to his page, he blocks them. He said it was a “hazard of using your real name.” During the on-air shifts I observed, he bounced back and forth from account to account, commenting under his personal account when he found it warranted.

*“Art Imitating Life”*

In these carefully strategized ways, one can see the separation between the speaking self and the self that is represented in speech, or the self-as-performer and the self-as-character (Goffman, 1981; 1959). One can also see the ways in which role distance is expressed on the radio (Goffman, 1961). For instance, a person may reveal personal details while in the performance of a role, while not letting it get in the way of the performance. Goffman (1961) noted how surgeons whom he observed wore wedding rings under their surgical gloves, and talked about their wives during a procedure. Therefore, these personal touches and attempts to evade a lofty status conferred by an audience seem to be quite normal behavior, only much more noticeable during an on-air radio performance, and much more intentional.

Announcers strive to be relatable to their listeners so that they may improve coorientation, which in turn improves the listeners' engagement with the program. Mark Nelson illustrated the importance of relating to the listeners on a personal basis:

If you can really connect one-on-one with the listener, you've got 'em for life. You know, you can screw up on the air and they're not tuning out a whole lot... real easy. They're gonna understand that you're human and you're fallible and if you've got a few seconds of dead air, they're not bouncing off to the next station (*laughs*).

In the movie *Private Parts*, flabbergasted radio executives cannot believe that people who hate Howard Stern listen for longer periods of time than the people who like him. The reason they listened longer was because they wanted to hear what Stern would say next (Reitman & Thomas, 1997). Agreement was certainly not a factor in this decision; Stern captivated listeners by making himself so relatable and so "real" that the degree of congruency, understanding, and accuracy more than made up for the lack of agreement.

In fact, Stern and the announcers I observed make themselves more relatable *by* being "real." "Real" and relatable go hand-in-hand. During an off-air discussion about making mistakes, Drew Kelly cited the scene in *Private Parts* where Stern messed up a live commercial and leveled with his audience about how silly it was. Stern realized that being himself was the best way to be successful; Hunter Scott said something similar during my week with him and Josh Grosvent. When I asked Drew if Stern really was being "real," Drew replied that it was a combination of "the real Howard and someone who knows how to craft a product." The same could be said of any of the on-air personalities I observed. Each has his/her own strategy to attract and retain listenership; the strategy involves being "real" and being relatable, but that is only part of the plan.

Perhaps instead of using quotes to indicate that these announcers are being “real,” the more proper term would be *realistic*.

Many of the announcers let on to this approach during my conversations with them. Vanessa explained, “I want to be seen as someone who tells it like it is and not as rude or a jerk.” She may be that way in her everyday life, but the phrase “I want to be seen as” implies that those are the aspects of her on-air personality with which she wants listeners to identify. George Brooks said that although he has a lot of information about the jazz artists that he plays, he tries to “stay out of the way” and not show off. “I think people get that you’re knowledgeable from the music you play,” he noted. “That’s really not my personality to be out front.” This particular statement also lends itself to speculation: What does he mean by his “personality?” Is it who George really is, or is it the on-air “personality” he wishes to perform?

During a commercial break, Bill Anderson told me about a political consultant with whom he has worked. He told me that the consultant was “hardcore” when he has a microphone in front of him, but not like that off the air. Bill concluded that the consultant does what he has to do politically. In a sense, the radio personality does the same thing; it is all about winning hearts and minds through strategy. Acknowledging that what he does is a performance on some level, Mark clarified, “It’s a performance, but it’s art imitating life.” I certainly noticed that Mark’s dry, sarcastic sense of humor on the air matched his off-air wit to some degree, but (as noted in Chapter Six) he has different standards of humor off the air.

Goffman (1981) stated that when an announcer makes mistakes, the audience is forced to consider his/her “plight as a speaker of words” (p. 320). As Brian Winter

pointed out in Chapter Six, it makes the announcer more human. The announcers I observed mostly saw this as a selling point, and a reason why people may not necessarily hold announcers the higher standards that Goffman inferred are in place. Indeed, Goffman (1981) noted that a radio personality who shows emotion is more relatable, and his/her audience is more likely to overlook the occasional mistake. Like Brian, George said that a mistake “humanizes” him. Drew Kelly and Ali Stevens acknowledged that they embrace their mistakes. Drew added, “It’s really an opportunity to just sound like a real human being, and allow your mistake or your faults or whatever to just become endearing to listeners, and yeah, we’ve had many, many, many (*laughs*).” Hunter credited the success of reality television shows in saying that listeners want to hear an announcer show some humanity. However, even humanity has its limits; an announcer would not gain much respect if he/she constantly made mistakes.

That being said, a realistic and relatable on-air personality who shows a human side can be more effective in attracting and retaining listeners. As Brent Axe put it, “I do a better job than my competition because people relate to me. They want to talk to me.” By conveying their passion for the music they play, Mark and his fellow music station personalities can stimulate the listeners’ interest in music, as suggested by Clarke (1973).

People in radio management positions actively seek announcers who can successfully plan and execute strategies that make them realistic and relatable as on-air personalities. Hunter, the program director at K-Rock, said, “I really do believe in trying to find people (who) can emote on the air, and if you find those people that people connect to, then that really is what makes a station.” He is looking for relatable people, and he added that when DJs do not have that sense of personality and are only reading the

pre-written announcements provided for them, it causes passive listening. Referring to radio as the original social medium, Hunter explained that the growth of online social media proves that people still want to connect to the person they hear on the radio: “To me, Facebook is just people connecting. That’s all it is, and people want that connection, and so if they see somebody that’s vulnerable or somebody that’s real, I think they’re more likely to be a part of that person, and want to figure out, ‘Hey, what’s this guy about?’”

