Aural Intimacies:

Gendered Constructions of Familiarity on *The Mary Margaret McBride Program*

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ABSTRACT

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The Mary Margaret McBride Program

By Sadie Couture

In this project I theorize the work of Mary Margaret McBride who hosted a number of shows on American network radio from 1934-1954. On her genre-defying programs, McBride chatted in a casual and unscripted way with guests, fluidly discussing both their professional and personal lives. McBride's relationship with her listeners was characterized by feelings of closeness, trust, loyalty and intimacy (Ware, 2005). I connect McBride's relationship with her fans to radio history and theory, especially certain 'media fantasies' (Verma, 2012) of the early twentieth century in which radio was understood as a particularly important medium for fostering connection, community, and democracy (Loviglio, 2005; Marvin, 1988; Mosco, 2004; Peters, 1999).

I present findings from my archival research at the Library of Congress in Washington, DC. In my analysis, I follow Neil Verma (2012) and John Barnhurst and Kevin Nerone (2001), and focus on the form of McBride's program. I investigate what her program sounds like, and how and why did it fostered such close personal connections between listeners, guests, and McBride. My research suggests a number of factors which may have contributed to the atmosphere of gendered familiarity evident in McBride's work. I argue that McBride's embrace of magazine format, innovative advertising techniques, use of pace and audioposition (Verma, 2012), combined with the fluidity and non-segmentation of her show, constructed an audio media context in which listeners felt connected to each other, to McBride, and to the products she promoted, constituting an emergent structure of feeling (Williams, 1977).

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". . . there exists a communion that approaches the mystical . . . between Mary Margaret McBride and several million housewives within earshot" (Hamburger, 1944).

1.1 Introduction

Mary Margaret McBride was born on a farm in Missouri in 1899. By 1949 and her fiftieth birthday, she was the host of a popular radio show which drew in millions of listeners every weekday, wrote a nationally syndicated column for the Associated Press, was the author of numerous monographs, and had celebrated her radio anniversaries in Madison Square Garden and Yankee Stadium along with tens of thousands of fans (Hilmes, 1997; Merrick 1996, 1997; Ware, 2005). She was one of the first people to ever host a talk show on American radio, one of the most well-known women in media of her era, an unquestionably successful saleswoman, and a dear 'friend' to millions of American women who listened to her show religiously.

From her rural upbringing, McBride made her way through journalism school, and worked as reporter throughout the midwest, before coming to New York in the 1920s. She wrote sob stories,[1] travel articles, and took jobs ghostwriting[2] (Ware, 2005). McBride's early years were filled with both successes and failures, as the scrappy young journalist fought her way into a field dominated by men and characterized by precarity. In the 1920s, she had considerable success as a magazine reporter,[3] but like many, she found herself both out of work and savings in the 1930s and as a result, accepted a job in radio despite her writerly ambitions (Hilmes, 1997; Ware, 2005). She later described her state in 1934 as "I needed a job and I needed it quick" (McBride, 1941a). This desperation led McBride to her second career, in radio, during which she hosted a number of talk shows of varying lengths and formats from 1934-1954 and again starting in 1960 until shortly before her death in 1976 (Hilmes, 1997; Merrick, 1996; Ware, 2005). McBride's role as a host was exceptional for her era in which gender-based discrimination was standard in the industry, and

[1] Ware describes how McBride was often assigned stories about tragedies such as fires, children living in poverty, or murder cases, and how she functioned as *The New York Evening Mail*'s "sob sister" for a time, a term used to describe "women reporters on daily papers who were automatically expected to have a natural feminine talent for writing sad, heartbreaking stories" (2005, p. 121, 133-137).

[2] She wrote stories 'with' figures such as Paul Whiteman, a prince of Greece, opera singer Marion Tally, and radio executive David Sarnoff (Ware, 2005, p. 139). Ware connects this work to McBride's success as an interviewer noting, "she kept the focus on her guest and was dedicated to drawing them out and making them the focus of the program while she performed the role of facilitator" (p. 139).

[3] She wrote regularly for publications such as *Harper's Bazaar, McCall's,* and *Country Gentleman,* and was "one of the top (and best paid) feature writers of the decade" (Ware, 2005, p. 139).

early flexibility in terms of gender roles had been replaced by institutionalized rigidity (Hilmes, 1997, p. 132). As early as 1924, rumours circulated about the compatibility of women's voices with radio technology, and McBride fought against these factors her whole career (Hilmes, 1997, p. 59; Merrick, 1997, p. 153; Ware, 2005, p. 52). McBride was one of the few women who worked in radio in an on-air, non-performing capacity during this era, and she was often disparaged in the press for her voice, weight, marital status, clothes and mannerisms (Churchill, 1949; Merrick, 1997, p. 153, 156-157).

On her daily talk shows, McBride chatted in a casual and unscripted way with guests, fluidly discussing both their professional and personal lives. McBride's conversational style was uncommon in an era when tightly rehearsed shows dominated the airwaves, and her approach defied the conventional genres and formats of the time (Ware, 2005). More popular were scripted serial narratives, variety musical programs and dramatic adaptations (Hilmes, 1997). Programs which loom large in many cultural imaginaries include *Amos n' Andy, The Jack Benny Program, The Lux Radio Theatre, Mercury Theatre of the Air,* while other programs, the "oft-pilloried daytime radio serials" have also received a fair amount of attention in their own way (Hilmes, 1997, p. xix-xx). Radio in this era articulated a strong daytime/nighttime binary in which daytime programming was denigrated as commercial, frivolous, feminine, and low-brow, while nighttime radio was understood as serious, masculine, and high-brow (Hilmes, 1997).

In this milieu, McBride's program was unique, offering daytime listeners a program through which they could hear unscripted and improvised takes on current events of political, social and cultural importance, as well as hearing from celebrities and important figures of the time. McBride's program was a daily presence for her listeners, in the way in which radio scholars have noted radio both integrated itself into daily rhythms and "constructed those rhythms, becoming a permanent part of the modern understanding of orderly interval" (Verma, 2012, p. 28). McBride's relationship with her listeners was similarly exceptional, characterized by feelings of closeness, trust, and intimacy (Ware, 2005). Her fans sent her an unprecedented amount of mail (see Figure 1), writing to her about their personal lives and her role in them, sending her food, gifts, offering advice, and buying the products she advertised in record amounts (Ware, 2005).

Figure 1. McBride with fan mail, no date. Library of Congress Recorded Sound Section – MBRS Division, Lowry/McBride Collection, Photographs, Box 1, Folder 2.

In this work, I connect these relationships and feelings with more general discourses about the intimacy of radio and audio media, and explore the social and cultural origins of these formations. I follow Michele Hilmes' (1997) call to treat radio as a "social practice grounded in culture rather than in electricity" (p. xiii), investigating how and why McBride's program came to be understood by both listeners and critics as particularly intimate. I argue that McBride's formally innovative use of radio and her development of certain conventions constructed an audio media context in which listeners felt connected to each other, to McBride, and to the products she promoted, producing an atmosphere of gendered familiarity and intimacy as notable to her contemporaries as it is today.

1.2 Method

McBride's radio career is unique in that much of it was recorded. As I understand this was not the norm for many broadcast radio programs of the time (Douglas, 2004, p. 7), but McBride's shows were recorded by her manager, Stella Karn, using her personal funds (Ware,

2005, p. 6). The recordings of McBride's broadcasts are held at the Library of Congress' Recorded Sound Research Center in Washington, D.C. and in selecting my corpus for this project my main problem was abundance of materials. Searching for Mary Margaret McBride in the Library of Congress catalog brings up 2,853 hits, some of which are her appearances on other radio shows, but most of which are her own shows in their various iterations with about 1,200 hours of audio available (Ware, 2005). As her programs were recorded at personal cost, and through their various travels and format migrations, some have become fragmented, cracked, or unlistenable, but the majority of them are complete and in good shape. With such a large amount of material to work from, I delineated my corpus in a number of ways. Firstly, I limited my selections to McBride's years on NBC and ABC from September 21 1941 to May 14 1954, at which she was at the height of her regularity, popularity and listenership, and when she had her favourite time slot, and desired length of program (Ware, 2005). These programs were daily during the week and lasted for forty-five to sixty minutes each, being broadcast live at one in the afternoon. With this still being a huge amount of audio, I choose a temporally representative selection, to account for differences in approach or form as the show matures and becomes more popular. As per the limits of the Library of Congress reformatting capacity, and the length of my research trip, I was permitted to request digitization of about 25 broadcasts. To choose these from the abundance of available material, I eliminated from consideration those broadcasts which were not fully complete, I then grouped the shows by year and then randomly selected two from each year (total 26), for a temporally representative sample.[4] I also had access to the broadcasts which had already been digitized for use by researchers which numbered around five hundred.

The shows were originally recorded on laquered disc, then the Library of Congress transferred them onto reel-to-reel magnetic tape which was their standard format for preservation before digitization.[5] Because of this reformatting, the original forty-five minute programs were put onto the hour-long reels, and then usually the remainder of the reel was 'filled up' with

[4] My initial idea to group the broadcasts by guest category was not viable for a few reasons. Firstly, the guests range from 1 to 10+. It would be difficult to categorize broadcasts based on category of guests when many categories routinely appear in the same show. Secondly, I noted some inconsistency in the metadata of the finding aid. It seems that sometimes only the famous guests were noted, and often there are indications that some guests were not named (i.e. "and others" or "guests include"). Instead of working with this information, I decided to opt for a temporally representative sample, randomizing my selections based on the year they were broadcast.

[5] Thank you to Bryan Cornell, Karen Fishman, Harrison and David at the Recorded Sound Research Center for this information.

another show, and the B side of the reel had another program on it, often the program from the following day. So, with each full program I requested to be digitized, I also had the opportunity to listen to fragments of other programs which were mainly other Mary Margaret McBride broadcasts, but at times were other NBC shows altogether. Because of this, I managed to listen to more than my original sample size of twenty-six broadcasts, for a total of forty-one unique programs between forty-five to sixty minutes long, the majority of which I listened to in their entirety. I also perused the already digitized broadcasts in a more "circular" and non structured manner (Hill, 1993, p. 6), investigating programs I had read about, or ones which popped out to me in the catalogue. I spent 4 weeks at the Library of Congress, looking through their collection of McBride's papers, other relevant collections such as the NBC History Files, and, listening for form.

1.3 Outline of this Work

In the remainder of this chapter I present and explore the origins of perceptions of mediated intimacy, as they have been understood in media and communications studies. I note Carolyn Marvin's (1988) assertion of the special moment in which media are introduced to societies, and as such, focus much of the chapter on the period in which radio became widely available in North America. I note the long history of desires and anxieties about mediated intimacy focusing on the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, and how these histories informed understandings of McBride's program.

In Chapter Two, I explore the concepts of form and format, following the work of Kevin Barnhurst and John Nerone (2001), and Neil Verma (2012), while noting Jonathan Sterne's (2012) divergent take on the concept of format. I offer an argument for how and why form is a fruitful and productive mode of analysis for radio and media studies, explaining my focus on form, aesthetics and structure. I note McBride's use of 'magazine format' as a funding model and structuring principle, and argue that her embrace of this format influenced the atmosphere of her show in a number of important ways.

Chapter Three consists of my presentation of some of the formal and aesthetic aspects of McBride's show, and my analysis of their connection to the atmosphere and perceived intimacy of the program. I note several temporal and spatial conventions which McBride deployed, specifically pace, flow, her interesting approach to advertising, the position of her mic, and gestures to physical closeness.

Chapter Four notes the lack of demographic information about McBride's listeners and explores questions of who these people were, and how they may have engaged with her program. I draw on literature about radio and listening practices (Birdsall, 2012; Lacey, 2013; Razlogova 2012) as well as listener letters, and newspaper and magazine articles to speculate on the types of listening and interpretive communities McBride's fans may have formed (Douglas, 2004; Radway, 1984). I argue that while McBride's fans understood her show and the feelings it produced on terms familiar to their social and cultural contexts (Marvin, 1988), and that they formed both imagined and non-imagined listening communities in relation to McBride, her program, and other listeners.

I conclude by mentioning some of the implications of my work, and opportunities for further research. I make connections between McBride's program and the contemporary moment in which podcasting is booming worldwide and audio media are often venerated for their ability to connect on an intimate register.

1.4 Perceptions of Intimacy and Communications Technologies

The perceived intimacy of *The Mary Margaret McBride Program* is a part of a wide trend in popular and academic discourses through which media technologies are understood as able to facilitate meaningful personal connections. Many of the examples I draw from are situated in the period when said technologies were being developed and popularized. As Carolyn Marvin has influentially argued, this period should be treated as a "special historical occasion" when "fascination and fear" as well as "social experimentation" are at their height (1988, p. 4). Marvin argues that as they are introduced to various publics, new media insert themselves into ongoing social negotiations by "providing new platforms on which old groups confront one another" (p. 5). For Marvin, it is in the period of newness, of integration, and of conflict during which important insights can be gleaned, as social and cultural assumptions about how communication ought to be attached to specific technologies are revealed. Marvin asserts, "how new media were expected to loosen or tighten existing social bonds also reflected what specific groups hoped for and feared from one another," and because of this, the time of a media's novelty and introduction is a period ripe for analysis and reflection (1988, p. 6). Following Marvin, many of the concepts and cultural understandings I discuss are situated in the early twentieth century in North America, during radio technology's introduction to the public and widespread adoption, the period of "utopian idealism and cultural pessimism that habitually surrounds the emergence of a new medium" (Lacey, 2013, p. 7). As Jonathan Sterne (2003) has

noted “our most cherished pieties about sound-reproduction technologies. . . were not and are not innocent empirical descriptions of the technologies’ impact. They were wishes that people grafted onto sound-reproduction technologies—wishes that became programs for innovation and use” (2003, p. 8). In this chapter I will investigate such wishes, their origins and impact, as they relate to media in general and radio/audio in particular. The social and cultural grounds of these understandings are of course deeply contextual, but, as I will argue in later chapters, have persisted in more or less obvious ways throughout time and space.

Many different communications technologies have been associated with notions of intimacy and closeness. As telegrams, phonographs, telephones, radio and the internet have become available, so too have narratives about these technologies’ abilities to conquer various divides, bringing people together in multitudes of senses. In his discussion on myth and cyberspace, Vincent Mosco (2004) has influentially argued that myths about communications technologies and their ability to transform social orders have endured throughout the nineteenth and twentieth centuries. He argues that many technologies have in their youth been associated with magic, transcendence, and the sublime, and have fostered idealistic hopes about their impact. He notes that in the past it was thought that “the railroad would bring peace to Europe, that steam power would eliminate the need for manual labor, and that electricity would bounce messages off the clouds” (Mosco, 2004, p. 22). Mosco contextualizes these types of desires into what he identifies as three central myths about communications technology and modernity, which he dubs the end of history, the end of geography, and the end of politics (2004, p. 13). Mosco argues that as new technologies such as the telegraph, radio, and phonograph are introduced, so too are these myths, which often dissipate as the media become more integrated into the social order. As Mosco notes, the end of structures of difference and separation have been projected onto many technologies, as have desires for understanding, harmony and connection which supposedly accompany these ends.

Similarly, Carolyn Marvin notes how electric media in the late nineteenth century were understood as both vehicles for “social miracles” and if their use was not properly controlled and integrated into the existing social order, as possible “social catastrophes” (1988, p. 63- 64). The telephone, when first introduced to consumers, evoked strong feelings of idealism and hope about the improved and open communication it would foster. Marvin asserts, “central to all the good things that new technologies of communication would accomplish was the building of better, usually construed to mean more open and democratically accessible, communities” (1988, p. 65). Marvin argues that with telephones, the possibility of contacting anyone at anytime

despite physical distance and various social relations, was lauded as a building block to better communities. However, also attached to telephones were fears. Marvin asserts that with telephone technology came "particular nervousness attached to protected areas of family life that might be exposed to public scrutiny by electrical communication. That intimate family secrets would be displayed to the world by new instruments of communication" (Marvin, 1988, p. 68). The ability of the telephone to make private family matters public was stressed in the expert as well as the popular literature about telephones. Exposed marital problems, inappropriate courtships, and even transmission of disease were fears which nineteenth century publics projected onto telephones, emphasizing the class and other relations which were understood to be in jeopardy in the face of telephone technology (Marvin, 1988). As a result, the supposed directness of connection with telephone calls needed to be monitored and massaged into the social relations of the time. Marvin notes,

> popular periodicals encouraged readers to use the cautious good manners of middle-class intimacy—quiet voices, clearly enunciated words, dignified presentation. 'You speak into a telephone loud and harsh and you get a jarring sound, you misunderstand yourself,' explained a speaker at the National Telephone Exchange Association convention in 1889; 'but speak low and tender and you get a perfect communication of soul.' (Marvin, 1988, p. 90)

As Marvin argues, with proper integration into the social order of the time, the connective possibilities of the telephone could be understood as a positive force for community building through deep connection, rather than as a threat to class, gender, and racial hierarchies of the era.

I see these desires, hopes, and fears as being connected to what John Durham Peters (1999) has dubbed the "dream of communication" (p. 1). Peters describes this dream as an idealistic one, a desire to overcome the problem of self/other, to experience a communion of souls and interiorities (p. 1, 8-9), a type of exchange able to foster "understanding, cooperation, community, love" (p. 30). Peters argues that this dream is often projected onto communications technologies, with hopes that "the expansion of means leads to the expansion of minds" (p. 29). As Peters shows, tethering utopian desires of closeness and harmony to communications institutions and technologies has a long history, and many of these desires have to do with ideas of intimacy, closeness, and connection. These ideas seem to be what Neil Verma (2012) calls a "media fantasy" following scholars such as Marvin (1988), Jefferey Sconce (2000), and Paul Young (2006) (p. 6).

1.5 Perceptions of Intimacy and Radio

As with communications technologies in general, radio in particular has been understood in part through fantasies. It has been characterized as a medium able to bridge temporal, spatial and spiritual gaps, bringing users closer together, and fostering connection, unity, and understanding. Because of the properties of the medium and the media fantasies surrounding it, radio has historically been understood as having potential to foster peace, social cohesion and democracy on a broad scale (Mosco, 2004; Lacey, 2013), and that it would serve as a de-isolating force in remote spaces (Kuffert, 2009). Building on these popular understandings, radio has been understood by scholars as able to forge highly personal bonds with its listeners (Douglas, 2004; Hilmes, 1997; Lacey, 2013; Loviglio, 2005; Vipond, 1992).