An effective on-air personality reduces the social distance between him/herself and the audience, mitigating the asymmetry of status that exists between the individual listeners and the announcer when the communication begins (McLeod & Chaffee, 1973). Being accessible, or as Cameron put it, being “tangible” can drive home the point that on-air personalities are no different than their listeners. At the same time, employing a strategy of being relatable through being realistic assists in the de-mystification process. If enough listeners feel this sense of coorientation and connection through reduced social distance, they will become members of an imagined community (Douglas, 2004) centered on that personality or program. This approach is not only demonstrated through interactions over the phone or online, but also in person. Drew and Ali repeatedly pointed out their in-person interactions with listeners in everyday life off the air and how beneficial they are. Hunter and Josh, both intentionally and – in Hunter’s case – unintentionally reduced social distance during their appearance at the bar. Bill did the same at the diner broadcast. All of these situations aided in the formation of imagined communities.

At Cameron's live broadcast from the "haunted hayride," the conferring and shedding of mystification almost happened simultaneously. Young listeners visited with Cameron throughout the evening. Some of them were intimidated, but he made them feel relaxed and have fun. At this broadcast, listeners saw the personality as an actual approachable person, cutting down the social distance and undoing the mystification attached to the radio announcer. He was not just a mythical faceless voice that comes out of the radio to tell them when they can win Justin Bieber tickets. Toward the end of the evening, Cameron visited with a group of young emergency rescue workers. They asked him for a picture out of respect for him, but after doing so, Cameron wanted to hear their harrowing rescue stories out of the respect that *he* had for *them*. Social distance goes both ways, and in the end it comes down to people talking with people.

"I've got kids asking me for my autograph on a Katy Perry DVD," Cameron said, "And I'm like, 'Are you kidding me? I'm gonna devalue your DVD by putting my name on it (*laughs*).'" He added that when people ask him for a picture, he thinks, "Can *I* take a picture with *you*?" Cameron concluded, "It really makes you think, 'Damn, dude. I must be doing something right,' and the best part of that feeling... is that I'm not doing anything that I wouldn't normally be doing, so it's like really people are gravitating and enjoying and loving who I genuinely am, and that really means a lot." Despite Cameron's success, it must be pointed out once again that the listeners are enjoying who he *says* he genuinely is.

On-air personalities make themselves relatable by being realistic and by being accessible, but they can only go so far before decorum, the format, or strategy makes them pull back. As Brent acknowledged, it is a very thin line, and it varies by the

announcing situation. However, these limits, consciously or subconsciously placed, serve as a reminder that in the end, what the listeners are receiving on a daily basis from their favorite radio personalities is a performance. These announcers have chosen a particular identity plot: "I am real/human. I am just like you." The plot then creates the character for them to perform on the air. It is a relatable character, one that enhances coorientation and engages listeners, but a character nonetheless.

## CHAPTER 10: RESOLVING THE ON-AIR RADIO IDENTITY

Over the last six chapters, I have described the everyday practices of radio announcers as they prepare, execute, and promote their programs through the construction and performance of a self that is designed to be presented to the listening audience. This presentation takes place for the purposes of entertaining and informing listeners, and so that the announcer may forge a long-term connection with the audience. During eleven weeks of ethnographic participant observation, I recorded the activities of radio announcers – both on and off the air – at their jobs, as well as in public at promotional appearances. The announcers provided deeper explanations of what they do through formal and informal interviews.

In the presentation of data, I broke down the everyday behavior of these announcers into specific categories that describe the many processes that go into the regular broadcast of radio content. These many categories of analysis fit together through their common relationship to the performance of on-air personality. For all of the preparation, the conscious and unconscious processes guiding what is said on the air, and the efforts to incorporate audience expectations into the broadcast, it is the moment of performance that determines success or failure for a radio announcer. In this chapter, I propose a theoretical model that explains the behavior of announcers and how effective social interactions lead to success in the social establishment that is radio.

### *Successful Radio Interaction*

What exactly constitutes success in radio broadcasting? High ratings and revenues are certainly indicators of success, but the two do not necessarily go together. For example, KFI in Los Angeles and WFAN in New York regularly finish in the top ten

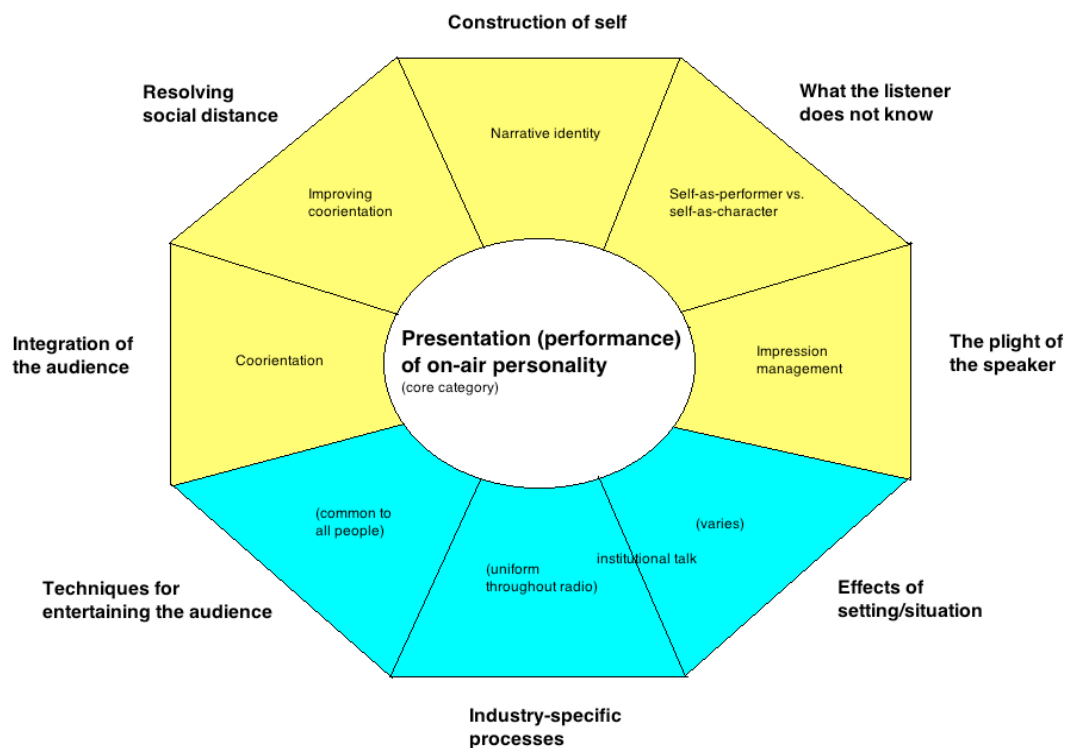
among the highest billing stations in America (“WTOP is Once Again,” 2013), but are not in the top ten in terms of ratings in their respective markets (Radio Online, 2013). These stations reach affluent listeners with compelling content; the listeners may not be as plentiful as with other stations, but they spend more money, thus causing wealthier sponsors to spend more money to advertise. Many program directors do not consider ratings to be the leading indicator of their stations’ success; they instead point to positive interactions and constructive feedback from listeners (Crider, 2009). A positive interaction will lead the audience member to continue listening and to spend his/her money on a station sponsor. In a transactional sense, the listener thanks the on-air personality for entertaining or informing by remaining loyal and indirectly contributing to station revenue.

Therefore, a positive interaction is a successful one, whether it is a broadcast interaction, an in-person interaction at a station event, or one that takes place online. As the integration of social media becomes more important for the radio industry, such statistics as the number of listeners who follow a station or personality’s Twitter account or Facebook page take on greater significance. The same principle is in play here as on the radio or in person; a positive online interaction will lead the audience member to follow the personality or station, enhance the listening experience for the audience member, and lead that person to help the personality or station in other ways. Similar to Goffman’s (1967; 1959) perspective on social interaction, the interaction between the on-air personality and listener is successful if the experience was positive for everyone involved. A sustained pattern of positive and successful interactions over time leads to overall success in the social establishment, in this case radio.

An on-air performance will not be perfect every time; such is the all-too-human task of performing a self, particularly one judged by broadcast standards (Goffman, 1981; 1959). However, when all of the processes I have described are accomplished with an acceptable margin for error, the broadcast should be considered successful, a positive interaction having taken place. The personality, other team members, and station management must determine what constitutes an acceptable margin for error; it will vary by format or the people involved. For example, Brian Winter noted the higher speech standards placed on news announcers as opposed to music station personalities. Music station program directors vary in how tightly they enforce certain aspects of the format.

*A Theoretical Illustration*

The following theoretical model displays how the categories of analysis described in Chapters Four through Nine come together around a performance of on-air identity:



**Figure 10-1. A Theoretical Model for Explaining On-Air Identity**

Corbin and Strauss (2008) compared the integration of a theoretical model to the design of an umbrella. It only works when concepts are linked to the core category and filled in with detail. Therefore, the model of on-air performance is displayed above as an open umbrella. This model and the explanation thereof are reflections of the themes found during my observations and analysis. The model, taken as a whole or as the sum of its parts, provides answers to the research questions given at the beginning of this study.

The focal point of all of the on-air personality's efforts, from preparation to remedying errors to resolving social distance, is the performance. Therefore, the performance of on-air personality is the core category of this model, while addressing the first research question (In what ways does an announcer on a live radio program present him/herself on the air as a personality?) Goffman (1959) devised his dramaturgical approach as a way to study the social interactions that take place within a social establishment. Radio, as perhaps the most intimate form of mass communication (Douglas, 2004; Loviglio, 2002), is predicated on interaction. When a listener tunes in to a radio announcer, whether for the first time or the five hundredth, the listener forms an impression of the announcer. That impression is based on the "appearances" (Goffman, 1959, p. 249) given by the announcer, "appearances" being a more abstract term in a medium where the listener and announcer normally cannot see each other.

In the world of radio, verbal cues (e.g. inflection) take the place of gestures and body language. Without knowing all of the facts of the situation, the listener relies on the definition of the situation given by the announcer. If it is to the listener's liking, he/she will continue to listen. Of course, there are some aspects of radio broadcasting that are beyond the announcer's control, such as the length of a commercial break or the listener's

attitude toward a particular song. For the purposes of this study, those aspects have been excluded from consideration; I have focused my analysis on those portions of the broadcast over which the announcer has control and during which the announcer is speaking to the listener.

Announcers present an on-air self in the same ways that people present a self in everyday interaction (Goffman, 1967; 1959). They define a situation and work to maintain the definition of the situation for the listening audience, either with the help of other station personnel or on their own as one-person teams. The performance takes place in a front region, the setting of which can be consistent (the on-air studio) or varied (i.e. the stadium from which Rick Hayes and Chris Williams call a SkyFish game). Through descriptive language and creative use of sound, the announcer engages the listener by inspiring his/her imagination. Again, if the effort results in a positive interaction, the listener will likely tune in again, having constructed a favorable impression of the on-air personality, and the announcer is one step closer to fulfilling the commercial imperatives of his/her job. Therefore, everything else deriving from my analysis of radio announcers is connected to the performance of on-air personality, and these connected categories address the second research question (What processes does this presentation involve?)

#### *Explaining the Theoretical Model*

*Construction of self.* The in-depth explanation of this theoretical model begins at the top with a discussion of how the on-air self is created. On-air personalities are narrative constructions (Bruner, 2004; 1997). When announcers enter an announcing situation, they unconsciously choose an identity plot (e.g. overcoming obstacles, “I am just like you”) from those that society has made available to them. In so doing, they

create the characters they will use to tell their stories on the radio (Vila, 2003; 2000). Through the training and influences picked up along the way, an announcer learns that when he/she enters an announcing situation, the personality/character must be put into play. Certain traits are played up in “war stories” (Joung et al., 2006) that are told both on and off the air, but the entire process of forming an on-air self is narratively driven.