For many users in the early twentieth century, the seemingly supernatural ability of radio to transmit messages through the air, without a physical connection such as a wire strongly connoted associations with otherworldly forces (Douglas, 2004; Loviglio, 2005; Mosco, 2004; Peters, 1999). As Jason Loviglio (2005), has noted, "like telepathy, interplanetary communication, or talking with the dead, radio seemed to be heralding a new relationship between space, sound, and human experience" (p. xix), and John Durham Peters notes radio's "immediate comparisons to telepathy, seances, and angelic visions" (1999, p. 206). For people in the 1920s, messages sent through the 'ether' by radio technology, seemingly defying spatial and temporal boundaries, seemed magical, mystical, and divine (Mosco, 2004). This apparent transgression of natural laws led to experts and their publics attaching very ambitious hopes and dreams to the emerging medium (Peters, 1999, p. 211). Susan Douglas (2004) argues that in this era, radio was able to bridge the gap between the dual societal interests of technologism and spiritualism, reconciling these two movements. She asserts, "radio burrowed into this unspoken longing for a contact with the heavens, for a more perfect community, for a spiritual transcendence, not at odds with, but made possible by, machines" (2004, p. 41). Douglas stresses the importance of the spiritualist movement in the first decades of the twentieth century as the "imaginative terrain" upon which radio trod (2004, p. 46). The slippery concept of the ether, desires to heal and re-evaluate after the devastating Great War, and a general cultural interest in the dead and the supernatural informed these understandings of radio (Douglas, 2004).

Desires for intimacy in some form were a central feature of the otherworldly associations attached to radio in the early twentieth century. The supernatural ability of radio to facilitate contact without physical presence reveals, as Peters argues "something about the curious

ontology of the radio signal and the longings associated with communication at a distance" (1999, p. 212). Peters characterizes the desire for understanding and communication as "always erotic in the broad sense" (p. 212), exposing a desire for contact, closeness and intimacy. Chatty, dialogic, and inclusive styles of address were developed and conventionalized to satisfy the cultural desire for contact at a distance, constructing a sense of presence and direct and personal address (Peters, 1999, p. 216-217). For Peters, "intimate sound spaces, domestic genres, cozy speech styles, and radio personalities" all worked to construct the contact which was so desired by all, but seemed difficult to produce in the absence of physical presence (Peters, 1999, p. 215). The awe inspired by the qualities of radio technology, the desires of the social milieu and subsequent conventions in which it was popularized, resulted in a strong association of radio and and intimacy in the first half of the twentieth century.

These associations were expressed in a variety of ways. Michele Hilmes and Jason Loviglio note that by the 1930s, radio stood as an "amalgam of nearly every public institution and a trusted guest" (2002, p. xi). Mosco (2004) cites the Episcopal bishop of Washington, D.C. who effused, "more and more I have come to feel that this growing feeling of brotherhood may result from the intimacy and fellowship created through the medium of the air" (p. 129). From romance, to democracy, friendship, and citizenship, in the early twentieth century, radio technology was thought to be able to promote many different types of connection and closeness. Radio producers emphasized the impression of presence and of direct address through formal techniques which many attributed to the medium (Peters, 1999; Kuffert, 2009), producing the impression that "each listener could feel that he or she was being addressed directly and personally by the announcer." (Vipond, 1992, p. 102).

A good example of this is Jason Loviglio's (2005) discussion of the Fireside Chats of Franklin D. Roosevelt which were understood by the American listening public as personal, friendly, and intimate. Listeners felt that Roosevelt was *in* their homes, talking to them as a friend, confidante, and peer. Loviglio quotes a letter from a man in New York City,

> you are more than just another President, in that your willingness to put plain facts in a plain way before the people brings you real close to their fireside, and creates a warmth in their hearts for you, such as they have for a real good friend. (Loviglio, 2005, p. 2)

Loviglio argues that the listening space of the home, the associations already attributed to radio, and Roosevelt's carefully curated style of address combined to create a sense of radio as a particularly intimate medium. He asserts, "the tension between intimacy (interpersonal communication) and publicity (mass communication) was the defining feature of early network

radio, its central problem and its greatest appeal" (2005, p. xvi). As Elena Razlogova (2012) puts it;

> sensitive microphones, crooning voices, living room radios, protracted storylines, and informal speech amplified the sense of a 'personal touch.' Commercials used personal appeal to direct consumer desires. Roosevelt, who received more mail from his constituents than any previous president, began his 'fireside chats' with a drink of water and an aside, 'It is very hot here in Washington.' (Razlogova, 2012, p. 9)

Many factors convened in radio to construct and fulfill the social and culture desires attached to the medium. This perceived intimacy is something which has persisted in popular, trade, and academic discourses about radio, and one that continues to be actively cultivated through radio conventions (Peters, 1999; Verma, 2012). As Susan Douglas (2004) writes "there are few devices with which people from different generations and backgrounds have had such an intimate relationship" (p. 3). While Douglas attributes these feelings as stemming from the "particular qualities and power of sound, and how these have shaped the power of radio" (2004, p. 8), I am interested in the social and cultural contexts in which these understandings developed, and the ways in which they were cultivated in relation to such constructs as the dream of communication.

1.6 Radio and Space

A big part of the impact and awe with which radio was associated, was the untethering of communication from transportation, and the desires which accompanied this. With wireless technology, no longer did messages need to be physically brought via foot, boat, or train. Because of this, radio, especially in its early years, was seen as importantly able to break through spatial boundaries, allowing for instantaneous connection and communication over previously insurmountable physical distances. As Verma (2012) writes, "the medium was broadly conceptualized as a cultural form destined to overcome traditional forms of distance" (p. 25), and cites philosophers, novelists, radio industry spokesmen, public intellectuals as all sharing this conception[6] (2012, p. 25). This untethering was not unique to radio, but rather was a part of a general trend in communications technology (and the dreams which Mosco characterizes as the 'end of geography'). As Carolyn Marvin (1988) notes, "the most admired feats of the telephone,

[6] He specifically mentions Martin Heidegger, John Dos Passos, F.T. Marinetti, Douglas Kahn, CBS vice president Paul Kesten, NBC official David Sarnoff, Rudolf Arnheim and Lewis Mumford as expressing these ideas (Verma, 2012, p. 25).

cinema, electric light, phonograph, and wireless, were their wonderful abilities to extend messages effortlessly and instantaneously across time and space" (p. 191). Communications technologies in general and radio in particular have been understood as able to bring messages, communities, and people near, and to foster connections in spite of distance. As Verma puts it, "radio culture seemed to dismiss fusty old boundaries that had outlived their usefulness, and all people were enjoined to inhabit radio's commodious plenum, as equals, just as they were welcomed at Roosevelt's hearth" (2012, p. 26). Loviglio (2005) notes popular depictions of Roosevelt himself replacing the radio receiver in a 1930s living room as a representation of his Fireside Chats, and as Susan Douglas notes, exploratory listening in the 1920s, known as 'DXing' was often framed in terms of travel to distant places (2004, p. 75). As Susan Smulyan characterizes it, in the early 1920s, "Both intellectuals and ordinary people were in the process of changing how they thought about time and space, a change that led to a belief that radio could, and should, connect the nation" (1994, p. 12). For Smulyan, these beliefs about space led to the development of the network system.

Especially in less densely populated areas, radio was seen as able to combat social isolation and to promote community, democracy and nation-building through these ideas of proximity. Len Kuffert has articulated some of these myths as flowing from the "double illusion of presence and exclusive conversation" which has traditionally accompanied radio (2009, p. 313). Listeners understood the radio as a type of presence, someone in their space, speaking directly to them. Kuffert argues that in Canada, radio was understood as a tool to end the social and cultural isolation of listeners living in remote areas (2009, p. 303). The loneliness of rural living could be combated with this personal presence via radio, (p. 304), not unlike a neighbourly visit, making the remote living conditions more palatable, strengthening the developing settler-colonial nation-state. The ability of radio to "annihilate space" (Peters, 1999), and to seemingly sidestep physical and material conditions of isolation and separation, has been a big part of popular, academic and trade discourses about radio, in which radio technology is seen as able to bring people and messages into relations analogous to physical proximity. Verma argues that this continued "prominence of the fantasy of space-binding"[7] and its "perennial feature of the discourse of media fantasy" are mainstay aspects of radio discourses in the past and the present (2012, p. 27).

[7] Verma cites sociologists Robert and Helen Lynds as coining this term (2012, p. 27).

1.7 Public and Private

Despite radio receivers' presence in stores, workplaces, and restaurants, the archetypal listening settings for radio are homes and vehicles, and radio has long been associated with its ability to interestingly navigate what scholars have dubbed the public and private spheres. Radio has been theorized as importantly able to penetrate space previously understood as private, such as domestic space of the home and the interior space of listeners' heads (Douglas, 2004; Hilmes, 1997; Loviglo, 2005) and many insights about the perceived intimacy of radio have been understood as resulting from the medium's challenge to traditional conceptions of public and private.

The public sphere, as coined by Jürgen Habermas, is the realm of topics, issues and discussions relevant to all members of a society, while the private sphere has historically been understood as personal, familiar, and not relevant for public discourse. As Nancy Fraser (1993) has noted, social categories which designate certain spaces, activities and issues as either public or private have been tools for the enforcement of regimes of power, especially of gender hierarchies, as the private sphere has been chiefly connected to issues which concern women (Loviglio, 2005, p. xvii). Radio has challenged conceptions of public and private in a number of ways, and entered into ongoing societal negotiations concerning these boundaries. By entering certain spaces, highlighting certain topics, and emphasizing certain conventions, radio has interestingly navigated, challenged, reified, and reorganized the concepts of public and private.

And this is not unique to radio. As Loviglio notes the preoccupation with the public/private dichotomy "is itself a central feature of modernity" (2005, p. xvi), and these tensions were central to discussions surrounding the telegraph, railroads and photography as well. As Carolyn Marvin (1988) notes, many of these technologies seemingly disturbed the "boundary between what was to be kept privileged and what could be shared between oneself and society, oneself and one's family, parents, servants, spouse, or sweetheart. Electrical communication made families, courtships, class identities, and other arenas of interaction suddenly strange, with consequences that were tirelessly spun out in electrical literature." (Marvin, 1988, p. 64). Radio's fraught relationship with the public and private is a part of this larger trend.

A lot of this discourse centres around a particular version of the white middle-class home, and some of the concerns about radio's penetration into the private sphere of such homes echo earlier debates around telephones. As mentioned previously, the rapid expansion of telephones into American homes in the late nineteenth century provoked fears about the breakdown of the

social order (Marvin, 1988). Fears of family matters being made public and social norms being violated pervaded many discussions about the popularization of telephony. This perceived ungovernability of the telephone was seen as a threat to domestic life, to privacy and to the middle-class hearth (Marvin, 1988). Marvin describes a number of strategies which middle and upper class families deployed in order to protect their homes from electric communication, while at the same time still making use of it. She describes internal-use only telephone systems, phonographic clocks and alarms, electric balls, timed lights and surveillance cameras, as means by which families integrated new technologies into their homes while at the same time attempted to maintain the social order which was so familiar to them (Marvin, 1988). She asserts,

> home was the protected place, carefully shielded from the world and its dangerous influences. New communications technologies were suspect precisely to the extent that they lessened the family's control over what was admitted within its walls. Householders resisted both the symbolism of outside intrusion and its physical expression in wiring, a tangible violation of intact domesticity. (Marvin, 1988, p. 76)

Marvin describes titillating stories of class barriers being violated by telephones such as a man being incarcerated for asking to be connected to a Vanderbilt, and rumours of the queen being inappropriately contacted by some of her subjects (1988, p. 81-86). Radio's introduction into American homes in the early twentieth century echoes and builds upon this context of anxiety about the technological violation of the sacrosanct private sphere.

Jason Loviglio (2005) takes the 1930s as a key moment in which both radio and the public/private dichotomy were at the forefront of many debates. He argues "this historical moment was less about the disintegration of the distinct public and private spheres than it was a time of heightened interest in the advantages and perils to be gained from both transgressing and reinforcing them" (Loviglio, 2005, p. xv). Listening in one's home, about politics, or global affairs, feeling directly spoken to despite the knowledge that you are one of many listening, are some of the ways in which radio has negotiated these understandings. Loviglio argues that radio created a new cultural and social space, "the intimate public" which he describes as "a category of permissible crossing of the public/private boundary, leaving the larger principle intact, even revitalized" (p. xvi). These permissible crossings are some of the most intriguing moments in radio history, when the reorganization of these concepts becomes clear.

Often, these crossings were seen as possibly dangerous and in need of regulation. Len Kuffert notes that early Canadian radio listeners remarked on the "ability of radio to mimic human contact, especially the sort of human contact associated with the home, small audiences

or cozy venues" (2016, p. 306). He notes that early radio producers and executives saw this perceived intimacy as a danger. Officials and politicians such as CBC General Manager Gladstone Murray feared radio would enter homes and hearths, making listeners vulnerable as they engaged with radio in an "unguarded way" (Murray quoted in Kuffert, 2016, p. 305). Kuffert argues that these perceptions guided programming choices in Canada in terms of topics which could be discussed on the radio, the types and style of discourses which would be permitted, and the format of shows. Similarly, in the US, certain topics were completely off-limits for discussion on the radio either in conversation or in dramatizations. Illegitimacy, female sexuality, pregnancy, and divorce were highly taboo topics which were only able to be represented on the radio in highly specific ways (Hilmes, 1997).

1.8 Imagined Listening Communities

In addition to these conceptions of the intimacy of, and personal connections fostered by radio, scholars often take up Benedict Anderson's concept of imagined community, and argue that radio has played a key role in creating a sense of belonging and unity amongst listeners (Birdsall, 2012; Douglas, 2004; and Hilmes, 1997).

Anderson (2006) has famously argued for the importance of print media in the 1700s to modern nation-building projects, coining the term 'print-capitalism' to describe the importance of the construction of a shared temporality to the production of the affective commitments by which the modern nation-state is characterized. Through print media, Anderson theorizes, an imagined simultaneity is possible, with each reader/citizen imagining a shared experience mediated by newspapers and novels (2006, p. 35-36). For Anderson, this shared temporality results in the feelings of membership and belonging which forge the types of imagined communities such as the modern nation state. Susan Douglas has argued that this concept extends neatly onto radio. She asserts,

> reading the newspaper may have been a crucial first step in cultivating this sense of national communion. But radio broadcasting did this on entirely new geographic, temporal, and cognitive levels, inflating people's desire to seek out, build on, and make more concrete the notion of the nation. (2004, p. 24)

As Mary Vipond has noted in her study of early Canadian radio, the mass and the personal converged in listening practices "early radio listeners were also thrilled with the sense that they were part of a vast unseen audience, all sharing a single experience simultaneously. While

listening in was in this sense communal, it was at the same time intimate" (Vipond, 1992, p. 102).

Carolyn Birdsall (2012) has theorized these ideas in depth in her study of the aural aspects of Nazi-era Germany. Birdsall notes Anderson's emphasis on song as able to produce imagined communities in the context of anthems, and argues that a similar process is true for radio. Birdsall asserts that radio listeners "can share in the simultaneous moment of imagining oneself hearing the same sounds as other listeners" (2012, p. 106). Birdsall notes how during WWII, special announcements interrupted radio's regular programming, and as the war went on, these occurred more frequently. She argues that these interruptions or "*Sondermeldungen*" facilitated the construction of an imagined listening community, by the "temporal organisation of radio programming for emphasising liveness and the co-participation of listeners 'as earwitnesses' to large-scale events" (2012, p. 104). Birdsall stresses the importance of the symbolic power of national broadcasting in this context, and radio's ability to build communities, especially in times of national stress and uncertainty. Similarly, Loviglio (2002) asserts that during World War II, patriotic citizens were seen as vitally important to the American war effort, and that network radio mobilized to produce such citizens, sometimes altering the structure of their programs to this end (p. 101).[8]

However, as many theorists have noted, the imagined listening communities produced by radio do not always map neatly onto national lines (Birdsall, 2012), and some of these communities have more to do with local, regional, or certain cultural or political markers (Douglas, 2004, p. 24). The combination of a sense of intimacy, personal connection and presence, in addition to the unifying and community building forces of radio produce a contradictory constellation of cultural understandings of the function, power, and uses of this medium.

1.9 Gender and Radio

The reconciliation of these tensions in the early twentieth century was partially aided by a strong split in radio programming between daytime and nighttime radio, embracing, reorganizing, and reinforcing a public/private dichotomy within the medium itself. Daytime

[8] This is true of McBride's program. During World War II, on Wednesdays she augmented the structure of her show, hosting a guest from the Office of War Information (OWI) and she and her guest would implore her listeners to contribute to the war effort in much the same way McBride urged them to buy the cookies, tea, dog food and cleaning products she advertised.

radio was seen as private and feminine "hidden, subversive, and highly disparaged", while nighttime radio was seen as public and masculine, "authorized and defeminized" (Hilmes, 1997, p. 154). Types of programs deemed too feminine, commercialized, frivolous or irrelevant to public life were relegated to the daytime slots, while programs deemed important for the public good were aired during the evening hours. Hilmes notes how this dichotomy both helped and hindered the ability of radio to air women's concerns. Hilmes draws on Nancy Fraser's work, arguing that the daytime serial producers "opened up a space on the public airwaves for a feminine subaltern counterpublic to emerge" (1997, p. 160). These interesting tensions, negotiations and renegotiations fed off and build onto the insights of radio as both an intimate and a mass medium. Radio spoke to listeners in different spaces and in different ways then previous media had been able to, and brought with it hopes as well as fears linked to the powerful renegotiations of public and private it enacted. Specifically because of its position in the home, and its challenge to the boundaries of public and private spheres, radio has long been connected to gender worries, policing, and has had a complex relationship with ideals of womanhood and femininity (Andrews, 2012; Douglas, 2004; Hilmes, 1997; Kuffert, 2016; Lacey, 2013; Loviglio, 2005). Radio has interacted with gender politics in various ways throughout the twentieth century, and has been a site of opportunities, discussion, and contestation.

Michele Hilmes (1997) has noted the complex gender politics of radio, with women being majority listeners, men being majority producers, and women working in radio being largely erased from the historical record (p. 131-132). Hilmes argues that women participated actively in DXing, or what Susan Douglas (2004) calls the 'exploratory listening' of the 1920s in which amateurs built receivers, and sought out two-way communication, often in the hopes of making contact over vast distances. Especially because of early radio's use of morse code rather than voice, women could cross traditional gender boundaries undetected in DXing (Hilmes, 1997, p. 133). However, as radio became more popular and institutionalized, women's engagement with the technology drew more attention, scrutiny and debate. Hilmes connects this to the context of the fight for women's suffrage in the United States, arguing that the contested relationship between women and radio was a part of broader societal concerns over the shifting roles of women in American society (Hilmes, 1997, p. 135). The fears of "disembodied women" transgressing social boundaries in a non-visible way stoked anxiety in the interwar period and beyond (p. 135). However, Hilmes strongly emphasizes women's continued contributions to radio history throughout the twentieth century despite the active exclusion of them from the

industry. Hilmes notes the role of women in early radio stations when profits were marginal, and there was little prestige in the work. She writes, "early radio stations frequently operated at the margins of established businesses, with low budgets and even lower revenues. . . under these conditions, it was a natural place for women" (1997, p. 137). She notes the typical role of "combination station manager, talent agent, program director, announcer, writer, and publicist" Gwen Wagner working at WPO in Memphis, Tennessee in the early 1920s before the network era (1997, p. 130). She describes the careers of women in radio such as such as script writer Gertrude Berg, known for her program *The Rise of the Goldbergs,* and station managers Bertha Brainard (head of commercial programming at NBC) and Judith Waller (program director, announcer and talent agent at WMAQ in Chicago) who began their careers in the early 1920s when radio stations were establishing themselves and who continued to work and shape radio into the network era (1997, p. 2, 138-141). Hilmes argues that women "invented and sustained some of broadcasting's most central innovations and served in key decision-making roles, and furthermore participated in the development of entire genres that spoke to them as a specific group about the interests and concerns of women's lives" (1997, p. 132). Despite their absence from traditional historical accounts, Hilmes strongly asserts, "women recognized the significance of this new medium of radio and seized the opportunities for social negotiation and change that it offered" (Hilmes, 1997, p. 132). Mary Margaret McBride is a part of this group of women actively engaged in producing radio in the early and mid-twentieth century.