These characters can change and develop over the years, sometimes changing as a result of “trouble” (Bruner, 1997, p. 157) that serves as a major life turning point. Hunter Scott and Josh Grosvent went through an instance of “trouble” when they decided they could no longer work at 95X. They moved to a new station where they feel more appreciated, and the characters they use on the radio changed in certain ways, most notably in the resentment they show toward their former employer. As with any self, an on-air self is constantly a work in progress (Holstein & Gubrium, 2000). Brian will probably continue to collect recordings of the noteworthy stories he has reported for the rest of his career, so that he may continue to refer to them as he builds and refines his “trusted newsperson” character.

*What the listener does not know.* Working clockwise from the top of the “umbrella,” the next major category of focus contains those aspects of performance that are hidden from the listener. The ongoing process of constructing an on-air self is exemplified in the endless preparation that takes place when the microphones are off. In today’s media environment, an announcing situation is not limited to a scheduled radio program or a live appearance; it could include extra content created for the station’s website or it could be something that will end up on the announcer or station’s Facebook

or Twitter accounts. Therefore, preparation for a performance is more crucial than ever; an announcer must be ready to put a personality into play at any moment.

Whenever they are off the air or invoke a “backstage style” (Goffman, 1959, p. 129), announcers relax their standards, discuss matters that would be on-air taboos, and are freer to be honest about what they do. One example is the larger off-air use of sarcasm between Drew Kelly and Ali Stevens about their marriage. During a performance, announcers can take advantage of the barriers to perception inherent in a radio performance to keep the visual aspects of a performance hidden from the audience. By observing these candid moments, I found clear divisions between the self-as-performer and the self-as-character (Goffman, 1959). The on-air personality (self-as-character) hides both the frustrations and much of the exhilaration of working in radio. Off the air, the self-as-performer is more likely to vent in both positive and negative ways, such as Brian’s enjoyment of reporting on a nice day or Rick’s weariness of the hectic routine of a baseball play-by-play announcer.

*The plight of the speaker.* Moving to the right side of the model, the next category refers to the ways in which announcers also use the spaces that are unknown to the audience to avoid errors, and to remedy those that do take place on the air. As indicated by many of the announcers I observed, they may either give a brief apology for a verbal fault, or they may just continue with their speech, knowing that the audience gives them some allowances for the occasional mistake. In any case, their apologies or their maintenance of professional behavior are forms of impression management (Goffman, 1959). The speech fault remedies made by the announcers I observed somewhat echo Goffman’s (1981) assessment of the remedy process; announcers may sometimes shift

footing from animator to principal in order to apologize or to make light of their mistakes. When Vanessa stumbled over the name of rapper “Pleasure P” and exclaimed, “You try saying that three times fast,” she not only engaged in a form of impression management, but she also changed speaker roles in an unexpected way. Listeners may have found this shift in footing jarring or endearing, depending on their expectations of Vanessa as an announcer.

*Effects of setting/situation and industry-specific processes.* Moving toward the bottom of the model, the next two categories remind us that on-air personalities must be aware of certain institutional constraints placed on the characters that they perform on the radio (Holstein & Gubrium, 2000). Announcers must work within the confines of their format, setting, or situation. Personalities who work on music station morning shows (i.e. *The Show, Drew and the Crew*) have been given more latitude to speak freely on the air. However, as I have mentioned, the Pop format of 94KX dictates that *Drew and the Crew* will be a family-friendly program, whereas the Rock formats of 95X and K-Rock give Hunter and Josh the freedom to be edgier on *The Show*. Laura Donaldson, George Brooks, Weewo, and Dan Cas all work in non-commercial radio, and they must deal with certain restrictions that come with being in that part of the industry.

Announcers must also adhere to the specific processes that are inherent to the world of radio. All of the announcers I observed used institutional talk (Holstein & Gubrium, 2000) both on and off the air. In this particular institution, the inside language or jargon of radio is the discursive framework from which announcers must craft their performances, whether it is specific terms used during the preparation process (e.g. “donut,” “mix-minus) or FCC-friendly double entendres used during the show. Editing is

a process that applies to many media performances but has unique implications in radio because much of the time, it is the announcer who does the editing. At times, an on-air performance comes in an edited form, allowing the personality to be presented without flaws. Mistakes, such as those Mark Nelson and Cameron made while recording commercials or voicetracking their shows, can be erased from existence without the listener ever knowing that they occurred. These two categories join together with “the plight of the speaker” to address both parts of the third research question (How do these processes vary according to the announcer’s job duties? How do these processes vary according to the type of announcing?)

*Techniques for entertaining the audience.* The next category explains how an announcer engaging in a performance of on-air personality chooses among tactics that anyone can use in everyday social interaction. Music announcers like Cameron, Mark Nelson, Vanessa, Laura Donaldson, or George Brooks impart information about the music they play and the artists who recorded the music. Sharing information is the primary job of news announcers such as Brian and Bob James. Talk show hosts like Brent Axe and Bill Anderson give opinions, although other announcers do so to a lesser extent. Most announcers add humor whenever possible for appropriately light topics. Much of the performance is improvised in the moment, with topics and remarks either being ad-libbed by a well-integrated team of performers (or performers and callers), or carried over from off-air conversations. Material is often repeated (e.g. Hunter and Brent repeating impressions) because the listenership is always changing.

*Integration of the audience.* On the left side of the model, the next category displays how the announcer involves the audience in the preparation and performance of

an on-air personality. Regular audience interaction – in person, through phone calls, or via social or digital media – gives the personality a chance to receive feedback about his/her performance. Such feedback may be negative, as when W-NEWS received complaints about constant references to a homicide victim as a prostitute. Sometimes, it may be positive, as in the excited reactions of young listeners when they met Cameron at the “haunted hayride.” Listener interaction can be part of the performance at times, as when Brent Axe asked for listener “Top-5” lists, Bill Anderson took calls about various topics, or Mark Nelson solicited winners for station contests. Radio personalities frequently take steps to recognize the importance of their audience, and they address the audience in a welcoming manner whenever possible. Such remarks are particularly noteworthy when a personality is about to leave his/her show (e.g. Bill, Brent, Weewo).

Radio personalities also take steps to understand what their listeners want and need. They do their best to cater to the interests of their audience, either the full audience or parts of it (e.g. Cameron playing an Adam Lambert song online to please Lambert’s fans). By incorporating feedback and understanding the salience and pertinence of the listeners’ needs and expectations, the announcer can establish coorientation (McLeod & Chaffee, 1973; Newcomb, 1953) and build an active audience. In addition to improved understanding, announcers seek to improve congruency by picking topics that will elicit similar reactions from themselves and their listeners. Although it may not reach the level seen in the instance of the bottled water delivery driver who brought water to *The Show*, coorientation is an end goal of any radio personality’s performance.

*Resolving social distance.* Finally, there is an explanation of the relationship between social distance and coorientation as it pertains to the performance. An announcer

can improve coorientation and increase listener engagement by giving a performance of on-air personality that is realistic and relatable. He/she seeks to convey emotion and excitement, telling stories and drawing on a shared bank of cultural knowledge; he/she also reveals personal details to a certain extent, while making sure to keep some personal aspects hidden. The personality balances on a thin line between expressing and deemphasizing his/her social stature, between mystification and de-mystification. Bill and Vanessa both revealed in their connections and their popularity, but they also preferred to have the ability to escape to a place where they would not be recognized. This balancing act reminds us that a performer often presents multiple, seemingly incompatible versions of reality, and will exhibit some degree of role distance during a performance (Goffman, 1961; 1959).

By reducing social distance, the personality improves understanding and accuracy, thus improving coorientation with the audience (McLeod & Chaffee, 1973). In fact, the resolving of social distance deals with asymmetry of status; McLeod and Chaffee (1973) recommended that the factors accounting for asymmetry be addressed when constructing a theoretical model about coorientation. Accuracy is increased because the personality has tweaked the performance to conform to perceived similarities with the listeners. At Cameron's "haunted hayride" broadcast, the inclusion of the young listeners in various prerecorded segments not only brought them into the performance, but also enabled Cameron to relate to them. Even in the News format, Brian makes sure that he speaks in a conversational tone – as opposed to the tone used by news announcers on television – and uses words that he would say in normal conversation.

The overall identity formation process requires the personality/narrator to create a character of him/herself that is consistent with the self that he/she shows to the world, one that is intended to be realistic and relatable. With increased coorientation comes a feeling of affinity for the personality on the part of the listener. Listeners may feel such a great degree of affinity for on-air personalities that they may form an imagined community (Douglas, 2004; Anderson, 1983) around a certain personality or program. The imagined community might receive a nickname, such as *The Show's* "Show Bros" and "Show Girls." The categories of resolving social distance and integration of the audience tie together to address the final research question (In what ways does the announcer draw upon the listening audience in these processes?)

#### *Stitching the Umbrella Together*

The resolving of social distance also ties into the construction of self because both areas deal with the narrative formation of the on-air self, thus returning us to the top of the model and displaying again how individual categories connect to each other. The major difference is that the identity plot that forms the basis of narrative construction for a personality is usually kept hidden from the audience, while the everyday stories of a personality's off-air life can be told on the air to make the personality more relatable. George Brooks would not likely tell the story of his early radio jobs on the air, but he had no trouble telling a story about the first time he ever heard Dakota Staton singing "Misty."

However, this theoretical model also ties groups of concepts together through their mutual importance to the core category of performance. For example, the concept of "the plight of the speaker" deals with the processes of making and atoning for errors;

when these processes take place, the announcers resolve social distance. As Brian Winter said, errors “humanize” them. Therefore, those two categories are related. The preparation that takes place behind the scenes is also conducted with an eye toward improving coorientation, tying together the categories of “what the listener does not know” and “integration of the audience.”

Therefore, just as the three concepts at the bottom of the model (“effects of setting/ situation,” “industry-specific processes,” and “techniques for entertaining the audience”) are related by degrees, the five concepts at the top are all related as well. Just like the aspects of performance described in those three concepts at the bottom of the model, the other concepts are all tied together through the performance itself. For example, the “plight of the speaker” deals with impression management and “what the listener doesn’t know” explores the ties between the self-as-performer and the self-as-character (Goffman, 1959). This model is not only an umbrella; it is a multi-colored one. The two parts come together through mutual uses of the available discourses that inform construction and performance of the narratively constructed self (Holstein & Gubrium, 2000). The performance is the realization and deployment of this self-as-character (Goffman, 1959), something that can be ideally achieved when all of the constitutive processes displayed in this model come together.

### *Effective Performance*

A well-executed on-air performance of personality should create a healthy tension, a tug-of-war of sorts, within the minds of their loyal listeners. On the one hand, listeners like their favorite DJs and hosts because they perceive these people to be just like them. On the other hand, the personalities are people like them who also happen to

have an authoritative role (i.e. news announcers) or work in an entertainment profession, to which we ascribe great social value and importance. The announcer is using the available “face” conferred on him/her by society (Goffman, 1967, p. 10). The listener may recognize through the personality’s mistakes and personal foibles that he/she is just as human as the listener, but this recognition may also lead to the perception that “anyone could do this job.” Such tension comes with the territory when trying to achieve coorientation with any audience.

Goffman (1959) stated that a performance is an idealized version of a situation, performed with no discernible errors to maintain the definition of a situation. Therefore, radio listeners develop an affinity for their favorite on-air personalities because in them the listeners see an idealized version of themselves. The personality is just like them, but funnier, cooler, more important, or more famous. Hence, mystification does still occur on some level in the listener’s mind, creating the mistaken perceptions of a wealthy, decadent lifestyle noted by Hunter Scott and Bill Anderson in Chapter Nine. Such perceptions are likely tied to the amount of self-mystification and embellishment exhibited by the announcer in his/her performance. Without either side of this tension between importance and relatability, coorientation and engagement could not take place.