Hilmes has noted that while the contributions of men have been overly emphasized in radio history, so too has the listening of women. Hilmes pushes back again the former, while affirming the latter, noting that the majority of radio listeners have, for the most part been women, for both day and nighttime programming. She asserts that as radio "edged its way into the living rooms of America from its previous accommodation in the workshop or garage" women became seen as properly listeners of radio and not producers (Hilmes, 1997, p. 137). For large chunks of radio history, the archetypical, and statistically accurate listener has been a woman in her home, and this has informed the politics, genres, schedules, styles, and topics broadcast on the radio, and has been the focus of fears, anxieties and perceived opportunities. Len Kuffert notes the gender tensions which guided early Canadian broadcast standards. He notes that in daytime programming, the assumed listener was a lone women whose "listening would be solitary, away from the 'hearth' atmosphere in which family groups usually encountered radio" (2016, p. 309). This assumed listening mode, along with the perception of intimacy and illusion of presence of the medium, led to stringent broadcast standards in which

certain topics were not permitted to be the subject of daytime radio dramas, and could only be discussed in the evenings when listening was assumed to be a group activity (Kuffert, 2016, p. 309). Similarly, Jonathan Sterne (2004) has noted how many images of sound reproduction technologies feature women listening. He asserts,

> these networked images of telephony and radio carry some of that audile-erotic sense. . . The listening white woman thus supplanted the image of the Victorian woman expressing herself and entertaining the family at the piano. This change was as much a result of real participation of women in emerging networks of sociability—including the networks of sound reproduction—as it was a result of the 'image' of mass culture and new media as somehow feminized. (Sterne, 2004, p. 226)

Throughout the twentieth century, women listeners have loomed large in the cultural imaginary, and have been the subject of intense discussion, scrutiny, and debate.

As previously mentioned, part of the radio industry's reaction to the actual and imagined women listening to their programming, was to impose a strong temporal split between daytime and nighttime radio. As many scholars have noted, by the 1930s, women and 'women's' topics was demarcated as 'daytime' content, while the evening hours were allocated for men and 'masculine' content despite the audiences for these times remaining mostly the same (Hilmes, 1997, p. 141). For radio executives, splitting the day into these categories allowed them to negotiate a number of tensions at play with the medium. These distinctions allowed radio to exploit the economic power of its women listeners, as well as posture as a serious medium committed to decommercialized public service. This balance allowed radio executives to de-emphasize and de-legitimize their women listeners, while at the same time, providing content which spoke to many women during the daytime hours and relying on these women to sustain their business model.

Within this dynamic, radio has been understood as a safe and non-threatening way for women to engage with the public sphere from the privacy of their home, while continuing to fulfill the roles of wife, mother and homemaker. Maggie Andrews (2012) notes the domestic sphere's construction in the twentieth century as a feminine space of intimacy and authenticity, and argues that radio was understood as a way for women to engage with the public from the privacy and safety of domestic space (p. 6). For Andrews, this had an influence on the medium itself. She asserts, "the reception of the wireless in the home, the perceived listeners and their concerns influenced the nature of broadcasting -- *domesticating the airwaves*" (2012, p. 7, italics in original). For Andrews, because of its placement in the home, radio itself became inextricably

linked with domesticity, femininity, and womanhood. Hilmes seems to agree, noting, "as radio became primarily a medium of reception in the home, its domestic situation seemed to suit it particularly to the needs and interests of women" (Hilmes, 1997, p. 133). Many understandings of radio's intimate mode of address were connected to fears about the changing gender politics of the early twentieth century, and specifically to worries about the archetype of the solitary woman listener.

However, Susan Douglas (2004) interestingly has a different take on radio and gender. She argues that radio has played an important role in definitions of masculinity, asserting, "boys and men have found in radio not only a hobby but also a medium that validates their aesthetic and emotional needs" (p. 12). Douglas argues that through engaging with radio technology men and boys have been able to push the boundaries of acceptable masculinity during eras in which "anxieties about manhood" were pronounced (p. 13). For Douglas, radio has been a way in which men have both rebelled against and solidified dominant understandings of masculinity, as well as a tool through which new masculinities have been formed. She cites the development of a technology-oriented masculinity in the 1920s, in contrast to the dominant "wild" masculinity of the time, which itself had developed in response to the gentlemanly masculinity of the Victorian era (2004, p. 67). She asserts, "tinkering with radio (like tinkering with cars) was one way for some boys and men to manage, and even master, the emerging contradictions about masculinity in America" (2004, p. 68). The ability to control and have power over machines was, for Douglas, a method of asserting masculinity in the 1920s, and radio played a central role in this rearticulation.

Douglas notes that radio was a key player in a similar renegotiation of masculinity in the 1930s, in which music became an acceptable masculine interest, and the popular genre of crooning on the radio threatened the gendered social order (2004, p. 89). Allison McCracken (2015) theorizes the gender hysteria surrounding the performance style of crooning (as enabled by radio technology), as a seminal instance of the policing of gender norms on a mass scale. McCracken argues that the microphone technology of the 1930s, combined with broadcast radio, allowed for the popularization of the soft and smooth genre, and allowed crooners such as Rudy Vallée, Russ Columbo, Gene Austin, Morton Downey, Nick Lucas, and Bing Crosby to gain tremendous popularity. McCracken notes that "crooners showed an unseemly degree of ardent emotion and vulnerability for white men, and they used microphones and amplifiers to artificially enhance their soft, trembling, often sensually breathy sounds" (2015, p. 3). The crooners' invasion into the private/domestic space of the home and their emotional and temporal

availability to women listeners posed a huge threat to the gendered order of the era (McCracken, 2015, p. 4). McCracken argues that the intense cultural reaction to the popularity of these singers, led to the mass policing of aural masculinity in American society, a cultural phenomenon which has existed ever since (p. 4). McCracken's account of the cultural enforcement of vocal aesthetics in the 1930s, is a great example of how radio has been a key player in many cultural controversies in the twentieth century, many of which have been centrally about gender, and many of which have either been enabled by, projected onto, or inextricably intertwined with, radio. McBride, as a rare example of a woman in radio, in her work both challenged and reified certain aspects of hegemonic femininity of her era. She was both restricted and enabled in her work by her time slot, and by her listeners' actual and imagined conformity to the archetype of the solitary woman listening. Her voice, style, and content was often critiqued according to gendered norms both in radio and more generally, and the perceived intimacy of her show has much to do with these gendered dynamics.

1.10 Intimacy and McBride

The perceived intimacy of McBride's show needs to be understood in these contexts. The power of communications technology in general and radio in particular to achieve the dream of communication, to bridge physical and social distance, to renegotiate the boundaries of public/private, to build imagined listening communities and to navigate and articulate the gender politics of the early twentieth century, all inform the understandings of historical and contemporary accounts of the atmosphere of McBride's show. The social and cultural currents of the early and mid-twentieth century inform how radio in general and McBride's work in particular were understood, with the fantasies, tensions, desires, and fears of radio's publics influencing the perceptions of, and practices associated with, the medium.

CHAPTER TWO - Form and Magazine Format

"Miss McBride['s] . . . radio formula achieves a
mood of intimacy and informality" (Traunch, 1939).

2.1 Form and Intimacy

Many scholars and commentators have attributed the consistent understanding of radio as intimate to the relationship between these associations and the development of certain conventions, relations which have reinforced each other throughout radio's history. The colloquial and chatty language, direct address, and idiosyncratic personalities of radio were unique, a "far cry from the stump orator or the Enlightenment public sphere" (Peters, 1999, p. 215-16). Techniques such as dialogue, contests and clubs (borrowed from newspapers) were developed to make audiences feel as if they were participating in a conversation rather than listening to a mass medium (Peters, 1999, p. 216). Live broadcasts were emphasized to mark temporal continuity, and simultaneity in the face of physical distance, as a commenter in 1928 observed, "the radio does not transmit 'dead material' as does the phonograph, but present and 'living' events" (E.W. Burgess in Peters, 1999, p. 218). Repetition, rhythm, and audio signatures, "all these modes of radio talk, just like radio technology itself, had to be invented" (Douglas, 2004, p. 12). The form of radio has been a variable factor of the medium since its inception, from being thought of as a point-to-point communication technology, to a "household music box" (Peters, 1999, p. 207). 1920s radio was dominated by music presented in a form continuous with a live concert, and then shifted to respond to the needs of advertisers, audiences, and the technology itself (Vipond, 1992, p. 86). Radio techniques, forms and conventions were, and could have been otherwise, were never given or natural, but rather developed in relation to social and cultural forces such as these desires for, and fears of, intimacy, connection and communication (Peters, 1999, p. 215). Attempts to make radio personal and intimate through form have a long history and "the fostering of 'we-ness,' dialogical inclusion, and intimate address have remained at the core of broadcast discourse to this day" (Peters, 1999, p. 215). McBride's form was notable to her contemporaries, critics accused her of "ignoring all rules of radio form" as she did not conform to many of the standardized conventions of her era (Hilmes, 1997, p. 280).

2.2 Form and Format

In light of these insights, it seems that form is an important aspect of the connections between perceptions of intimacy and radio. As such, in this work, I draw on a theoretical framework developed by Kevin Barnhurst and John Nerone in their (2001) study of newspaper form. They define form as "the persisting visible structure of the newspaper" and includes such variables as "layout and design and typography" as well as "habits of illustration, genres of reportage, and schemes of departmentalization" (2001, p. 3). They argue that newspapers derive their social and cultural meaning largely from their form, connecting newspapers to civic culture and participation in a much more meaningful way than any of the specific content (2001, p. 1). Barnhurst and Nerone insist that the importance of newspapers has less to do with disseminating information as such (a traditional transmission model of communication), and more to do with what James Carey has dubbed the "ritual function" of media (2001, p. 2): how newspapers are entwined with lives, and what social, cultural and political functions they serve. This ritual function resonates strongly with how radio has been understood to be a highly ritualized medium, in which scheduled programming and listeners' routines structured each other in intricate and interconnected ways (Andrews, 2012; Douglas, 2004; Hilmes, 1997; Verma, 2012).

For Barnhurst and Nerone, while the content of newspapers can be criticized, pushed aside, or disregarded, "the form of the newspaper is almost sanctified" (p. 1), arguing that form is critically influential in how media influence the world. They argue that the form of a medium is the crystallization of certain material relationships which circle around it: the relations between technologies, economies, political actors, audiences, and ideologies. For Barnhurst and Nerone, "form embodies the imagined relationship of a medium to its society and polity" offering conditions of possibility for content, for interpretation, and for consumption, and as such, form is a critical component of any media scholarship (2001, p. 3). They position their research in contrast to such traditions as content analyses, audience studies, and structural research, and instead focus on several different newspaper "formations" which they understand to be constituted by a "look," a system of production, and a "broader cultural configuration" (2001, p. 4). They argue that the expectations of, and desires about newspapers informed the development of the form of the news, fulfilling the cultural understandings which they are imbued with.

Barnhurst and Nerone dub themselves "media environmentalists," paying specific attention to the elements of newspapers which are "clearly visible and yet somehow beneath attention" (2001, p. 10), the factors that create the environment of the media, which is more than

the sum of its parts (2001, p. 6). They insist on a holistic account of newspapers according to form, arguing,

> readers do not read bits of text and pictures. What they read is *the paper*, the tangible object as a whole. They enter the news environment and interact with its surface textures and deeper shapes. Readers don't read the news; they swim in it. (2001, p. 7)

For Barnhurt and Nerone, this environment and the habits, rituals, and familiarities constructed by the forms of news communicates ideology to news readers by seeming at once natural, obvious, and transparent (2001, p. 6). They assert that form is a very important factor in meaning-making in relation to media, arguing that form constrains meanings, making possible some reading practices and not others, constructing "the audience's field of vision" (2001, p. 7). As such, they argue that the "the form of news is never innocent or neutral. . . the form reenacts and reinforces patterns of deference, just as do other formal aspects of culture, such as manners or dress" (2001, p. 9). Just as the content of any article in any particular paper has political meaning, power and force, Barnhurst and Nerone insist that the form of news has similar implications, and ought to be theorized in a similarly rigourous manner (2001, p. 9).

Jonathan Sterne (2012) has influentially argued for the importance of format when it comes to media theory. He asserts, "writers have too often collapsed discussions of format into their analyses of what is important about a given medium" (p. 7). What Sterne dubs 'format' can seem similar to, but is distinct from Barnhurst and Nerone's 'form.' Sterne asserts, "*format* denotes a whole range of decisions that affect the look, feel, experience, and workings of a medium" (Sterne, 2012, p. 7). Form, as Barnhurst and Nerone understand it, lives within Sterne's category: "most crucial dimensions of format are codified in some way -- sometimes through policy, sometimes through the technology's construction, and sometimes through sedimented habit. They have a contractual and conventional nature" (Sterne, 2012, p. 8). Many of the formal elements I have focused on in this research can live under this umbrella of codified conventions which have developed over time for complex and sometimes opaque reasons. Interestingly, radio scholars, writing before Sterne, use the word format to describe various conventionalized types of programs, such as "quiz format" (Loviglio, 2012, p. 89), "black format" (Hilmes, 1997, p. 272), and, most importantly for my work, magazine format (Hilmes, 1997). Confusingly, this latter usage by radio scholars describing the structure of various programs is closer to Barnhurst and Nerone's concept of form, and what Verma calls "overall form," than Sterne's concept of format. As I discuss magazine 'format' in the remainder of this chapter and beyond, it should be

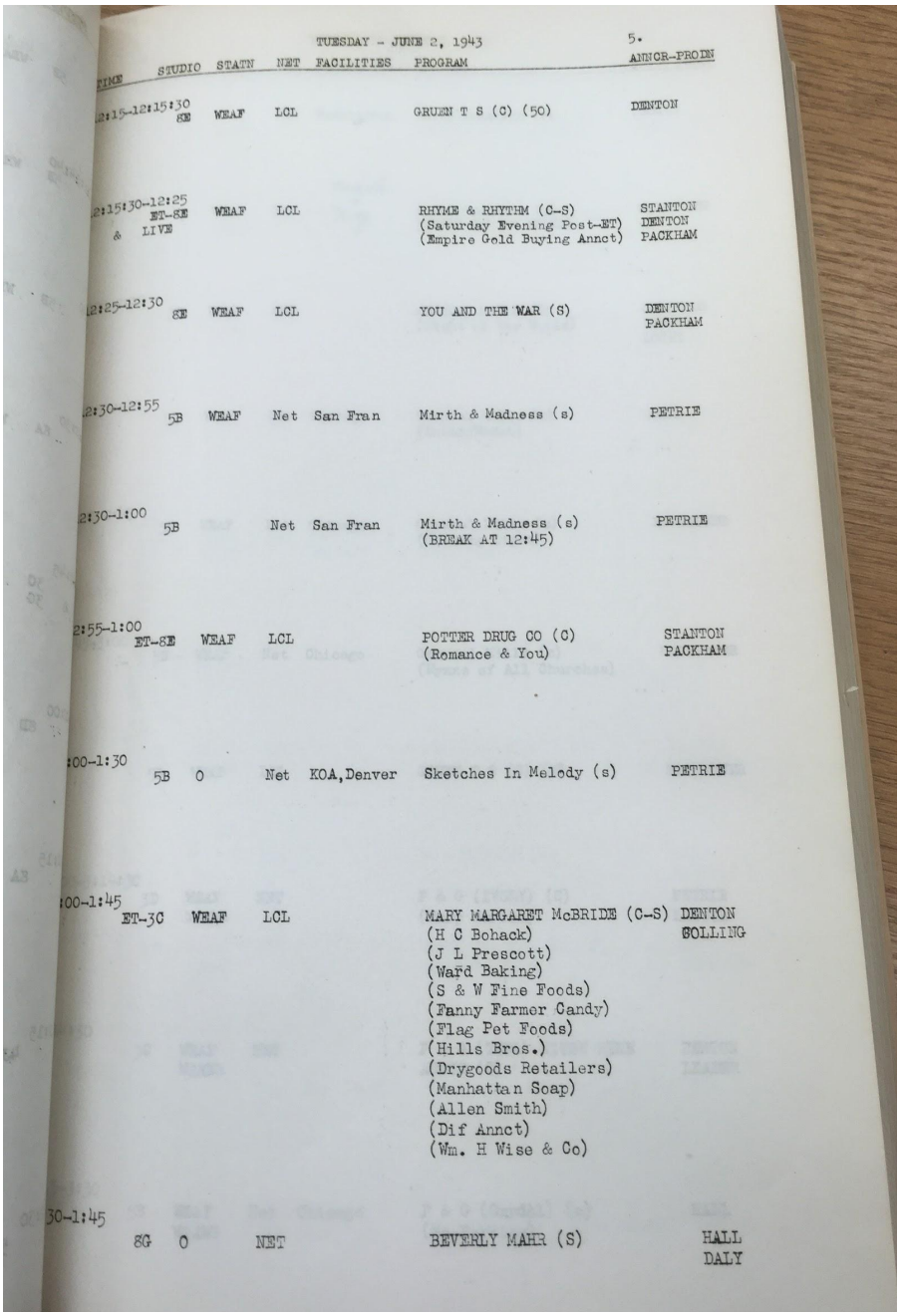
noted that I conceive of 'magazine format' as an aspect of the form (as Barnhurst and Nerone conceive of it) of McBride's program.

2.3 Magazine Form(at)

McBride's show is an example of what radio theorists and historians call magazine format, magazine approach, or magazine concept (Hilmes, 1997; Smulyan, 1994; Ware, 2005). This is both a structuring principle and a commercial model in which producers sell time on their program to various advertisers, and mention these sponsors throughout. While magazine format is very familiar to contemporary radio and television audiences, in McBride's era it was somewhat unique (Hilmes, 1997; Ware, 2005, p. 5). More prevalent at the time was a single-sponsor model, in which one company puts up the money for a program, and has almost complete creative control as a result (Meyers, 2013; Taylor, 2012, p. 20). Many of these single-sponsor programs practiced "indirect advertising" with the brands and products being involved and mentioned, but not directly plugged (Taylor, 2012, p. 25). Often the show's name would include the name of their sponsor,[9] and the producer-sponsor relationship could be tumultuous and have serious implications for the life of a program (Ware, 2005 p. 51).