By effectively navigating this balancing act in their performances, on-air personalities are able to fulfill the commercial imperatives of working in the radio industry. Drew Kelly and Ali Stevens know from their interactions with listeners that the personal details they share on their morning show elicit reactions. People ask them about their lives; for example, they ask about Drew and Ali’s home being flooded. Therefore, Drew and Ali feel free to talk about themselves because they see that they are relating to

listeners through their feedback. It is a classic feedback loop, and in tailoring their performance to be just relatable enough (but not too much), they improve coorientation with their listeners, and maintain their status as the top morning show in their market. On the other hand, Mark Nelson relates to his Country audience through brief anecdotes about his life that tie in directly to the station or its sponsors. In so doing, he not only creates a respectable and relatable self through narrative, but he also aids in the promotion that helps him and his station achieve their goals.

Even noncommercial stations must adhere to a variation on these commercial imperatives. Because the station still requires money to operate, it must obtain this money in part through underwriting agreements with sponsors, and if a noncommercial station has a large and devoted following, it will be easier to secure the help of underwriters. In addition, the listeners themselves – through their pledges of financial support or other donations – give announcers like FM University’s Laura Donaldson and George Brooks the chance to entertain them and to relate to them. It is a much more literal transaction than the implied transaction that comes with getting advertisers or underwriters (i.e. the listener hears the sponsor’s message and patronizes the sponsor, and the increase in business motivates the sponsor to continue giving money to the station). Perhaps this is why during a pledge drive, the relatability factor increases through the sharing of stories, as Laura described. When the need arises, a noncommercial personality emphasizes this strength, reminding the listener of why he/she enjoys the personality so much that he/she would be willing to make a donation to keep the personality on the air.

A long-term result of successful broadcast performances of personality is the building of an audience that is emotionally invested in the personality. Douglas (2004)

writes that radio is at its best when it connects emotionally, stirring the imagination, evoking the desired moods or feelings, and creating associations between “our personal lives and the broader sweep of popular culture” (p. 34). Along with that emotional connection comes a healthy respect for the on-air personality who helped to forge it, and a willingness to do what the personality asks of the listener. The imagined community that is formed around the personality can be mobilized in the service of different causes. Whether it is calling their congressman to push a particular bill, attending a station event, or patronizing a sponsor, the listeners do so at least in part because they have come to respect and trust the on-air personality, a product of high levels of coorientation over a prolonged period of time. In this sense, coorientation may be a better indicator of an on-air personality’s success than ratings because it is a product of repeated positive interactions.

### *The Impact of a Changing Industry*

Some of the changes that have occurred across all areas of the radio industry in recent years have adversely influenced the ability of radio announcers to perform their on-air personalities in the manner that they would prefer. For example, Vanessa repeatedly expressed her concerns that she cannot connect with listeners now that the management of her Urban station has restricted her ability to talk on the air because of their interpretations of PPM ratings data. Although she may have built up a narrative identity over the previous years, listeners with short memories (or who may be new listeners to the station) do not really have much of a sense of who Vanessa is, outside of her brief bursts of celebrity-related opinion.

Vanessa's situation reflects the cohesive nature of the theoretical model I have presented; when the ability to engage in one or more of the constitutive processes is compromised, the performance as a whole suffers. The ability to construct a narrative identity on the air adds depth to an on-air personality, and fosters a deeper connection with the audience by making the personality more real and relatable to listeners. Vanessa cannot supply the self-narratives she wishes to present due to a lack of time; therefore, she cannot present herself as a personality that people can relate to. She pointed out that people do not call her as much since the restrictions on airtime went into effect. Her voice still comes out of the radio at the same time on the same station, but she is not the "Vanessa" the listeners knew.

Therefore, she may be getting high ratings with the PPMs, and management may be content with that fact, but listening to her program has been reduced to a passive sort of listening that does not spur engagement. It would be interesting to find out whether distribution of contest stickers or turnout at promotional appearances have declined since the restrictions on airtime were imposed. In addition, Vanessa clearly does not find satisfaction in her own performance, leading her to question how much longer she would like to continue in her present position. Applying Bruner's (1997) concept of trouble as a period when a narrative identity must change and adapt, Vanessa appears to be going through a trouble brought about by one company's interpretation of PPM data. If Vanessa is uninspired and can tell that her audience is as well, the characterization of her daily program as a successful broadcast must be called into question. She does not find her broadcast interactions with listeners to be positive ones, or at least not as positive as they once were.

Vanessa's situation shows that not every announcer I observed is completely successful as an on-air personality. A comparison of her circumstances and others I observed (e.g. Brian Winter, *Drew and the Crew*) would bear this out. We can also consider past instances of trouble experienced by participants in this study. One past example of a situation lacking in success was Mark Nelson's experience at the station where he had to voicetrack most of his programs. He admitted to going into ruts and repeating himself frequently. He subconsciously limited the techniques he used for entertaining the audience, falling back on repeating material. Because he was not on the air live, Mark could not interact with his audience during his "show." As such, the performance suffered, and it was not a positive, satisfying experience, leading Mark to seek a better opportunity for himself at the Country station where he is now.

The increased reliance on voicetracking is another change that has come about in radio in recent years, and I argue that it is not for the better. Cameron noted the difficulty of being a popular personality in another city because of voicetracking, but not being able to interact directly with the listeners in that other city. Therefore, the performance may have some degree of success (at least in terms of ratings), but it is not as successful as it could be. With voicetracking, corporate owners institute a lower standard of success that they are willing to accept, but are the listeners willing to accept it?

*Corporate influence.* The above discussions of PPM and voicetracking are reminders that the subtle hand of corporate influence is always at play in on-air radio performance. Corporate owners seek to quantify the achievement of commercial imperatives in different ways. As previously noted, ratings and revenue are the most obvious, but the policy of Cameron's station to monitor and benchmark the number of

“likes” and comments on Facebook demonstrates how owners are incorporating social media in their quest to meet corporate goals. The shaping of personality through these policies is a reminder that as a social institution, the radio industry establishes the discourses that are available for creating a relatable self through narrative for on-air performance (Holstein & Gubrium, 2000). As corporate downsizing has eliminated opportunities for performances to occur, particularly on a live and local basis (Crider, 2012; Hilliard & Keith, 2005; Ala-Fossi, 2004), it is important to see how performance elements have been changed or reduced for those who have adapted in order to survive in the ever-evolving radio industry.