McBride's show did not work this way. She did not have a single sponsor, but had many. At times she was supported by a roster of over 100 companies, which she plugged on her show in a rotating manner, usually discussing around twelve in each forty-five minute broadcast (Heggie, 1942, p. 33; Ware, 2005, p. 93). In the NBC Log Books held at the Library of Congress, there exists meticulous records of each program on the air on a given day, and underneath that, the sponsor(s). I looked at some of the Log Books from McBride's era, and every other show has either one or no sponsor listed, while the entry for McBride's program has the twelve sponsors she planned to mention that day listed (see Figure 2). In these Log Books, the contrast between McBride's show and the other programs on the air at the time is stark, and it seems clear that McBride's model was not standard for this network in this period.

[9] Some of McBride's broadcasts were preserved on magnetic tape with other NBC programs, and, when I requested shows of McBride's the other programs were digitized as well (either ones which appeared after her program or other ones which were possibly randomly selected for digitization). Because of this, I had the chance to listen to some of them, which I did out of curiosity and they turned out to include some great examples of the single sponsor model. *The General Mills Hour* was made up of several different serial dramas (NBC Preservation Tape RWB 689), and *The Bell Telephone Hour,* an hour of music (NBC Preservation Tape RWA 7397) are both sponsored by one company and did not include direct plugs for products.



TUESDAY - JUNE 2, 1943 5.

TIME	STUDIO	STATN	NET	FACILITIES	PROGRAM	ANNCR-PRODN
12:15-12:15:30	8E	WEAF	LCL		GRUEN T S (C) (50)	DENTON
12:15:30-12:25 ET-8E & LIVE		WEAF	LCL		RHYME & RHYTHM (C-S) (Saturday Evening Post-ET) (Empire Gold Buying Annct)	STANTON DENTON PACKHAM
12:25-12:30	8E	WEAF	LCL		YOU AND THE WAR (S)	DENTON PACKHAM
12:30-12:55	5B	WEAF	Net	San Fran	Mirth & Madness (s)	PETRIE
12:30-1:00	5B		Net	San Fran	Mirth & Madness (s) (BREAK AT 12:45)	PETRIE
12:55-1:00 ET-8E		WEAF	LCL		POTTER DRUG CO (C) (Romance & You)	STANTON PACKHAM
1:00-1:30	5B	O	Net	KOA,Denver	Sketches In Melody (s)	PETRIE
1:00-1:45 ET-3C		WEAF	LCL		MARY MARGARET McBRIDE (C-S) (H C Bohack) (J L Prescott) (Ward Baking) (S & W Fine Foods) (Fanny Farmer Candy) (Flag Pet Foods) (Hills Bros.) (Drygoods Retailers) (Manhattan Soap) (Allen Smith) (Dif Annct) (Wm. H Wise & Co)	DENTON COLLING
1:30-1:45	8G	O	NET		BEVERLY MAHR (S)	HALL DALY

Figure 2. Page of NBC Log Book from 2 June 1943. Recorded Sound Research Center, Washington, DC.

2.4 Origins of Magazine Format

This format was not solely McBride's innovation however. McBride took up the model from other programs in the 1920s and 30s which some dubbed "woman's magazine of the air" (as described by NBC executive Davidson Taylor, in 1954, quoted in Hilmes, 1997, p. 276). Hilmes notes that "by 1932, at least two of the twenty daytime homemakers' programs on the air

involved multiple sponsorship: Ida Bailey Allen's *Radio Homemakers Club,* on CBS twice a week; and NBC's *Radio Household Institute*, three times a week" (1997, p. 278). These types of programs and the language used to describe them seem to clearly link this format to magazines and their signature funding model of relying on multiple advertisers rather than a single sponsor or sales revenues.

There seems to be several connections between this format in magazines and on the radio as embraced by McBride. In the late nineteenth century, popular magazines such as the *Ladies Home Journal*, *Saturday Evening Post*, *Cosmopolitan*, *Munsey's* and *McClure's* "made most of their profits from advertising rather than subscriptions" (Schneirov, 2017, p. 121), and by 1910, featured layouts of stories split onto non consecutive pages, with content and advertising "enmeshed" (Gruber Garvey, 1996, p. 4-5).

McBride's program echoed this structure, and followed in the tradition of some women's magazines such as the *Ladies Home Journal* (*LHJ*) which by the 1890s "featured a blend of gendered material and commercial messages. . . a powerful and mutually reinforcing mix of gender and commerce that had come to characterize a significant segment of American popular culture by the turn of the century" (Damon-Moore, 1994, p. 2). The early *LHJ* was comprised of stories made up of "odds and ends taken from various sources"[10] (Damon-Moore, 1994, p. 19). As the *LHJ* grew under the leadership of Louisa Knapp, it offered household tips, articles on child rearing and cooking, as well as fiction, and news (Damon-Moore, 1994, p. 35-37). The magazine offered both entertainment and edification, and was clearly a "feminine text, produced primarily by women for women" (Damon-Moore, p. 29). Additionally, the *LHJ* and other similar magazines of the era were not one-way exchanges, as Damon-Moore argues, "Knapp and her staff viewed their readers as peers and they spoke to them and heard from them in what they considered to be a two-way exchange" (1994, p. 29). These exchanges and the magazines which facilitated them were important components of readers lives who understood "the Journal as a guide and a 'friend.'" (Damon-Moore, 1994, p. 37). Damon-Moore quotes a listener who writes, "Your little monthly messenger has helped me to while away many an otherwise lonely hour" (1994, p. 37). This coupling of gendered discourses with commercial goals and close personal feelings that was characteristic of nineteenth century women's magazines aptly describes McBride's show, as does the relationship of the *Ladies Home Journal* to their advertisers. As

[10] This is how Damon-Moore describes the women's column in Louisa and Cyrus Curtis' paper the *Tribune and the Farmer*, which eventually became *The Ladies Home Journal* (1994, p. 19).

Helen Damon-Moore describes, the *Ladies Home Journal* asserted its independence from advertisers, and featured a "blurred distinction between editorial and advertising content" (1994, p. 50-51). Damon-Moore describes how advertising was key the *Journal's* success, with the amount of ads determining the amount of content, ads appearing very close to the front of the magazine, editors writing the ad copy, and the development of the practice of "ad-stripping" in which the key reading material was surrounded by advertisements in the back of the magazine (1994, p. 99-100). Damon-Moore argues, "producers, advertisers, and readers" collaborated to "connect gender and commerce" and that this connection has "proven to be both extremely strong and resilient over the course of the twentieth century" (1994, p. 189). As Gruber Garvey notes, through magazines, no longer were "literary or editorial interests separate from and in conflict with advertising and commerce" (1996, p. 4). I suggest that McBride's program is a strong example of this lack of conflict and resiliency, that these characteristics, as I will point out in the following pages, are very familiar to a McBride listener, and seem to reinforce the connection on a number of fronts between McBride's program and women's magazines such as the *Ladies Home Journal*. Many commentators emphasize McBride's previous career in magazines and newspapers, such as describing McBride as "the first woman to bring newspaper technique to radio interviewing" (*Current Biography,* 1954, quoted in Ware, 2005, p. 5), or asserting "from the very beginning, Mary Margaret took the stand that radio is no different from newspaper work" (Perason, n.d.), further solidifying this connection between McBride, magazines, and the form of her program.

These connections are important for their illumination of mediality, a property which Sterne describes as "the complex ways in which communications technologies refer to one another in form or content," a "sense of cross-reference as routine" (2012, p. 9). McBride's use of magazine format seems to me as a case of this type of relationship. Radio taking on a mode of organization from magazines, and as such also its "articulation with particular practices, ways of doing things, institutions, and even in some cases, belief systems" (Sterne, 2012, p. 10). Selling space or time to advertisers, mixing ads and editorial content in various ways, the combination of gender and commerce, and close feelings between audiences and a medium, can then be understood as a story about "the mediatic dimensions of formats" as similar designs, structures, and as such ideological functions move across media (Sterne, 2012, p. 14).

Because of their embrace of this mediality and format, McBride and her manager Stella Karn produced the show independently,[11] and this arrangement gave them a significant amount of control over the show. They were able to "shape the program's content and signature style free from outside interference" (Ware, 2005, p. 5). McBride switched networks when she pleased, and over the course of her career she was affiliated with all four of the major networks in her era (Hilmes, 1997; Ware, 2005, p. 51). When McBride changed networks, her sponsors followed her, knowing that she would bring her audience and their support with her (Ware, 2005, p. 93).

Radio historian Michele Hilmes has argued convincingly for the development of this format to be attributed chiefly to McBride rather than to Sylvester 'Pat' Weaver as it has often been (Hilmes, 1997, p. 275-286). Hilmes characterizes the "Weaver Myth" as the repackaging of this "well-established format" making it seem more "educational, serious and masculine" all the while ignoring the work that many women, most notably McBride, have done establishing this format as a successful and profitable model (1997, p. 276-77). As Hilmes notes, when Weaver 'introduced' this format to television, *Harper's Magazine* asserted the connection to magazines: "Weaver's approach to sponsorship was equally original. He pioneered what he called the 'magazine concept,' by which the network sells spot advertisements on programs the way a magazine sells pages" (Mayer, 1956, quoted in Hilmes, 1997, p. 276). Magazine format continues to be popular and accepted model of broadcast media, and McBride had a strong hand in its development (Ware, 2005, p. 13). The independence and control that this format offered allowed McBride to produce the show as she and her listeners preferred it. As McBride put it, "since no one client owned me, Stella and I made our own rules" (1960, p. 82). Magazine format seems to be at the crux of McBride's ability to have autonomy over her show, and a key factor in determining the form and atmosphere of the program.

[11] This working relationship was quite unusual. Karn and McBride met while working for a church organization, became roommates, and when McBride's manager on *Martha Deane* was fired after an alcohol-fueled outburst, Karn stepped in and confidently and competently managed the program (McBride, 1960, p. 23, Ware, 2005, p. 123, 161). McBride and Karn sustained an exceptionally close working and personal relationship until Karn's death in 1957, and there is and was much speculation about the nature of their relationship (Ware, 2005, p. 130, 31). Karn managed McBride's bookings, sponsorships and schedules, but doesn't seem to have been directly involved in the conceptualization of the show, which was already somewhat established when she took on the role of manager. However, some sources cite Karn as the one who suggested McBride begin to interview guests, one of the central aspects of McBride's program (McBride, 1960, p. Ware, 2005, p. 162).

2.5 Intimate Style

Neil Verma has also argued for the importance of form specifically in relation to radio. Verma's (2012) work centres on radio dramas from the 1930s, 40s, and 50s, and the oft-repeated cliché about radio's ability to catalyze "congress between mind and medium" through the creation of a "theater of the mind" (2012, p. 3). Verma places his focus on the audio itself, and conducts an analysis according to what the programs *sound like*, building what he dubs "interconnected frameworks for performing formal readings and digging into aesthetics" (2012, p. 7). Verma notes that concerns such as his are "a relatively new priority in radio studies" (2012, p. 7) and as such the methodological tools are somewhat underdeveloped (2012, p. 8). In his work he offers some of this much needed vocabulary to "help explore portrayals of time, space, perspective, dialogue, narration, characterization and other properties" (2012, p. 9). Verma argues that "it is necessary to confront common narrative moves and aural details and provocations, as well as the overall form of a drama as revealed in directly perceivable qualities – or the 'actual sound' of radio" (2012, p. 10). He employs a Benjaminian notion of aesthetics to theorize the interaction between object and listener, in a "double process of craft and reception" (2012, p. 10) and traces how conventions, forms and practice "evolve in concert with a series of historical developments" (2012, p. 12).

One of Verma's most relevant observations in relation to my work is his examination of spatial conventions in 1930s radio dramas. Verma notes the development of two different production techniques which he calls intimate and kaleidosonic styles, which he argues represent "one way that prominent broadcasters solved representational and narrative problems, and that each also embodies an aspect of the political rhetoric of the period" (2012, p. 57).

Verma argues that in the intimate style, mics were positioned close to characters who we are meant to sympathize with (2012, p. 58). He describes scenarios in which the listener is positioned in supposed close physical proximity to certain character(s); as if in the back of a buggy with two young boys as the adults remain muffled and distant, as if on a train with a journalist as it whizzes through a landscape, and as if "cheek-by-jowl" with detective Dick Tracy as he solves a case and enemies draw close (2012, p. 58-65). Verma argues that producers used amplitude and mic position to nestle the listener "intimately with one carefully selected character for the duration of the drama" (2012, p. 63), producing a sense of closeness, and allying the listener with one character. This technique and the feelings it produced have been hugely influential in radio drama and beyond. As Verma puts it, "Intimate audioposition became so

widespread as a tactic that critics have tended to confuse its effects with those of the medium itself. Instead of considering intimacy to be the result of composition choices and volume levels, the radio device has the reputation of being innately intimate" (2012, p. 65) Verma argues that this notion inherent intimacy is simply not the case, but that this style and effect "the product of an aesthetic strategy" (2012, p. 65). For Verma, this strategy was employed to foster sympathy and empathy in listeners.

2.6 My Approach

While Sterne's analysis focuses on many of the more technical and back-end aspects of format,[12] I've approached the topic from a more structural and aesthetic point of view. Following Verma, and Barnhurst and Nerone, in this work, I've examined a formal and aesthetic analysis of *The Mary Margaret McBride Program* by focusing on what these shows sound like, or their persistent audible structure; what parts they are constituted by, and the differing audio techniques, styles, soundscapes, the role of the host, and how these factors interact to create the media "environment" or atmosphere (Barnhurst & Nerone, 2001). I am interested in how form was utilized on *The Mary Margaret McBride Program* to construct the feeling of closeness and intimacies so clearly articulated by McBride's listeners, and what ideological ends these intimacies serve. As I've argued, magazine format is a key component of this environment, greatly influencing the other formal aspects I've identified. As with the *Ladies Home Journal* in the 1890s and beyond, McBride show seems to have used magazine format to produce a media environment or 'package,'[13] which addressed women's concerns and appealed to them on a familiar register, intermixing commercial and editorial content, encouraging participation, and providing companionship.

In the following chapter I note certain temporal and spatial conventions such as pace, flow, and audioposition (borrowing this concept from Verma) to theorize the construction of the atmosphere which the listeners are immersed in. Following Verma, I note the "media fantasies" surrounding McBride's program and how "aesthetic practices normalized fantasies and managed transitions from one to the next" (2012, p. 7).

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[12] Sterne quickly moves to analysis of bit rates, compression, bandwidth, and the infrastructures and technologies "behind the format" (2012, p. 17). I haven't gotten into these qualities much in my analysis, focusing more on the very 'forward-facing qualities' of the form.

[13] As Damon-Moore characterizes the *LHJ*.

CHAPTER THREE - The Mary Margaret McBride Program

"Once a day, five times a week, she gets up and gabbles happily, in a wee girl voice, into a microphone, selling paint and peanuts and shoe polish and noodles and similar truck" (Ruark, 1949).

In this chapter I discuss the details of McBride's career in radio, and theorize several aural aspects of *The Mary Margaret McBride Program*. I highlight her unique approach to advertising, and certain temporal and spatial components of her show such as pace, flow, audioposition, and gestures to nearness. I connect these components to her embrace and augmentation of magazine format, a funding model and structuring principle borrowed from print media (as explored in chapter two). In this chapter I suggest that McBride's formally innovative use of radio technology constructed an audio media context in which listeners felt connected to each other, to McBride, and to the products she promoted, producing an atmosphere of gendered familiarity and intimacy as notable to her contemporaries as it is today.

3.1 McBride's Career

In the 1930s, McBride's successful career as a print journalist and magazine writer had taken a significant hit, and this depression-era desperation led to one of McBride's first long-term gigs hosting *Martha Deane,* a thirty minute program from 2:30 to 3:00pm six days a week (Ware, 2005). McBride was hired to play a grandmotherly figure, and wax on her fictional children, grandchildren, favourite recipes, and household tips (Hilmes, 1997, Merrick, 1997, Ware, 2005). The facade didn't last long however, and eventually the 35-year-old unmarried McBride came clean to her listeners about her identity in an outburst she later characterized as "I killed grandma" (McBride, 1960, Ware, 2005, p. 157-159). However, her fans connected to her new approach, and it was on *Martha Deane* that McBride began to develop her trademark ad-lib style, in which she freely discussed current events, her life and her thoughts. This unscripted style was notably unusual, and her station WOR promoted her show on this basis, declaring in their promotional materials, "Martha Deane chats with her audience as though they were actually in the studio with her" (quoted in Ware, 2005, p. 161). And listeners responded. From 1934 onwards, McBride's following grew, and McBride and her manager Stella Karn cultivated a mode of listenership characterized by close personal feelings and active participation (Ware, 2005 p. 9, 161). Her fans enthusiastically organized parties at which they listened to and

discussed the show, tried out the household tricks and recipes McBride mentioned, and actively bought the advertised products in an effort to ensure the shows continuation (Ware, 2005, p. 161). *Martha Deane* was also popular with critics. Ben Gross, prominent radio columnist praised McBride in writing as early as 1936 (McBride, 1936, p. 19-20).[14] As historian Susan Ware describes it, on *Martha Deane* "McBride discovered a formula that worked" (2005, p. 160). In 1937 she experimented with a short-format, nationally syndicated show in addition to her local thirty to forty-five minute program, but ultimately dropped the shorter show for a number of reasons, namely to do with overwork, conflict with sponsors, and difficulty with the brief amount of time allotted to her (Ware, 2005, p. 167). Her discomfort with a shorter format is why it's so surprising that in 1940 McBride decided to stop hosting *Martha Deane* and instead to move to a fifteen minute program called *Columnist of the Air,* produced and sponsored by the Florida Citrus Commission. This show was somewhat of a disaster from the beginning: McBride immediately regretted her decision, hated the short format, and the control her sponsor wanted to have over the show (Ware, 2005, p. 168-69). *Columnist of the Air* was cancelled before McBride's first contract was up, and both McBride and the citrus commission considered it a bust (Ware, 2005, p. 170).

Shortly after this debacle, in 1941, McBride breathed a sigh of relief when manager Stella Karn landed her a slot on WEAF, the NBC flagship station in New York City, at one pm every weekday. After a period of uncertainty and tumult, McBride was happy to settle into a steady show, and was even happier to be allotted her favourite amount of time: forty-five minutes. *The Mary Margaret McBride Program* (on air from 1941-1954) brought her the most stability, popularity, autonomy, and financial success of her career, and it's the period of her work on which I've decided to centre my analysis. For the next thirteen years, McBride hosted a forty-five to sixty minute talk show every week day (and sometimes more frequently!), and it is during this period that the form, style and aesthetics of her show were firmly solidified.

Throughout her life and career, McBride encountered a significant amount of gender-based discrimination which she navigated, negotiated, and combatted. Despite a number of women engaging with radio technology in the early days of the medium, (Douglas, 2004, Hilmes, 1997, p. 130), by the time McBride began hosting her show in the mid 1930s the early flexibility in terms of gender roles had given way to institutionalized rigidity (Hilmes, 1997,

[14] Gross was a McBride fan, however, he originally didn't enjoy her show. He is cited as having characterized McBride has being "*the worst* radio speaker he had ever heard" but later developed a fondness for her and took back his earlier statements (Merrick, 1997, p. 151-152).

Douglas, 2004). In McBride's era of the 1930s-50s, women were mainly relegated to on-air performing roles (such as singing in variety shows or acting in serial dramas) and to off-air support roles (such as assistants, secretaries or researchers) (Hilmes, 1997, p.132). Of course, there are notable exceptions (as mentioned in chapter one), but in general, radio in the 1930s, 40s and 50s, women were only welcome on the air as performers, not as announcers or hosts (Ware, 2005, p. 52-53). Starting in 1924, rumours had circulated about the register of women's voices not being compatible with the technology, that listeners would not respond to the lack of authority in women's voices, and that women were otherwise unsuitable for on-air roles (Hilmes, 1997, p. 59, Ware, 2005, p. 52). This conception was applied to McBride often, and McBride's voice especially was not deemed pleasant or fitting for radio. Along with comments about her age, weight, marital status, and upbringing, McBride's voice was much maligned in the press (Ware, 2005, p. 6-7). An otherwise complementary profile of McBride in *The New Yorker* describes her voice as "naive" and as sounding as if it belongs to a "corn-fed ingenue" (Heggie, 1942, p. 27). However, despite institutional barriers and significant amounts of criticism, McBride's voice, concerns and techniques were popular. Part of this equation was her willingness to broadcast in the day (Ware, 2005, p. 54-55). At the time, radio was staunchly divided into daytime and nighttime with different programming and expectations for each (Hilmes, 1997, Ware, 2005). McBride likely was more free to produce her show with some degree of autonomy and independence because of her time slot, one o'clock, and the disparaging manner in which radio executives treated daytime shows and daytime audiences. McBride operated in a similar context to many serial dramas or soap operas allowing her greater expressive freedom as she operated "under cover of daytime" (Hilmes, 1997, p. 151).

It's also during her time broadcasting *The Mary Margaret McBride Program* that McBride's relationship with her fans blossomed, and intimate and close feelings were strongly established and maintained. I've characterized these relationships and feelings as related to the atmosphere which McBride fostered on her show, and as connected to form in interesting ways. As such, in the remainder of this chapter I explore some salient formal and aesthetic aspects of McBride's work, and discuss them in relation to the atmosphere of gendered familiarity which was so important to so many.

3.2 Advertising Techniques

Very audible in McBride's show are the advertisements. As I've mentioned, McBride's program was an example of magazine format, structured around a funding model of selling time

to various sponsors and mentioning them throughout. Magazine format influenced the overall atmosphere of her program, and allowed McBride to develop her characteristic foregrounding of the products she advertised. Her method of promoting products is a major factor in the flow and non-segmentation of her program, and greatly contributes to the conversational, collaborative, and familiar environment of the show.

In contrast to the single-sponsor/indirect advertising model, McBride did not disguise or hide her sponsorships, and seemingly discusses her products for about one third of each broadcast (Ware, 2005, p. 93).[15] Writing in *The Radio Daily* in 1941, right before her return to a regular longer format program, McBride gushed, "I'm pretty excited about getting back to my good old forty-five minutes again and all the products that were as much a part of me as my breathing" (McBride, 1941). The products are by no means an aside, or reluctantly mentioned. McBride spends a significant portion of each show advertising, which she seems to enjoy, even to "revel" in (Heggie, 1942, p. 27). This heavy emphasis seems to be somewhat exceptional. In an internal memo from 1941, NBC specified that for a daytime program, a thirty minute show could have four and a half minutes of advertising, and a sixty minute show could have nine minutes (NBC, 1941). According to this policy, McBride's 45 minute program would have been allowed 7 minutes and 45 seconds of advertising per show, which I can staunchly assert, she far exceeded in every broadcast I listened to. [16]

In addition to this heavy emphasis, McBride's approach to her ads is fairly unique. What she referred to as "doing the products" (Ware, 2005, p. 88) is a quite unpredictable aspect of the show with the length, timing, placement, and style of her ads varying drastically. McBride might start a show off by discussing her products for 20 minutes straight, she might pepper them

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[15] This is Ware's estimation, but it sounds about right to me as well.

[16] An interesting few letters in the McBride collection attest to the possibly tense relationship she seems to have had with station managers over this issue. A letter from Harry M. Thayer, an executive at the local radio station WGHQ she broadcast from in her retirement writes, "I know how unhappy it makes you for me to talk to you about the length of time of commercials but we are under strict orders from the FCC not to exceed 20 minutes per hour. . . I'd like to just point out that many times the commercial content of your program-- and God bless you, I approve but the FCC does not -- runs as much as 26 minutes. . . The point is, our daily log, I repeat again, are being mailed at the end of each month to Washington for their inspection. Please understand, it is not a complaint of mine, simply a rule of the FCC that our new company has to adhere to. . . We also had an unhappy person today call and say there were five commercials messages in a row. Please, my dear, split them up for me, please, a little more than that" (Thayer, 1968a). One month later, he writes to her again, "We've discussed it many, many times and I have found it quite upsetting to have those particular programs start with about four or five minutes of commercials before getting into the program itself, which more than one program did." (Thayer, 1968b). It seems in her retirement, McBride stuck to her ways, with a heavy emphasis on advertising, and little regard for an even spread.

throughout, or might quickly rush through them near the end. Interestingly, most of the time she does not necessarily 'break' from her programming in order to promote the products. Instead she weaves the advertisements into the fabric of the show, often seamlessly transitioning from a story to a promotional segment, and back into a story in such a way that as a listener it's not clear when the ad starts and when it finishes. On her broadcast from 2 February 1954, McBride mentions her guest, then delves into the products "we have a thrilling guest today, at least I think so. I've tried to get her for the longest time, and the stubborn thing I never got her until today. But you will love her I know. Mary Boland? You know Mary Boland. You'll like her. Her cat will like Puss n' Boot cat food. . . so get Puss n Boots in two convenient sizes. Can you do that?" (McBride, 1954). She then proceeds to advertise her products for about 10 minutes, and when she does transition into an interview, she does so with no pause or break at all, seemingly in the same breath as her final product "McCormick Tea, the tea with the big M-C, I want you to buy it in the loose tea or in the tea bags, it's the most economical beverage you can imagine. McCormick Tea, really, good, fine tea. Mary Boland do you feel that your play *Lullaby* is about namism?"[17] (McBride, 1954). This refusal to separate the advertising from her other content is reminiscent of magazine practices. As Gruber Garvey notes, "any insistence on an editorial/advertising split distorts the experience of actual magazine readers, who took in a magazine as a whole" (1996, p. 4). McBride's program functions in a similar way.

Often, her advertisements are not a monologue, but are a discussion between McBride and her announcer Vincent Connolly,[18] her guests, or her listeners. One particularly involved segment included McBride pretending she was late for the broadcast and was calling in from a phone booth, forcing Connolly to advertise the products as best he can, offering him leading questions and comments, but never taking over or allowing him to fade into the background (McBride, 19 December 1941). She coaches Connolly in how to best promote the products saying "do you feel you ought to mention the Dromedary Gingerbread Mix?" and telling him

[17] It seems that Mary Boland was on McBride's program to promote a play she was appearing in, *Lullaby*, which was about a mother blocking her son's marriage because of the low status/family name of his fiance, and I think McBride's comment about"namism" refers to discrimination due to someone's name (Hischak, T, 2009, p. 274, J. P. S.,1954).

[18] Connolly was a big part of her show. He was "more than an announcer but not quite a sidekick or buddy like Stella" and acted as a steady and regular presence on the show, a good foil for McBride (Ware, 2005, p. 24-25). He was a "confirmed bachelor" and Ware describes him as "slightly effeminate" (2005, p. 25-26). Amongst McBride's radio family, Connolly's private life was often discussed, and his sexuality, as well as the interesting relationship between McBride and Karn, were accepted although never addressed. As Ware put it, in McBride's "radio family, as in many other families, sexuality and gender relations were not always what they seemed on the surface" (2005, p. 26-27).

"your personal experience is very important" (McBride, 19 December 1941). Other times, she quizzes Connolly about the products (McBride, 25 August 1944), or they simply chat about the products and their various positive qualities. Connolly acts a gentle, kind and reliable interlocutor, supporting and humouring McBride as she goes through her song-and-dance, and reminding her of products she missed, sometimes correcting her mistakes, and attempting to keep her on schedule.

In addition to contributions from Connolly, fairly frequently her guests help her with her advertisements. She either solicits their help, or they chime in of their own accord, gushing about the products, mentioning that they themselves use them, or conversing with McBride about various aspects of a brand of coffee, a type of soap, or a grocery store. On a broadcast from 2 January 1949, both Eslanda Goode Robeson and Pearl S. Buck offer to help with the products right at the beginning of the program. On the show from 21 January 1943, one of her guests actually inquires about the products, and gets the conversation going unprompted by McBride:

> Ella Logan: "Well what's cooking today kid? What are you giving us away?"
>
> McBride: "What am I giving you away? There are no cookies today, I am sorry I don't understand"
>
> Fred Finklehoffe: "No cookies! How about Dromedary Dates? How 'bout that stuff where you put the shirts in and they jump out and they are brand new again?"
>
> Logan: "How 'bout that soap to shine up your kisser?"
>
> McBride: "We've got a dog food since you were here, have you any dogs yet?"
>
> Logan: "Sure we've got a dog"

McBride and her two guests keep discussing the products in this informal way intertwined with talk of their careers, until McBride tries to transition into her products more formally. She says she has a "little plan to do the products, you all really can help me out a good deal with it" (McBride, 21 January 1943). About his experience as a guest on McBride's show, publishing executive Bennett Cerf writes, "Often the guest stars become so enthused by the McBride endorsements that they sail right into the commercials with her. One day, for instance, I found myself emoting over Bruce floor wax, although until ten minutes before I had been firmly convinced that all wax came from bees" (Cerf, 1947). A broadcast from 31 October 1945, offers another example of McBride's guests participating in her promotional segments. Betty Bacon Blunt helps her advertise Eylers Tea, and then McBride turns to her second guest, Herman Smith, and asks:

> McBride: "You might just tell me, what do you think of Dromedary Gingerbread mix?"

Smith: "You know, someone asked me the other day, 'why you never put a recipe for gingerbread in your books?'[19] I said why on earth would I ever put such a recipe for gingerbread in my books when there is such a thing as Dromedary Gingerbread mix on the market?"

McBride: "That's a boy"

Smith: "It's true! You just add the water and there you are!" (McBride, 31 October 1945).

Smith soon divulges that he is moving away from New York, consequently making his future appearances on the show more infrequent. They spend the final minutes of the program going over which of McBride's products he will use in his new house in Massachusetts:

McBride: "Well you're gonna need Dif in your new home were you about to say that?"

Smith: "Rather I've already, you know when you pack things, you don't wait till to get there, you wash them beforehand. And we've Diffed and Diffed and Diffed, all the glasses and all the china and it's all wrapped up and all you gotta do when you get down there you just take it right out and set it on the shelf like brand new. And also the washing - I did my last washing the other day in my washing machine."

McBride: "With Dif"

Smith: "With Dif"

McBride: "Dif Washing Powder in the blue box" (McBride, 31 October 1945).

Guests on *The Mary Margaret McBride Program* were considered a part of the fabric of her show, and were not exempt from the collective effort to make the show a success through commercial advertising. As McBride herself notes in her 1960 memoir, "whenever I could see what looked like interest in a guest's face I was sure to drag her - or him- into the fray" (p. 79).

And, of course, the listeners got in on the action as well. On most of the shows I listened to, McBride would read listener letters on the air, and almost all of them had the products as their central or only focus. While many have noted the participatory nature of McBride's show, as represented on her program, the terms of this participation and the listener-host relationship is very strongly based in a conversation about the products. She tended not to read them verbatim, instead summarizing and editorializing, especially focusing on the letters and parts of letters which mentioned her products. The listeners wrote about how they and their families loved

[19] Herman Smith, a "writer and food expert" wrote cookbooks, was another 'confirmed bachelor', and was a core member of McBride's 'radio family' (Ware, 2005, p. 27).

McBride's products, and about how much the show and the products contributed to their lives. A typical segment has McBride talking to Connolly about a listener letter:

> McBride: Oh. Well Agnes Hoffman says about Ward's in the letter that I got from Utica just today she says 'the texture in your Ward's New Enriched Tip-Top Bread is just like in a swell angel food cake. And it makes the best toast I've ever had!' And she's tried all kinds, all kinds of bread, all kinds of white bread, and there's not one on the market she thinks can compare with Ward's New Enriched Tip-Top. When she was sick not long ago she sent Cynthia to the store for her and she'd made a list that she had intended to use herself so she only had 'bread' she didn't have 'Tip-Top' so she was a little worried about Cynthia, Cynthia's the gal who didn't like white bread, but has reformed now. When she tried Ward's New Enriched Tip-Top white bread which has this magic yeast you know that makes its own Vitamin B1 and has the right minerals in it and comes in a wrapper with the star ends. Stars to applaud itself and its own excellence. So when Cynthia came back, the end of the story is, she had Ward's New Enriched Tip-Top Bread. To her, bread now means Ward's New Enriched Tip-Top Bread. So I was pleased about that.[20] (McBride, 21 August 1942)

In a broadcast from 5 May 1950, McBride collaborates with Esther McGuire of St. Charles, Illinois for an ad. She says that Esther "likes that especially for her icebox cookies, oh I love icebox cookies! She says she rolls her cookie dough in Waxtex and stores it until it's chilled well" (McBride, 1950). To my ear, McBride and her listeners consider themselves as a part of a collective project in which they all have a role. Heggie likens the commercial relationship as familial, "Her listeners buy the products she recommends, partly, perhaps, in the spirit in which they would help a real niece raise some pin money by buying Christmas cards or a magazine subscription from her" (1942, p. 27). She quotes a letter from a listener who lives outside the area where one of McBride's products was sold: "How can I get Bohack's up here? I can't do it and I feel I owe it to you and your sponsors to buy your products. What shall I do?" (Heggie, 1942, p. 29). Ware has noted the same phenomenon, she quotes a listener who writes, "I would do anything I could to keep your program on the air. . . so I am going to drink twice the amount of coffee, Savarin Coffee, as I ever drank before" (K.D. quoted in Ware, 2005, p. 98), and another who dutifully reported, "This is from one of your devoted listeners. I'm right on the job

[20]It's possible that these letters were not genuine and instead were fabricated as a device for advertising by McBride or one of her staff members. It's hard to tell who wrote these segments, especially without a robust archive of listener letters. In any case, they are presented on air as if they were written by listeners.

listening as always. On my pantry shelf are Dromedary Ginger Bread Mix, Date, and Nut Bread [sic]" (H.S. quoted in Ware, 2005, p. 98). These assertions support an ethos I observed on McBride's shows, which positions the consumerism at the heart of her program as a collective goal, project and responsibility. This foregrounding of consumption is typical for mid-twentieth century cultural production (Cohen, 2003; Ewen, 1976; Fox & Lears, 1983). McBride's listeners seem to embrace an ethos of "purchaser as citizen" which Lizabeth Cohen (2003) describes as a framework, beginning in the 1930s, in which "consumers satisfying personal material wants actually served the national interest" and consumption and civic responsibility are able to be combined into one (p. 8, italics in original). I see McBride's listeners' on similar terms, purchaser citizens of of the McBride 'nation,' they merged their responsibilities as fans and personal interests in material goods (Cohen, 2003, p. 8, 54-56). McBride, her announcer, her guests, and her listeners all contribute to promoting the products and to buying them, as a collective effort to ensure the success of the program, fostering a growing consensus that buying was more than a mere financial transaction.[21]

McBride's ads are of a similar ethos as her appeals in the early 1940s for her listeners to contribute to the war effort, encouraging her listeners to support her show by buying her products in the very same ways as she encouraged them to drive less to conserve rubber (McBride, 20 January 1943). As one commentator wrote, "a three-way benefit evolves when special guests for the day support the enthusiastic endorsements of Miss McBride, add some of their own; and she, in turn, discusses the latest book of the obliging guest" (Parker, n.d.). This harkens back to what Gruber Garvey (1996) sees as a principle of "alignment" in nineteenth and twentieth century magazines. She notes, "as the editors saw it, advertisers, readers, and editors were all on the same side" (p. 14). Similarly, the goal of commercial success seems as unproblematically accepted on McBride's program as contributing to the war effort, and McBride, Connolly, her guests and her listeners all seem to happily embrace their role in the collective consumerism I heard on her show.

When her advertising had been truncated for one reason or another, McBride relies on the rest of the collective to pitch in and make up for it. In a show from 6 June 1946, McBride

[21] One article describes how McBride implored her listeners to buy her products so that the wife of one of her sponsors could get a new dress. She is quoted as saying, "I just know that you are all going to buy this delicious salad oil so that Betty Jane can have that wonderful, wonderful new dress" (McBride quoted in Churchill, 1949, p. 13)

broadcasts from a hotel ballroom and a National Father's Day luncheon for Veterans. She seems to have trouble getting good interviews out of the award-winning fathers she is trying to highlight, and possibly because of this, spends more time on them than she should have. At about forty-two minutes in, with just three minutes to go, she starts to just name her products rather than go into them in depth as she usually does. She says "well, I will just name these products and I trust you loyal people so much that I just name 'em and I know you'll go out and buy everything double because I'm not doing much commercial, see?" (McBride, 6 June 1946). When the regular balance of the program is thrown off by unexpected events, McBride counts on her listeners to contribute to the project more than usual. McBride's advertising strategy is similar to an early model of broadcast advertising described by Timothy Taylor (2012) in which "sponsored programs were developed to generate goodwill in the audience, whose members, it was hoped, would purchase the products advertised out of gratitude to the sponsor for providing the program. The idea of goodwill became the dominant advertising and broadcasting strategy at the beginning of radio" (p. 22). Taylor argues that the goodwill strategy in radio advertising ended in the depression era (2012, p. 25), but I notice a similar atmosphere in the goodwill strategy of the 1920s and McBride's appeals to generosity and reciprocity, fostering an atmosphere of active participation, and a sense of belonging and mutuality.

And, her method seems to have worked. McBride was renowned as one of the most successful advertisers of her time, and always had a waiting list of sponsors eager to be plugged on her show. As Barbara Heggie wrote in *The New Yorker* "facts are facts, and it seems to be a fact that never before have so many women been ready to buy things just because another woman tells them to" (1942, p. 27). The Mary Margaret McBride Collection in the Library of Congress is jam-packed with thank you notes from organizations, establishments, and individuals that McBride promoted on the radio. The thank you notes at times verge on the extreme, with the authors insisting that McBride's support has been the primary or perhaps even sole reason for their success. In a letter to Stella Karn, Walter Bruce of Bohack's grocery stores writes:

> Dear Miss Karn: I should have known -- after all, you warned me. But even then I was amazed at the response we had from Mary Margaret McBride's audience on our recent butter contest. When you consider that there was only one prize and a small one, at least for a radio contest, the response was 'terrific'. We gave up counting after 40,000 and we say again 'Mary Margaret McBride sure can pull them in' (Bruce, 1945).