Corporate owners have influence over the strategy that goes into on-air performance of personality, in both positive and negative ways, and they are not alone. Consultants and other radio experts pitch various strategies to both established and would-be personalities in the hopes that they will find success. Their work is published in books (e.g. Geller, 2011) or in regular columns through trade publications and websites (e.g. Jacobs Media, 2013; Weaver, 2013). Rather than pit my theoretical model against these various strategies, I wish to emphasize that the performance of on-air personality is *based in strategy*.

Whatever outside advice or gut-instinct an announcer uses to construct a performance, the performance itself is the moment that matters. As Goffman (1959) wrote, there is the possibility in every interaction that a participant may be embarrassed or humiliated. Therefore, a radio announcer enters each day’s broadcast interaction knowing that he/she is gambling with the reputation he/she has established with listeners. The announcer hopes that his/her performance of personality is convincing enough to

earn subsequent listens by the audience. Often, it can be fun and entertaining for all parties. At other times, it can be stressful, although as I have noted, the listeners usually do not know how stressful. Whether it is a college DJ or Ryan Seacrest, the success or failure of an announcer's social interaction with listeners hinges on the successful performance of a narratively constructed self. This on-air self is tailored to anticipate the listener's expectations so that some form of coorientation may be gained with the listener. The announcer's long-term goal is the formation of a sizable and emotionally invested listening audience.

## CHAPTER 11: CONCLUSION

The purpose of this dissertation was to analyze the ways in which radio announcers present themselves on the air as personalities. I sought to investigate the processes involved in this presentation, how they varied by the announcer's job duties or type of announcing, and how announcers involved their listeners in these processes. I conducted weeklong observations at 11 different broadcast sites, studying announcers in various formats, settings, and types of announcing. From my observations and analysis, I constructed a theoretical model explaining the social establishment of radio by connecting the various themes and behaviors I witnessed to the central premise: the presentation of a constructed and prepared "character" meant for mass consumption. The successful presentation and performance of this character/personality enables the radio announcer to meet the commercial imperatives of the medium by building a large and emotionally invested audience through a pattern of positive interactions.

The theoretical model I have constructed provides an explanation of the everyday practices of radio announcers in today's quickly changing media landscape. Coorientation researchers (e.g. Meyer et al., 2010; Jones, 1993; Wackman, 1973) have found that the need to build consensus through the sharing of information is ongoing, regardless of the communication channels that are used or the introduction of new channels. Although the technology is changing, the need for media content that is relatable and engaging does not change. The challenge for today's radio professionals is to present the content and interact with listeners in as many different ways as possible, including digital and social media.

Therefore, this model is not only timely in its presentation, but should also continue to contribute to the body of knowledge about audio media as different forms of presentation continue to be introduced. This study provided an inside-the-industry perspective not generally found within American radio studies, and rarely found within media studies in general (e.g. Gans, 1979; Tuchman, 1978; Powdermaker, 1950). It also addressed a need for identity research that recognizes the everyday practices of identity formation (Brubaker & Cooper, 2000).

This theoretical model of on-air performance of personality also provides an explanation of cultural behavior amongst radio announcers, as advocated by Wolcott (1995). As Powdermaker (1950) did with the film industry, my model examines the social system that surrounds the production of content in the radio industry, so as to gain an understanding of how that system influences broadcast performances. It explains how these announcers make meaning out of their everyday activities by describing how and why they construct on-air personalities through narrative, and how and why they perform these on-air selves with the ultimate goals of attracting and retaining an audience through coorientation (McLeod & Chaffee, 1973; Newcomb, 1953).

The model also applies Goffman's (1959) dramaturgical perspective to an important social establishment, in this case a medium that affects millions of Americans on a daily basis. Regardless of whether listeners ever feel the need to actively engage with the medium through phone calls, texts, tweets, or "likes" on Facebook, at the very least they seek information and entertainment from radio on a daily basis. This dissertation reflects the increasing sophistication of recent radio research, while addressing the need to continue studying this valuable medium (Sterling, 2009).

Like many theoretical models found in social science, such as Goffman's (1981; 1959) theories that formed the basis of my study, my model describes an idealized situation while recognizing that perfection does not usually occur. As Goffman (1959) noted, a performance of self is an all-too-human task, and mistakes will take place during social interaction. The mistakes themselves fascinated Goffman (1981), hence his study of errors made by radio announcers. Habermas (1984; 1962/1996) took a similar approach with his social theories, using his explanations of how society is supposed to work in order to show how it does not. In much the same manner, the theoretical model I have presented can be used to describe how certain radio announcers are better than others at forging connections with listeners, pointing out the advantages and the disadvantages of certain approaches. As I hinted in Chapter Ten, a comparison of the participants in this study, applying the model to each, could provide such an assessment, although certain factors would have to be considered (e.g. format, time of day, commercial vs. noncommercial).

Although this dissertation was limited geographically to the Eastern United States, it is likely that announcers on the West Coast or in the Midwest exhibit the same behaviors when developing and performing an on-air personality. There are local factors that play into any performance, and as my participants who have moved from one city to another (e.g. Hunter Scott, Vanessa, Cameron) demonstrated, taking the time to understand the audience and learn about the market can result in greater relatability, regardless of location. In Chapter Three, I suggested that those who chose not to participate in the study might not have wanted their performance secrets to be revealed.

These personalities are likely to engage in the same behaviors as the participants, but the degree to which they embellish or hide details may vary.

There were no announcers with national audiences in this study, so I can only speculate about the applicability of the model to those with syndicated or satellite-delivered programs. There is no denying that personalities with national audiences, such as Rush Limbaugh and Howard Stern, have vast imagined communities of active listeners. National on-air personalities run into the same potential problem that out-of-town voicetrackers like Cameron have: If you cannot be there to interact directly with a local listener, does it diminish the emotional connection for the listener? Certainly, national talk show hosts have a much larger pool of listeners with whom to interact, so the odds of a listener in any one of the hosts' many markets getting through to speak with the host are slim. The affiliate station also has to make up for the lack of local information provided by the host, and many choose not to do so (Crider, 2012). The hosts of national programs would be an interesting topic for future research, using the theoretical model I have provided as a guide.