McBride is often in both the historical and contemporary literature compared to Kate Smith, the legendary war bonds saleswoman (Boyle, 1959; Hamburger, 1944; Ware, 2005, p. 84). In articles about her, writers enjoy emphasizing and mythologizing the power of her plugs, "one of her casual remarks once sold eight freight-car loads of carrots!" (*People Magazine,* n.d.). On McBride's program, her radio family, guests and listeners all contributed to the commercial success of her show in various ways, and McBride framed herself as the primary beneficiary of this system rather than the network or the sponsors who backed her. This approach was enabled by her embrace of magazine format, which as I have argued, importantly contributed to the atmosphere of familiarity by which her show was characterized.

3.3 McBride and Time: Pace and Flow

Another factor in this atmosphere is the show's temporality. The pace and flow of McBride's program significantly contribute to the media environment in which she operated. Immediately striking is the pace: the show is slow. For a forty-five minute time slot, there is not a lot of identifiable 'content' in the way of guests, topics, or segments, but mainly consists of McBride filling time by talking at her leisure. As one article by an unknown author notes, "I was convinced that Miss McBride wasn't conducting a radio program but a filibuster" ("But Will She Meet Billie Pep?" n.d.). She talks at great length about seemingly tangential topics, does not appear to be keeping track of time, and is not afraid of silences and pauses. She often delves into a story and only after minutes of confusion does it become clear that she is tying it in with a previous point, a plug or a guest. On one such occasion, McBride tells a story about a radio announcer who is getting married, his wife, and their plans, and then, after minutes of recounting it, links the story to one of her products. At this point, her guest, Fred Finklehoffe, interrupts her. Incredulous at her method, he exclaims, "you mean to tell me that you went through that whole thing, that entire procedure there about the fellow with the blonde wig and the girl with the red hair just to get to Bohacks?!" (McBride, 21 January 1943). Another McBride trademark is losing her train of thought, forgetting certain details, or making mistakes. She does not gloss over these moments of imperfection, but instead languishes in them, often struggling for seconds or minutes to remember a word, a detail, or her intended conclusion for a digression. After her regular Wednesday special during the war, McBride stumbles on her words, and then digs in deeper to her forgetfulness relying on her announcer Vincent Connolly for support:

McBride: “Well it was grand to have you. That was William S. Clark, regional manager of the division of motor transport, of the ODT, Office of Defense Transportation, and this has been part of our, ah, what is it Vincent?”

Connolly: “Homefront Forum, the Mary Margaret McBride Homefront Forum”

McBride: “The Mary Margaret McBride Homefront Forum, MMM, um, H,”

Connolly: “FF”

[all laugh]

These moments of forgetfulness are not uncommon on McBride’s show, and are a feature of her characteristic ad-lib method. Also due to the unscripted nature of her show, there are often moments where she stumbles over her words, or isn’t sure what to say. Of note is a broadcast with Pearl Buck and Eslanda Goode Robeson, in which they discuss race and gender issues. This is one of the programs in which McBride stutters the most, allows the most silences and unfinished thoughts, and is one of her least graceful broadcasts in a conventional sense. In another sense I found it very adept as McBride bares her discomfort with the challenges of the topics in an audible way. After Robeson has discussed her life as a black woman fighting racial injustice, and Buck has offered her perspective as a white woman raised in China, rather than her characteristic cutting follow-up question McBride simply notes “You really roused my need to think” (McBride, 1 February 1949). After this, the conversation moves on, but not without a notable silence. Digressions, stumbles and pauses are typical of McBride’s technique and style, and are partially how she managed to fill three quarters of an hour with ease each weekday for the better part of twenty years. McBride herself has commented often on the pace of her show, and famously called it the “forty-five minute tempo” (McBride in Heggie, 1942, p. 32-33), and enough “time to turn around in” (McBride in Ware, 2005, p. 165). A 1942 profile in the *New Yorker* described her time with a fifteen minute slot as “so harried by young men with stopwatches that the easy geniality of her program began to wither” (Heggie, 1942, p. 32). As Susan Ware has noted, “hers was a program that needed time to grow on its listeners; she had to settle into it just as much as they did” (2005, p. 5), an attitude illustrated well by Figure 3.

Several components of McBride’s show appear regularly, fostering the type of familiarity and comfort which can accompany seriality. There are regular structural aspects of the show, but also there is a certain amount of irregularity and what seems to be spontaneity. As one commentator noted, “a day’s broadcast is as unpredictable as April weather” (“Mary Margaret McBride, Here Nov. 22 is ‘Specialist in Friendship” n.d.). Mainly, the regularity on the *Mary*

Margaret McBride Program is produced by people, stories, and phrases which recur throughout the programs, not by segments or rigidity of form.

Figure 3. McBride, broadcasting from bed, no date. Library of Congress Recorded Sound Section - MBRS Division, Lowry/McBride Collection, Photographs, Box 3, Folder 55.

The few regular structural aspects of the show appear mainly at the beginning of each broadcast. The program always kicks off with a few seconds of music and then Vincent Connolly announces "It's one o'clock and here is Mary Margaret McBride." This is the single most consistent aspect of the show, and the phrase is so iconic that Susan Ware used it to entitle her 2005 book. The sentence signals the beginning of the show, but also reinforces the time slot which was so precious to McBride and so denigrated by studio executives. Not only does the opening structure the show, but it probably also structured many listeners lives, the regularity of the time slot, and the constant reminders of it, add a type of referentiality, allowing listeners to integrate McBride into their lives and daily routines (Ware, 2005). After Connolly's opening, McBride would kick off the program with a description of herself in the third person, always beginning with 'who.' This pattern was so regular she referred to it as "a who" (McBride, 19 August 1942). Some examples of this regular segment are: "Who intends to Stump Vincent today, if it's the last thing she ever does" (McBride 21 August 1942); "Who is on the air today,

with the Federation Breakfast Club" (McBride 2 December 1947); or "Who forgot to get a who!" (McBride, 19 August 1942). The first thirty to sixty seconds of every show are essentially the same, and can be relied upon to provide a familiar introduction to the Mary Margaret McBride world. Other regularities are more broad: on Wednesdays during World War Two McBride had a program called the Homefront Forum in which she had a guest from the Office of War Information and she and her various guests would discuss what they and the listeners can do to help the war effort. This seems to be the only ongoing themed segment McBride had, and lasted from 1942-1945.

Other touchpoints of regularity have less to do with structure. McBride had a group of staff and guests who she referred to as her "radio family" (Ware, 2005, p. 28). Announcer Vincent Connolly, manager Stella Karn, longtime secretary Mrs D., research assistant Janice Devine, guests Juliette Nicole, Herman Smith, Patti Pickens, and Olga Petrova all regularly appeared and were discussed on the show, and listeners would have been familiar with them, their lives, and their stories (Ware, 2005). Her radio family filled in when there were cancellations or sicknesses, were there for all the celebratory programs, and McBride frequently held "jam session programs" in which she invited them on the air to chat (McBride, 1960, p. 32). Often, members of this radio family are referred to by first name only, with little or no explanation, an indication of McBride's assumption about who and how her listeners engaged with her show. She often reads letters from "Al the Butter Man" a person about whom I am still know little, except that she refers to him often, and he is one of her favourite correspondents (McBride, 18 August, 1942, McBride, 20 August 1942, McBride, 21 August 1942). Only rarely does she fill listeners in on who she is talking about.

> McBride: "Do you suppose there's anybody listening who doesn't know who Stella Karn is?"
>
> Connolly: "I don't think so, but there might be, new people listen every now and then you know" (McBride, 18 August 1942).

McBride, Connolly, and her radio family also refer to certain stories often and without much explanation. The "nightgown story"[22] (McBride, 5 May 1943) and "the zipper story"[23] are oft-

[22] I have been unable to locate further details of this story that might contextualize the event or references to it.

[23] It seems that sometime in March 1948 McBride was late to her broadcast because she had zipped some of her flesh into her corset, and had to call a doctor to come get her out ("Mary Margaret Zips to New High with Listeners" *People,* n.d.).

mentioned but rarely repeated, suggesting that McBride assumed her listeners were familiar with the stories, which did not need to be rehearsed regularly. Instead, McBride assumed that her audience was made up of dedicated listeners who tuned in daily, and were rapt the entire time. By not repeating the stories themselves, she gestures to this mutual understanding of listenership,[24] in a proverbial nod to her fans and their listening practices. Occasionally she does explain herself and bring her listeners in. Talking to Rosemary Taylor, McBride solicits some more context for her listeners. She asserts, "I was thinking there might be benighted human beings who don't know what the story of chicken every Sunday is. Maybe you'd better give just a very brief little resume" (McBride, 25 August 1944). However, these explanatory moments are few and far between. More often, McBride flows on, assuming her listeners' wide and deep knowledge of her show. Characterizing her staff and friends as a 'radio family' invites listeners into a very specific atmosphere. Hers was a program in which all parties knew each other well, confidences could be shared, and blunders and silences were common.[25] These different regular components of the show such as the formulaic introduction, weekly features, and the cast of recurring guests, stories, and tropes build a familiarity and a skeleton of structure which listeners can use to orient themselves, and which fosters a type of comfort in sameness. One fan describes what he so enjoys about her show as its "firmness of pattern" (Starr, 1942), and as I listened to the recordings in my booth at the Library of Congress, I experienced this comforting firmness as well. Certain landmarks, phrases, voices and stories guide one through that which can otherwise be a somewhat irregular program, offering points of reference, building a familiar environment in which to listen.

In spite of this, aside from the very basic structural aspects (the introduction, and a brief mention of the station around the thirty minute mark), there is very little segmentation in the show. There is no regular pattern of when or how the stories, interviews, and ads will happen, and once you are in the McBride world, it's a flow of talk which does not get interrupted in any meaningful way. As one commentator described it, the show has a "smooth texture" (Starr, 1942). As mentioned, this flow is especially notable when it comes to the ads. McBride does not break her flow for the ads, instead builds them into the conversations, both stopping and starting

[24] With these personal stories, she also seems to be indicating the gendered expectations of her listenership. There is a sense that these stories are meant for women to hear. In a time when women's modesty was a common public expectation, the story also betrays that her audience was presumed to be largely female (thank you to Sandra Gabriele for this important insight).
[25] Thanks again to Sandra Gabriele for this way of framing the radio family.

an advertisement in such a way that it's not totally clear when she is promoting something and when she is not. She weaves the show together out of multiple components, not fussing too much about differentiation or separation. This smoothness reminds me of Verma's account of radio scheduling changes in the 1930s. He notes radio's "stopwatch aesthetic"[26] which "ensured each program would proceed seamlessly into the next" and the introduction, during McBride's era, of twenty-four hour content (2012, p. 28). Verma notes how through these changes radio in general "was smoothed into a single calculable flow marked by clear cycles and predictable punctuations" (2012, p. 28), a characteristic which resonates strongly with what I've observed in the structure and flow of McBride's program in particular.

An especially notable aspect of this flow is McBride's refusal to orient the listener within her program. As a rule, she did not announce her guests ahead of time (Ware, 2005, p. 35), and very rarely does she introduce them in a way familiar to contemporary radio listeners. Often, she will begin an interview without any warning, listeners were not aware anyone else was at the table with her, and only later in the program will details about who the guest is and why they are on the show will be revealed. For example, at the top of a 1945 show, McBride and Connolly are chatting about how to structure a speech, and then McBride says "I am not sure about that. Whenever I make a speech, I wonder which to do: leave 'em laughing or leave 'em crying. What do you think David McCord?"[27] (McBride, 31 October 1945). Then she delves right into an interview with a guest who was previously unannounced. They discuss the book he has written though the listener is never provided any information about it. Perhaps these guests were famous enough in their time to not need any introduction, but to my ears, and I suspect to some of her contemporaries, McBride's method is somewhat abrupt, lacking the familiar touchpoints of contemporary media forms. She does not repeat the names of guests, recap their discussion, or explain the circumstances of an interview. Instead, she barrels ahead, refusing to break her flow. This non-segmentation signals to me certain expectations of listenership. Listeners are expected to be familiar with McBride and her idiosyncrasies, and to be committed to the show on both a short and long-term basis. They are assumed to know who Stella is, what the zipper story is, to whom McBride is talking, and about what on any given program. These expectations of listenership contribute to the atmosphere of intimacy on McBride's program in which familiarity is a given rather than a possibility, and through which listeners, McBride, and her radio family

[26] Verma credits radio scholar Shawn VanCour with coining this term.
[27] David McCord, a poet, may have been known to McBride's listeners, but was not a regular guest or member of her radio family, and I don't think can be considered a celebrity (Van Gelder, 1997).

seem to share a sense of belonging cultivated through referentiality, a lack of segmentation, and certain unique relations with temporality.

3.4 McBride and Space: Audioposition and 'Fleshy Presence'

Other interesting aesthetic aspects of McBride's program are spatial in nature especially what Neil Verma (2012) has dubbed 'audioposition.' As I've mentioned previously, Verma (2012) notes how in depression-era radio dramas, certain "sonorous marks" were used to produce spatial, temporal and emotional effects (p. 32). Verma argues that two audioposition formulas dominated the radio dramas of this period, conventions which he calls 'intimate and kaleidosonic styles' (2012, p. 57). Most notably for McBride's show, as noted earlier, is the intimate style, mics were positioned close to characters with whom we are meant to sympathize (2012, p. 58), producing an imaginary nearness and an emotional bond (2012, p. 62). While *The Mary Margaret McBride Program* is a very different genre from the radio dramas Verma theorizes, I posit that audioposition may have some influence over the intimate and familiar atmosphere which McBride fostered on her program.

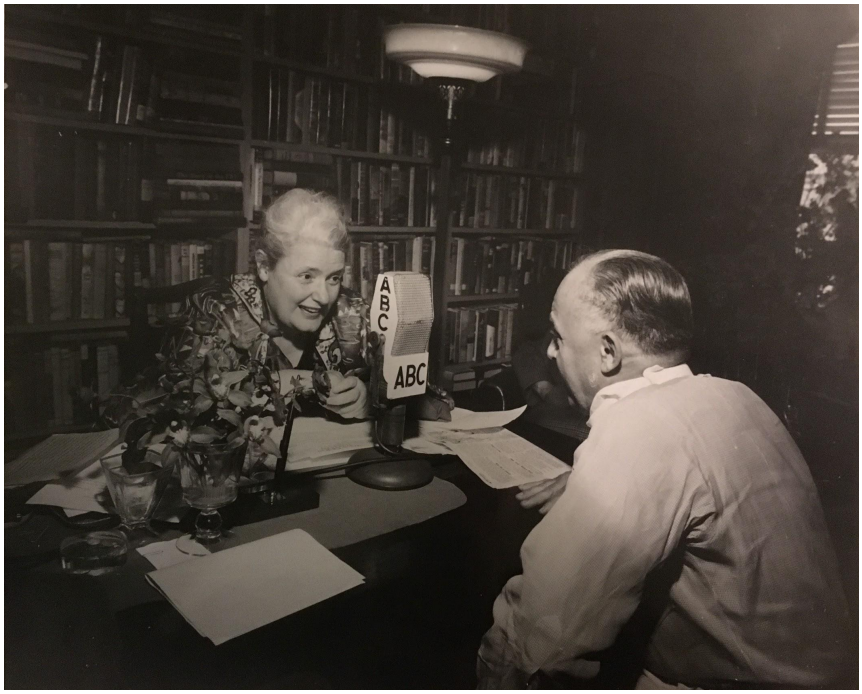

Figure 4. McBride interviewing an unknown guest for her last long-form show, 14 May 1954, broadcast from her apartment. Library of Congress Recorded Sound Section - MBRS Division, Lowry/McBride Collection, Photographs, Box 3.

Despite variation in factors such as where McBride broadcast from, and who she was speaking to, the mic set-up on *The Mary Margaret McBride Program* seems to have remained relatively constant throughout her twenty-year career. She had a single table, with two chairs and either one or two mics. I saw many photos showing this set up in the Mary Margaret McBride Collection of the Library of Congress (see Figures 4 and 5). When there is more than one guest on her program, they switch seats to speak (an example of this is McBride, 31 October 1945), and although for most of her career McBride had a small studio audience, very rarely are they audible. When McBride broadcasts from the studio, a live event, garden, or from her apartment, the audioposition stays the same. The listener is positioned at a table with McBride and her guest, and the background sounds and events are either inaudible or incomprehensible.

This audioposition is somewhat surprising, as throughout her career McBride broadcast in front of a live studio audience. Faithful McBride listeners would attend her broadcasts in the NBC studios, and she would interact with her audience before each program (Heggie, 1942, p. 29, Ware, 2005). Barbara Heggie in *The New Yorker* describes her greeting her audience vigorously and generously before each broadcast, noting, "[McBride] has a word for everybody, making sure that those who are there for the first time feel at home and saying something or other to show that she remembers those who have been there before" (Heggie, 1942, p. 29). Before I had the opportunity to listen to her shows, I had assumed that because of her participatory and involved relationship with her fans, she might interact with her audience on the air, or at least mention them as a method of community building and conviviality. However, it seems that this type of relationship-building happened mainly off-air. When McBride's broadcast begins, the listener is 'placed' directly at the table with McBride and her guest, and aside from the odd comment from announcer Vincent Connolly, the surrounding people, places, and things fade away.

Intimacy is largely about closeness in time, but also, importantly, in space. As I have suggested, the audioposition of McBride's show contributed to feelings of nearness between McBride and her listeners, but she also makes some more obvious efforts to bring her listeners into physical closeness with her. I notice these efforts in McBride's practice of describing certain aspects of her surroundings to her listeners, most notably the appearances of her guests. In the middle of an interview, McBride chimes in to describe the woman speaking: "Betty Bacon Blunt has got red hair, it's a red-gold, really beautiful hair" (McBride, 31 October 1945). On another occasion, she describes her guest, Betty Wason as looking like a primrose, with brown eyes and brown hair, then asks her how much she weighs on the air! Wason is happy to oblige, and

informs McBride that she weighs 107 pounds and is “almost five feet tall” (McBride, 4 May 1945). She describes the colour of Fay Wray’s outfit (Mulberry, or possibly Wine), Jennie Moscovitz’s silver hair, and even takes it a step further, describing in detail a photo of Joan Crawford’s daughter who she describes as “beautiful” “peaceful” and “adjusted” and as being about 5 '5 and 118 pounds (McBride, 19 December 1941; McBride, 18 December 1942; McBride, 20 March 1954). Likely, McBride formed this habit in her career writing for magazines, and continued it on her show.

Figure 5. “McBride w/ Omar Bradley” From Library of Congress Recorded Sound Section MBRS Division, Lowry/McBride Collection, Photographs, Box 1, Folder 16.

This practice evokes what Will Straw (2008) has described as a “new physicality of entertainment culture” in the 1930s in which the introduction of talking pictures altered the ontology of celebrity in various ways (p. 21). Straw argues that as celebrities appeared in various different media, a circulation developed in which “different parts of their being were successively clarified or exaggerated. As celebrities migrated across audio-visual media, the substance of performer corporeality was filled in; voice, image and gesture interacted to convey

a sense of fleshy presence" (2008, p. 21). This practice seems to have centred on McBride's women guests, as per societal obsessions with women's bodies but also perhaps also as a gesture to the closeness and familiarity which characterized the show and perhaps also in relation to this broad interest in "fleshy presence" which Straw describes (2008, p. 21). I believe this is a strategy which McBride employs to bring her listeners 'in' and to build an illusion of physical closeness, and as such an emotional closeness as well. McBride's practice of describing the physical appearance of women on the air to women listening, I read as a gesture to the closeness, both spatially and emotionally which McBride aimed to foster through her program.

3.5 Conclusion: McBride's 'Aesthetic Strategy'

In this chapter I have posited that the atmosphere of intimacy and familiarity on McBride's show was produced and maintained through several forms, techniques and conventions which she developed and solidified throughout her career. Through her format, approach to advertising, and several temporal and spatial techniques, McBride produced a show and a persona which listeners connected to on a personal level, contributing to radio's reputation and as a particularly intimate medium. I've argued that the forms and techniques that McBride pioneered and conventionalized are part of her and her team's aesthetic strategy (as per Verma) to build an imagined listening community which could sustain her show and her goals, produced by deft and innovative use of radio technology, rather than as an inevitable result of the properties of the medium.

CHAPTER FOUR - Imagined Visitors and Non-Imagined Communities: Mary Margaret's Many 'Friends'

"I have women listeners who will never go out when I am on the air. In fact, if I thought they were missing my broadcast, I would be heartbroken" (McBride in Traunch, 1939).

McBride enjoyed a loyal, attentive, and enthusiastic fan base. Her dedicated listeners wrote her unprecedented amounts of mail and exuberantly bought the products she advertised. Most interestingly, however, is that not only was McBride popular and adored, but she also seems to have occupied a special position in the lives of her fans. Many of her listeners considered McBride to be analogous to a close personal friend, neighbour or relative. The host-listener relationship which McBride fostered seems to be difficult for commenters to characterize, and critics both in McBride's era and today tend to understand the relationship in terms of metaphor. In a 1942 piece for *The New Yorker,* Barbara Heggie framed McBride's fans as "doting aunts" (p. 27) likening the way they worried for her, chastised her, and cared for her as strikingly familial. Susan Ware characterizes the relationships to be more neighbourly, in which listeners felt comfortable confiding in McBride because of her role as a friendly outsider (2005, p. 67). As one fan characterized it, "I feel toward her [McBride] as though she were an old friend" (Lucas, 1936), and another writes, "I felt as though I were a cousin 'once removed'. . . I felt I was really related to the program and to you" (Tommy, 1940). It seems evident that McBride enjoyed an especially tight relationship with her listeners, and she professed this closeness often. On a broadcast from 19 December 1941, during a plug for her newest book, she mentions one correspondent with whom she has a special bond. She says that this listener is "a woman I am devoted to. I've never laid eyes on her either, but I love her. She's got a beautiful soul" (McBride, 19 December 1941).

In addition my formal and aesthetic analysis of the production of intimacy and familiarity on McBride's show, I've borrowed some insights and methods from audience studies to investigate who McBride's listeners were, how they interacted with her work, and what types of "interpretive communities" they may have formed (Radway, 1984, p. 53). Raymond Williams (1977) has suggested that cultural texts cannot be understood in isolation but in formations of practices, technologies and institutions. This informs my choice of corpus and object of analysis by including listener letters, articles in both newspapers and magazines about McBride, as well as other promotional material and ephemera which contributed to the cultural formation of *The Mary Margaret McBride Program.* In this chapter, I explore the gendered and racialized

perceptions of McBride's show, who her listeners may have been, and how they may have listened. I posit that many of McBride's fans seemed to listen in a solitary manner, in their homes alone. I note the possibility of her listeners engaging in the type of "distracted listening" (Lacey, 2013) which is archetypically associated with daytime listening by women in McBride's era. However, I also suggest that some listeners may have engaged with her program in a more focused manner, and connect this residual form of listening (Acland, 2007; Williams, 1977), to the transitional moment of technological change which McBride's program and listeners straddled. Additionally, I draw on Carolyn Marvin's (1988) work to show how her listeners understood her program through dominant social and cultural practices of their era, making the feelings fostered intelligible on terms familiar to them: understanding McBride as a 'visitor' to their homes. I've also found that this solitary and distracted/focused listening doesn't seem to be the ending of engagement with the program, but rather a beginning. I argue that listening to *The Mary Margaret McBride Program* seems to have been a jumping-off point for forming not only imagined, but also non-imagined listening communities, and that her fans seem to have used her program as a means to engage with each other on a number of different fronts.

4.1 McBride's Listeners: Who They Were

Much of the discourse about McBride, be it journalism or scholarly work, focuses on her listeners, characterizing them as women working mainly in their homes (Churchill, 1949; Hilmes, 1997; Lowry, n.d.; "Mary Margaret McBride, Specialist in Friendship," n.d.; Merrick, 1997). Her time slot of one o'clock figures prominently in these accounts, and seems to occupy a space in certain cultural imaginaries as a time when only women alone in their homes would have been able to listen to the radio. While very little formal information on the demographics of McBride's listeners exists, as a part of her research for her biography of McBride, Ware (2005) put out a call to former listeners to understand who they were, how they listened and what they remembered. She found that many of McBride's loyal fans seem to have been isolated for one reason or another; some were sick or disabled, many were mothers who did not work outside of the home, some had moved away from their families, and others were new immigrants learning English (Ware, 2005, p. 68-70). Drawing on statistics from the Nielsen Company, Ware suggests that most of McBride's listeners were "older women, probably married or widowed, whose children had left home or were already in school" (2005, p. 71). The assumption that McBride's listeners were women is widespread, and seems to be stem from a number of sources, mainly to do with her time slot and McBride's own subject position. As one commenter envisioned her

listeners, “Winsome and plump, Mary Margaret McBride looks like a typical Mary Margaret McBride fan” (Hamburger, 1944).

McBride’s earliest iteration on radio, *Martha Deane* was explicitly geared towards ‘housewives’ and offered tips on child-rearing, cooking and cleaning (Ware, 2005). This orientation influenced McBride’s entire career, even when she shifted her focus to include other topics in later years, and she herself noted the persistent gendered impressions of her program:

> I didn’t consider myself a woman’s program -- certainly not after I started doing interviews. . . I thought that ought to interest men and women alike -- and so it did. But I had to wait a long time for recognition of this fact (1960, p. 25-26).

A typical article about McBride and her fans (this one describing the attendance at one of her ‘radio anniversaries’) reads, “solid streams of women were boiling up from the Independant subway station . . . it was plain that very few dishes were being washed in the five boroughs, and precious few babies were being rocked” (Wall, 1949, quoted in Ware, 2005, p. 3).[28] In *Newsweek*, McBride’s fans were characterized as “wholly feminine -- fluttery, middle-aged and purely housewife. Men, as a rule, disdain the show” (1949, quoted in Ware, 2005, p. 7).[29] Ware stresses that while McBride’s listeners were mainly women, and were characterized as such, some men did listen to her program (p. 6), and it seems that anyone near a radio at one o’clock would have been a possible listener. However, it seems undeniable that regardless of the exact breakdown of her listeners’ gender, McBride occupied a type of feminine sphere on the radio, characteristic of daytime programming in this era (Hilmes, 1997; Ware, 2005). As Ware explains, the program was “typecast as a women’s daytime show, not much higher in prestige than the soap operas” (2005, p. 26). McBride herself describes her initial impressions of her time slot as

> an hour when tired young mothers nap with children, suburban matrons are on the way to the bridge club, and older women are gadding to matinees or shopping. . . I went to Mr. Streibert and told him that I wanted to be given a nice time in the morning when there were people at the other end to hear me. He said: ‘You’ve been given that time just because it is dead. If you can get listeners, we want you. If you can’t, we don’t.’(1960, p. 24)

[28] Article by Ed Wall for the *World-Telegram*, 31 May 1949, quoted in Ware, 2005, p. 3.
[29] “The McBride Phenomenon” *Newsweek,* 30 May 1949 in Ware, 2005, p. 7.

The theme of isolation of one form or another was evident in the correspondence from listeners I was able to access. In a letter to a guest on McBride's program, one listener confesses she hadn't heard of the guest's work as "I have lived in this village for nearly 18 years and my occupations of mother and housewife have been very absorbing" (Lucas, 1936). Unfortunately, while the huge amount of mail she received is stressed in articles, scholarship, and McBride's own work, "estimated in 1944 at five thousand letters weekly," at some point during World War II McBride donated over three million letters to a scrap paper drive (Hilmes, 1997, p. 278, Ware, 2005). Very few letters from listeners survive in the archive, with most of the correspondence being from sponsors, friends, or guests. However, some did manage to squeak their way in. A long and notable one reads:

> Dear Martha Dean -- Altho I have difficulty in crystallizing my thots into words, I do want most sincerely to tell you what your program has meant to me. If I seem verbally stupid -- forgive me. Throu the years my mother has casually referred to you but to me you remained just a name and my mother's interest seemed to be a forgivable, whimsical quality of a gentle, old lady who brightened her life by an over indulgence in radio. However -- six months ago I became ill, rather a chronic but not serious malady, and was forced to dissociate myself completely from my work and former pattern of existence. I crawled into exile with my mother and prepared for a long, bleak, lingering emptiness. My semi-invalid schedule provided for a daily nap at three p.m. . . So -- you see -- there was no escape from you because at two o'clock mother would say --, "your chair in the sun room, dear" -- and when I was seated, you'd be there too. And Vincent would be stalking around. Vague plans of stuffing wool in my ears or cutting the radio wires assailed me but slowly and very serenely did you creep into my life [sic]. (Armstrong, 1937)

The representativeness of the very small sample of letters in the archive is not clear, nor is it clear which of McBride's listeners would have been devoted correspondents, however it does seem that at least some of the listeners engaged with McBride's show in a context of isolation within their homes for various reasons. In McBride's 1960 autobiography, she quotes a listener who wrote about this type of isolation,

> I used to have a responsible executive job in a Manhattan department store. . . Now I'm living in the suburbs (New Jersey), trying to make a good home and waiting for my first baby. I get lonely and sometimes, though I love my life now, I miss the store and the excitement of each day (quoted in McBride, 1960, p. 27).

Her listenership seems to overlap with the perceived listenership of daytime serial dramas (Hilmes, 1997), women who worked mainly in the home. As I argued in chapter three, the formal and aesthetic expectations of listenership seem to line up with that assessment as well. As per McBride's characteristic fluidity, non-segmentation and referentiality, listeners were expected to be able to commit to listening daily for many years, and to listening in a focused way from the beginning of each program to the end. Theoretically, these expectations on the part of McBride had some type of relationship with how her show was engaged with. The circumstances of McBride's listeners as being able to listen for an hour daily on a regular basis seem to be at the very least correlated to the aesthetic and formal aspects of her program which I have previously outlined. From the evidence available, I think that it's likely that McBride's listeners were mainly not casual ones: that they did not listen by accident, nor did they flit in and out of a program, but rather it seems that they listened on a more committed basis, regularly, and from the beginning to the end. Ware seems to agree, she asserts, "many of them [McBride's fans] listened to her for more than twenty years straight" (2005, p. 9).

More details about McBride's listeners are not easy to come by. For example, I haven't encountered much discussion about the race of McBride's listeners. Most of the pictures of McBride with fans show white women, but I do not take this to be sufficient evidence of a totally white listenership, rather as evidence of those who would be able to attend certain photographed events, or felt the ability to occupy public space in this way. I did not find any articles in the archive which mention race in relation to McBride, which I interpret as an assumption of their whiteness given the racial politics of the era. This assumption is not unique to McBride's show however, but is a part of a broad and deep construction of radio as a medium by and for white people both in McBride's era, and in the historical reconstruction of the era in later years (Hilmes, 1997, Ware, 2005). As Judith Smith notes, in mid-century radio discourses, "*any* mention of race outside entertainment minstrelsy was considered by definition to invoke the unacceptably political" (2002, p. 211). Race was a contentious topic in McBride's time, on the radio as it was everywhere, and this needs to be accounted for when thinking about who her listeners were. Ware notes these racial politics and concludes that because of them, it is likely that the majority of McBride's listeners were white (2005, p. 72).

However, as Jennifer Stoever (2016) has powerfully illuminated, the whiteness of radio listenership may not have been the case. She asserts,

> American radio audiences were far more diverse in the 1930s and 1940s than its programming, imagery, archives, or much of its scholarship depicts— how could they not

> be with 90 percent of American households owning at least one radio and listening to an average of three to four hours of broadcasting daily? (p. 230)

Instead, Stoever argues that the whitewashing of radio listenership is and was a part of the same systems which excluded black engineers, technicians, hosts, performers and writers from the industry (2016, p. 241). She asserts, "radio functioned as a technology of the sonic color line,[30] propagating racialized aural representations, mediating racial discourse, and practicing racial exclusion while depicting itself as incapable of racialization" (2016, p. 234). The media fantasies of connection and closeness which I outlined in chapter one hold here for race as well. As Stoever convincingly argues, with the association of racial discrimination with the visual on the one hand, and radio technology with democracy, access and connection on the other, radio commenters and executives had a ready-made argument for why radio was an equitable medium (Stoever, 2016, p. 234). Stoever argues that "network radio, in particular, enabled the emergence of color blindness, helping to make race invisible via exclusion, omission, and silencing while simultaneously expanding the sonic color line's repertoire of aural codes representing and hierarchizing racial difference" (2016, p. 234). As Judith Smith (2002) argues, "The whiteness of radio broadcasting grew out of unspoken, widely accepted, and long-standing conventions, but it was carefully monitored and enforced" (Smith, 2002, p. 211). And this most likely had implications for black listenership. As Langston Hughes put it "I DO NOT LIKE RADIO" (quoted in Smith, 2002, p. 235).[31] Hughes' frustrations were likely shared by many black entertainers and listeners, and may have influenced the listenership of McBride's program. However, McBride does seem to have ventured outside of these norms in small ways, having nonwhite guests on her program semi-frequently, (for example Eslanda Goode Robeson on a broadcast from 1 February 1949). Her efforts were acknowledged by NAACP president Walter White who wrote to her,

> Dear Mary Margaret and Stella, I want to tell you what a magnificent job you did on the televised Carribbean program. Of the performers (aside from you Mary Margaret) I was particularly impressed with Pearl Primis, Eldra Shulterbrandt and d'Estine. Most of all I liked the dignity as well as the gaiety of the program. I have never seen any program

[30] In her work, Stoever (2016) theorizes the "sonic color line" as "the process of racializing sound— how and why certain bodies are expected to produce, desire, and live amongst particular sounds— and its product, the hierarchical division sounded between 'whiteness' and 'blackness'" (p. 7).

[31] However, Hughes made an appearance on McBride's program, and apparently "composed an on-the-spot jingle about cake mix" (Ware, 2005, p. 96).

where Negroes were treated as fully human beings so admirably and successfully as you did. My blessings to you both. (White, 1948)

On other occasions, McBride was known to have White on her show to discuss his activism (for example, on 26 December 1947, and 25 July 1952). And Ware argues that McBride's "support for civil rights in general and for individual black performers, writers, and artists was well established long before the emergence of an organized civil rights movement and no doubt attracted minority listeners" (2005, p. 72). Such efforts by McBride, as well as Stoever's comments about the likelihood of black listenership, suggest to me that perhaps McBride's listeners may not have been as homogenous as popular discourses would have it seem.

However, I also wonder how the expectations of listenership which I mentioned previously would have affected the racial makeup of McBride's listeners. As many scholars have pointed out, black women in America have had a very different experience with work in and out of the home than white women have (hooks, 1984).[32] Often, in the age of consumerism, suburbanization, and the rise of the middle class, black women in America did not have the luxury of not working outside the home, and as such may not have been able to be as committed of listeners to McBride's show as many white women were able to be. Black Americans' contested relationship to radio in general, McBride's various efforts to reach out to various listening publics as well as her program's participation in systematic exclusions, suggest to me that the race of her listeners is not something which can be easily concluded.

4.3 McBride's Listeners: How They Listened

In addition to these questions about who McBride's listeners were, it remains an open question as to how they listened. As Kate Lacey (2013) has argued, listening is not a passive, given, or static activity, but rather, should be understood as "a cultural practice that changes under changing historical and material conditions" (p. 18). As such, it's important in theorizing McBride's work to think about the practices and conditions of listening which her fans may have engaged with.

There's a long tradition in radio, television and media studies of discussions around whether listeners/viewers are active or passive (Lacey, 2013). I am not going to rehearse that here, and will instead agree with Lacey (2013) and her assertion that the activity of listeners is

[32] I am thinking here of bell hooks' (1984) influential critique of Betty Friedan's *The Feminine Mystique* and the ways in which hooks illuminated Freidan's conception of womanhood as very specific, contextual, and exclusionary.

somewhat given (p. 114). Active engagement with radio technology has a long history. When it was first introduced, radio listening was more of a hobby than a mode of entertainment. As Mary Vipond notes, "Listening in was an active, rather than a passive, venture in the earliest days of radio" (1992, p. 83). Vipond describes fiddling with knobs for the best reception, writing down their listening activities, and solitary listening with headphones as characteristic of listeners in Canada in the 1920s (1992, p. 83-83). Vipond notes that by the 1930s, communal listening through loudspeakers was most popular (1992, p. 102). However, with the end to this exploratory listening, and the advent of broadcasting, Lacey argues that during the "formative years of broadcasting" there were "widespread cultural anxieties about the passivity of audiences" (p. 114). Lacey argues that this perceived passivity was reacted to by the encouragement of listeners to interact through competitions, letter writing, fan clubs and the like (p. 114 -115). Lacey argues that many of the intimate conventions of radio were also developed in response to this perception of passivity of listeners. She suggests, "these specified textual strategies to make the listener feel 'at home' in this imported public soundscape were understood by the practice that gradually became the norm of matching the schedules to archetypical domestic familial routines" (p. 115). On Lacey's account, radio producers developed such techniques to make listeners feel comfortable and at ease to enable active listening and to counter alienation. This seems to have worked in the case of McBride; her listeners were very actively engaged in her show, regularly listening, writing, and buying. As Ware argues, McBride's fans "were active, not passive listeners. They structured their day around the program; they learned from it; and they supported it by buying the products" (2005, p. 9). Lacey argues for the complexity of radio's place in the modern media landscape: a public medium, listened to from private space and engaged with in a very active manner, and *The Mary Margaret McBride Program* seems like a good example of the type of active listening fostered by the contextual factors about which Lacey argues so convincingly. By all accounts, it seems that McBride's listeners would have engaged with her work in private space, most likely their homes. This privatization of listening publics is as Lacey argues, a relatively new phenomenon. She asserts,

> listening publics in the age before modern media had to assemble in public space. The media of phonography and broadcasting for the first time allowed listening publics to be constituted by citizens in the comfort of their own homes, or within other privatized soundscapes (p. 113).