As for situations where the announcer's program is voicetracked, I again propose that with voicetracking comes a lower standard for content. In many cases, the voicetracked host is asked to only give the names of songs and promote the station, leaving very little to be shared that the listener might find relatable, much less realistic. Does the listener notice this lack of an effort to resolve social distance, and does it make a difference in how the person listens to the personality or his/her station?

The above speculation makes it abundantly clear that there is a need to consider the listeners' side of the communication. The analysis of listener engagement in this

study was based on the self-satisfaction of the announcers and their empirical observations that they are connecting with the listeners, as well as the observations I gleaned from live appearances. It would be prudent to obtain hard evidence that supports such observations. Do audiences feel this tension between reverence and relatability in their attitudes toward on-air personalities? Do listeners think that their favorite news announcer, DJ, or talk show host is “just like me, but better?” Such research would likely follow the model used in previous audience-media coorientation studies, focusing on measures of congruency on the part of the listeners (e.g. Meyer et al. 2010; Clarke, 1973). These studies could determine the level of active or passive listening that comes from certain strategies that are employed by announcers and their corporate bosses. Again, allowances for factors such as format and time of day would be necessary. A station that plays wall-to-wall music may be just fine with listeners who only want to hear music.

As a model created through grounded theory methodology (Corbin & Strauss, 2008; Glaser & Strauss, 1967), this theoretical model of on-air performance should be subjected to the same evaluation as any other theory. A solid theoretical model must meet several criteria, such as testability, parsimony, explanatory power, predictive power, and scope (Shoemaker, Tankard, & Lasorsa, 2004). As suggested above, there are certainly many avenues available for future research that can test this theory by getting the perspective of radio listeners. The model is parsimonious in that everything flows from the core phenomenon of the performance of an on-air self. Its explanatory power is quite strong in that it covers many diverse settings found within the radio industry.

The predictive power of the theoretical model developed here is also strong; this model predicts that realistic and relatable performances of personality will result in

increased engagement. Therefore, this model has both academic applications for those who wish to study how identity is constructed and presented through the media and practical applications for radio itself. I believe that my analysis and the theoretical model derived from it are valuable to both people who work in broadcasting and those who aspire to do so someday. As Hunter explained, the ability to relate and connect with an audience is something he actively seeks in a prospective on-air personality, and it is likely that many other program directors do as well.

Using Sanjek's (1990b) three canons of assessment, I find this completed study to have a high degree of ethnographic validity. In addition to my previous explanation of the reasons behind my choice of ethnography as a research method, the theoretical model yielded by this study adds to theoretical candor by complementing the dramaturgical and narrative approaches for studying identity, and by bolstering previous media coorientation research. In addition to my applications of the second and third canons in Chapter Three, the narrative that runs through Chapters Four through Nine address both my path through the field research and the ways in which my field notes were incorporated into the product. Both of these areas were described explicitly through my use of the events that I observed and those with which I was personally involved as part of the process of preparing and executing an on-air performance.

*Radio... What Would Life Be Without It?*

Despite its decreased emphasis in academia, and experts' proclamations that the medium is dying, radio is still very much alive and well and successful. While the industry attempts often-derided self-marketing campaigns like "Radio Heard Here" (Simon, 2012) and "Radio... What Would Life Be Without It?" ("Radio Stands Up,"

1989) engaging on-air personalities continue to be radio's best selling point. Most of the announcers I studied had followings that were sizable and/or loyal. Those who left their positions did not do so because of inferior results. However, it is fair to say that sometimes listeners and announcers alike take the connection they have for granted. When I shared the results of this study with the announcers who participated, some said that the analysis revealed aspects of on-air performance that they had never previously considered, and that the knowledge gained would improve their future work.

The theoretical model I have proposed is not a one-size-fits-all roadmap to becoming a great radio personality. Instead, it explains the process of putting on a performance of on-air radio personality by showing how the performance is done and why it attracts listeners. The factors that turn a good radio performance into a great or outstanding performance vary by format, setting, or situation. In the case of local radio, an announcer's on-air "face" (Goffman, 1967, p. 10) is on loan to him/her from the local audience, and those who are fortunate to have one of the ever-decreasing opportunities to be live and local must still adhere to the standards that local society places on them as broadcasters. Announcers also seek to live up to the standards that they place on themselves, as well as the standards set by those in the industry that they respect.

I am interested in both how radio works and why it works, particularly as the number of other media options continues to grow in the digital age. Whereas Powdermaker (1950) was concerned with an influential industry (Hollywood) that was perceived to be in some ways out of step with American society, radio concerns itself with trying to be as much in step with society as possible. The narrowly targeted demographic focus of 21<sup>st</sup> century radio – as opposed to the mass appeal of golden-age

film – is an interesting point of departure. Radio, particularly in an age of ever-personalized media options, seeks to become the ultimate personal medium, being successful by aligning itself with the listener's taste and lifestyle. The on-air personality's role is to perform a self that aligns with these things just enough to create a desire in listeners to continue listening, and ultimately to develop a sense of loyalty and fidelity.

Brian Winter's belief that "radio is still hit the sounder, open the mic, and tell the world" is an oversimplification. Whether a radio announcer is conscious of them or not, there are a lot of thought processes that go into a radio broadcast. If an announcer has a sound strategy for being relatable and realistic with his/her audience, performs in a technically proficient manner while retaining humanity, and uses all available forms of audience interaction to his/her advantage, there is a greater chance that he/she will connect with the audience. Even as the move toward digital media continues, the demand for interesting and relatable content will persist, regardless of where the content may originate. No matter what form "radio" may take in the future, there will continue to be announcers who forge connections with listeners by presenting an image that the audience finds trustworthy and compelling.

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