McBride's program seems to me like a great example of what Lacey (2013) notes as a modern mode of listening, "encountering public life within domestic space" (p. 114).

Many commentators have noted daytime radio's ability to reach listeners as they performed various household tasks (Hyland Wang, 2002, p. 359). This was stressed in the advertising literature especially in the 1950s when radio was seen as a medium compatible with work in the home, in contrast with television, a medium which on these accounts, necessitated sitting down and the stoppage of work (Hyland Wang, 2002). As Lacey writes, "radio became defined as a secondary medium with fragmentary, ephemeral content listened to while doing other things. This was a new *distracted* way of listening, possibly quite different from ways of listening that had gone before" (Lacey, 2013, p. 128). Lacey notes that this distracted mode of listening was very strongly associated with women, with daytime radio, and with the domestic sphere (p. 129). She writes, "the way broadcasting was deliberately organized to feed into and reflect the rhythms and practices of the domestic sphere can be read as a means by which women in particular were reintegrated into traditional gender roles" (p. 129). This distracted listening is likely how many of McBride's listeners - especially in later years - would have engaged with her show.

However, McBride's program spans a period in which changes in the placement of radio receivers were accompanied by changes in listening practices, and it seems that many of McBride's listeners would have engaged with her show in a more focused way. By about 1924, radios were positioned in the living room, moved inside the house from their former placement in workshops/garages (Hilmes, 1997, p. 137). Shaun Moores (1988) characterizes this shift as radio's transition from an "unruly guest" to a "good companion" in the home and he notes how this transition was not always smooth (p. 23). He quotes an interviewee who remembers, "oh, it was out of the ordinary in them days, having this box in the living room. As I remember, there was a square piece of wood and on it was all these wires" (1988, p. 29). Both Moores (1988) and Hilmes (1997) describe this tricky placement: radio batteries leaked onto carpets, had to be replaced often, and did not fit well with the aesthetics of early twentieth century living rooms. However, as Moores notes several "changes in the form and technology of the listening apparatus" which altered the way radio was engaged with in the home (31). In the 1930s the introduction of non-battery operated sets, a switch from headphone listening to loudspeakers, as well as changes in the aesthetics of the exterior of the sets allowed radio receivers to be integrated into living rooms in a more unobtrusive manner (Moores, 1988, p. 31-32). One of Moores' interviewees notes though the place in the living room was somewhat set apart from the tasks of the everyday. She mentions that she didn't listen to the radio much in the day, "I never had time. There were too many jobs to do, what with baking and washing and all that. In any

case, the radio was in the parlour, whereas I'd be in the back most of the time" (Moores, 1988, p. 36). For listeners in the 1920s and 1930s, their radios were likely to be in their living rooms, and to listen, women working in the home would have to leave the tasks in the kitchen, and sit down near the receiver. However, starting in the 1940s and 50s, radios began to migrate into kitchens (sometimes being replaced in living rooms by televisions) (Hyland Wang, 2002, p. 357).[33] For Moores, these changes are significant in part because of the implications for listening habits, and he argues that in later periods, with changes in technology, radio became more compatible with household tasks and the 'distracted listening' Lacey (2013) describes. For McBride, broadcasting starting in 1934 and continuing until 1954 (and again in later years), her program straddles this period of transition. When she began broadcasting in the mid-1930s, the sets her listeners used would likely have been integrated into "the geography of the living room" (Moores, 1988, p. 33), while over time it is probable that their listening changed as they acquired additional receivers in other parts of their homes throughout the 1940s and 50s. As such, I've found that while it's likely that McBride's listeners engaged in distracted listening while performing household tasks, I've also found some evidence that they may have listened in a focused way, especially in earlier years.

A number of listener letters and articles describe listeners engaging with the program in their living rooms or sitting rooms, as one writer describes it, "every day at one o'clock, Monday through Friday, thousands of women stack their luncheon dishes and settle down for a three-quarter hour radio visit with Mary Margaret McBride" (Parker, n.d.), and as Heggie writes "from Miss McBride's fan mail it is possible to form a picture of thousands of Eastern housewives settling themselves before their radios well in advance of one o'clock so as not to miss a single word" (1949). As I've mentioned, this seems possible with regards to the norms for radio receivers in this era as McBride's program exists in a liminal period during which radios may have been either large sets in the living room or smaller sets in other spaces of the home. While of course my sample is small, I did not encounter any listener accounts of listening to McBride while doing other things. It seems that at least for some, listening to McBride's show was an activity in itself, rather than one to accompany something else. One newspaper explains "She conveys to the housewife sitting before her radio, the impression that the conversation is

[33] Hyland Wang cites an advertising industry report from 1951 noting that "nearly thirty-six thousand TV sets had been sold by 1951. . . what television did was to move radio out of America's living rooms and into women's kitchens. As reported, 77% of all radio listening in TV-owning homes was done with 'secondary sets' throughout the house and in cars, and nearly 50% of all radio listening took place in kitchens" (2002, p. 357-58).

designed for that listener alone" ("Mary Margaret McBride, Here Nov. 22 is 'Specialist in Friendship"), while another imagines that when McBride came on the air, "bridge games stop, children are shushed, housewives come out of the kitchen" ("Dear Martha Deane, 1936). As Mitchell (1954) put it: when McBride comes on the radio "in millions of homes activity ceases." Listeners and commentators describe women setting down their work, and taking time to listen to McBride's program, engaging with her show according to a dominant listening practice in earlier years, and perhaps according to a residual listening practice in later ones (Acland, 2007, p. xx; Williams, 1977). As Charles Acland, drawing on Raymond Williams, notes, the residual

> has been effectively formed in the past, but is still active in the cultural process, not only and often not as an element of the past, but as an effective element of the present. Lags in cultural change leave us with bundles of things, beliefs, and practices with varying temporalities (Acland, 2007, p. xxi).

In the later years of McBride's broadcasting, as placement of radio receivers and listening practices changed more broadly, it seems that while some of her listeners likely took up these new listening practices, others may have engaged with her show according to a residual listening practice, focused listening. Susan Douglas identifies several "modes of listening", relates them to particular genres of radio content such as news, sports, stories and music (2004, p. 8), and argues that these modes change over time and have shaped "our individual and collective identities and also shaped the contours of American cultural and political history" (2004, p. 7). While Douglas doesn't explicitly focus on daytime listening in McBride's era, it seems that the 'mode' of listening that some of McBride's fans operated according to, was likely a focused and engaged one, in which listeners purposefully and intentionally listened to her work, in the "central and selective" basis that Moores associates with living room listening (1988, p. 37). While it's probable that some of McBride's listeners engaged with her program in the distracted way that Lacey (2013) and others describe especially in later years, I suggest that they may have also engaged in a more focused manner, according to dominant listening practice in earlier years and a residual listening practice in later ones.

These listening modes have broader implications as well. As Lacey puts it, in mid-century discourses there was much discussion "about whether the radio could be deployed to keep women in the home by offering compensatory distractions, or whether it could be used as an unobtrusive way to mobilise women to participate in different ways in the public sphere" (p. 130). McBride and her show, I suggest, would be proponents of the latter, and perhaps her expectations of focused listenership can attest to that. As Ware puts it, "the show was a vital part

of their [McBride's listeners'] everyday life, not just a diversion or a sop" (2005, p. 9) and regardless of the specificities of their listening, it does seem that *The Mary Margaret McBride Program* became integrated into the daily lives of her listeners in a substantial way. As one commentator put it,

> The voice of Mary Margaret McBride has become an integral part of the daily routine of American women -- a routine of domesticity that starts when the breakfast coffee goes on the stove and knows no pause until the last light is turned out at night. Her daily broadcasts are ranked as an event to these women -- as a window through which they may watch the world go by and escape momentarily from a prison of dullness. ("Mary Margaret McBride, Here Nov. 22")

This routinized listening was not accidental, hopes of it actually structured programming, as Moores puts it, "the imagined daily routine of the mother provided the basis for the broadcasters' programming plans" (1988, p. 36). In the letters from McBride's listeners, this routine and "grooved" (Douglas, 2004) mode of listening, while at once being focused and selective as well as ritualized and routine seems to characterize how many of her fans seem to have engaged with her work.

4.4 Interpretive Communities

In her analysis of the reading and interpretive practices of romance novel readers, Radway (1984) follows theorists such as Umberto Eco, Stanley Fish, Louise Rosenblatt, and Jonathan Culler, in arguing that the meaning of cultural texts is not solely determined by the text itself but is "product of a complex transaction between an inert textual structure. . . and an actively productive reader, who constructs those signifiers as meaningful signs on the basis of previously learned interpretive procedures and cultural codes" (p. 52). For Radway, interpretation of text relies on the social position and cultural context of the reader (or listener), as well as on the text itself. Radway argues that readers produce meanings of texts according to different interpretive communities to which they belong, and that these communities are formed according to social, political and cultural contexts (1984, p. 53). In the case of McBride, I've noticed how many of her listeners seem to have interpreted her broadcasts as a 'visit' from a close personal friend or relative. Many of the letters, thank you notes, and quotes from clippings frame McBride's program on these terms. One listener explains, "although merely one of Miss McBride's listeners I feel toward her as though she were an old friend who drops in occasionally

to visit and her guest speakers are, so often, like some one she brings to call [sic]" (Lucas, 1936). Another listener notes,

> Although I am only a name on a piece of paper to you, you are like an old friend to me because for many years you were a regular, daily visitor to my home. . . I wish we could visit and discuss your long and interesting career right here in my living room. You might feel you were talking to a stranger but for me it would be like visiting with an old friend because you have revealed so much of yourself to your audience over the years. (Wissler, 1948)

This analogy seems especially pronounced when it comes to McBride's brief foray into television. One particularly effusive letter reads,

> I was sitting there before my television set . . . and then - oh Mary Margaret - you came! Why, you came right into my living room here in the little cottage on the side of a quiet street - bringing with you such a delicious cake to share with me as we sat and visited. (Williams, 1948)

It seems that these perceptions were supported by McBride and her staff as well. An ad for WOR from 1936 reads "The listeners get the impression that Martha Deane is speaking to them just as she would if she were holding a personal conversation across a tea table. Maybe it's our imagination but we think WOR has an intimate atmosphere anyway" (*Variety Magazine,* 1936). McBride herself understood radio in general on these terms as well. In a column for the Associated Press she writes about soap opera characters as "troubled callers" and writes, "until just recently I was visited regularly, five days a week by a young woman charged with pushing her mother down a flight of stairs and breaking her neck" (McBride, "Wonderful World," n.d.), and an article about McBride describes her show as "her daily noon visit with millions of women all over the country" (Shawell, n.d.).

These listeners made McBride's show and their relationship with it intelligible on terms they were familiar with: visits from friends and family members. I see this as an example of what Carolyn Marvin (1988) has described as a propensity for new technologies to be understood on certain terms for a more smooth integration into the social context. As Marvin notes, electric media, especially within nineteenth century homes, were understood as able to "make the old world work better" rather than as able to revolutionize and imagine different social orders (1988, p. 76). She argues that for nineteenth century homeowners, "electrical devices must fit unobtrusively into the household routine" and that for these publics, "nothing of domestic life should warrant drastic adjustment as a result of electrifying it" (1988, p. 77). She quotes a

nineteenth century commentator who imagined electricity being delivered to homes just as bread and milk were: in a wagon, on a daily basis, and left by the door. Marvin notes,

> the author of this image had attached his intuition of a new order to the landmarks of a thoroughly familiar and archaic one, in this case door-to-door distribution by hand and horsepower of a commodity as perishable as milk or ice (1988, p. 77).

In particular, Marvin notes that in the late nineteenth and early twentieth century, how to "interpret remote or nonimmediate presence" was a pertinent issue for many (p. 87). She describes many myths and stories from the era about social mishaps occuring because new forms of mediated presences were treated exactly the same as face-to-face presences and that "more or less constant anxiety was also directed to the effects of new forms of presence on customary social exchange" (p. 87). She describes frustration and confusion about how to integrate telephones into Victorian era 'calling' practices in which visitation intentions were communicated via calling cards (p. 88). On Marvin's account, technologies of electric communication were conceptualized by nineteenth and twentieth century publics on the terms familiar to them and were imagined and used in accordance with these conceptualizations.

I understand McBride's listeners describing her program as a 'visit' in a similar way. While they were likely more familiar with electrically mediated communication and remote and nonimmediate presences than the users that Marvin describes, McBride's listeners interpret their interactions with her program on the terms of their previously dominant social order. Their close feelings and bond towards McBride, and the listening setting of their home, seems to have allowed them to interpret their experiences as a visit from a close friend or relative. The social support, companionship, and camaraderie which McBride offered on the radio seems to have been unfamiliar to these listeners who instead metaphorically re-conceptualized McBride's remote presence as if it were immediate and physical.

4.5 Imagined and Non-Imagined Communities

In addition to these ways of interpreting McBride's program, it seems that McBride's listeners formed both imagined and non-imagined listening communities in relation to her show. As I've previously mentioned, many theorists stress radio's ability to form imagined listening communities amongst users, in similar ways in which newsprint has been argued to do so amongst nation-states. As Michele Hilmes (2012) describes, "listeners' tuning in by the tens of thousands to one specific program airing at a specific time created that shared simultaneity of experience crucial to Benedict Anderson's concept of the modern "imagined community" of

nationhood" (p. 351). She asserts, "radio, more than any other agency, possessed the power not only to assert actively the unifying power of simultaneous experience but to communicate meanings about the nature of that unifying experience" (Hilmes, 2012, p. 352). This formation of imagined listening communities seems to have been a method of interpretation and engagement for McBride's listeners, as Susan Ware puts it, "even though most of her listeners rarely met in person, they shared a deep bond through their shared activity of tuning in each day at one o'clock. . . they belonged to the same radio nation" (2005, p. 9). It seems likely that McBride's fans would have understood themselves as a type of imagined listening community, listening simultaneously to McBride in their respective homes.

While from the press and scholarly accounts of McBride's work one can get the impression that her listeners were always alone in their homes and engaged with her show on a purely solitary basis, I am not convinced that's the whole story. A letter from a listener proclaims, "best of all, the enjoyment didn't end with 'goodbye you all' because we discussed your program by telephone and by letter and then went on to read the books the authors wrote" (Wissler, 1948). Similarly, with reference to the infamous 'nightgown story' one magazine article refuses to print the details but tells readers to "ask around" if they haven't heard it (Siegel, n.d.), assuming the existence of groups of listeners who have the ability to discuss McBride and her exploits. It seems that while many of McBride's listeners tuned in by themselves in their homes, the listening was a starting point for broader activities centred around the program. Reading groups, parties with food made from McBride's products, making the sometimes significant trip to be in the studio for a broadcast, and attending her anniversary events were all part of the broader experience of Mary Margaret McBride listenership. As Susan Ware notes, "if a woman relocated to a new community, one of the first things she might do was seek out other Mary Margaret fans as an introduction to her new neighbors" (2005, p. 64). While it's similar to the group listening and discussion that Hilmes (1997) has noted with serial dramas of the same era, (p. 179), I haven't come across much evidence of group listening to McBride's show. It seems that often the listening itself was solitary, but McBride fandom was a jumping off point for group activities and engagement and formation of a non-imagined listening community. Of the same phenomenon, Lacey writes, "in the most denigrated corner of privatized, distracted listening, is potentially another way of recuperating listening as a political site of resistance. . . a kind of responsiveness in the act of privatized listening as collective endeavour and public practice" (2013, p. 131). McBride's program certainly belonged in the same denigrated and

privatized category, and I see her listeners formation of varied listening communities along the same lines.

Not only did McBride's listeners foster this non-imagined listening community amongst themselves, but they engaged in a number of what I see as community-building ventures involving McBride, her networks, and other media practitioners. As Hilmes has noted, listeners of radio serials engaged with the producers of their favourite shows regularly, arguing that listeners treated serials as "permeable, flexible, and participatory" (1997, p. 163). Hilmes notes that this wasn't a ridiculous or unrealistic practice, as producers reacted to fan letters and thoughts making space for listener-text interactions (Hilmes, 1997, 164). Similarly, Elena Razlogova has argued that this type of interactivity and reciprocity characterized radio of the era. She argues, "audiences were critical components in the making of radio, the establishment of its genres and social operations" (Razlogova, 2012, p. 3). For Razlogova, listeners extended the participatory ethos of early experimental radio and applied it to the later commercial era (Razlogova, 2012, p. 5). She argues that the intimate conventions and forms cultivated allowed listeners to form "imagined personal connections" with those they heard on the air, and they made themselves and their opinions known to radio producers through letter writing among other means (Razlogova, 2012, p. 3). These producers responded to the letters with "specific formal choices. These choices in turn suggested new forms of sound perception and social order" (Razlogova, 2012, p. 5). The conversations sparked by McBride's program, the reading groups, and Bohack's parties inspired by her, the letters and the subsequent reciprocity acted as the active cultivation of a non-imagined listening community. Not only were McBride's listeners envisioning themselves as connected to countless other solitary listeners but they were actually forging those connections in active ways.

4.6 Conclusion: Speculating at the Edge

In this chapter I have discussed the possible demographics and probable social locations of McBride's listeners as per the available evidence. I've noted the gendered and racialized perceptions of who her listeners were, and how these perceptions may or may not have aligned with her actual listeners given the media landscape of her era. I have speculated on how her listeners engaged with her work, and suggested that some of McBride's listeners seem to have interpreted her program and role in their lives according to the social order of their era, conceptualizing McBride as a close friend or relative, and her broadcasts as 'visits.' I connect this insight to Carolyn Marvin's (1988) assertion that as new electric technologies have been

introduced to their various publics, they are often made intelligible on terms which fit into the existing social order and that McBride's listeners did exactly this: interpreted her program on terms familiar to them. I've argued that not only did McBride's listeners engage in the formation of imagined listening communities, but that they also reached out to friends, neighbours, relatives, McBride, and others, to form communities which were very much non-imagined. McBride's program was a jumping off point for many of her listeners which they used to forge bonds and engage with each other.

I'm also cognizant of the limits of theorizing listening and listeners as I've done in this chapter. Ultimately it's hard to say who McBride's listeners were, and how they listened, interpreted and made meaning of her program. Especially with the limited corpus of letters, as well as the limited demographic information available, I see this work on her listening communities as informed speculation about "something hanging halfway over the edge of critical availability" (Verma, 2012, p. 12). I'm reaching towards that edge in this work, as Jonathan Sterne so aptly put it: "away from attempts to recover and describe people's interior experience of listening . . . toward the social and cultural grounds of sonic experience" (2004, p. 13).

CONCLUSION

"It turned out pretty well. Well enough, anyhow, that a good many people today use the same formula" (McBride, 1941a).

5.1 Digital Audio and Podcasting

The insights I've offered in my analysis of *The Mary Margaret McBride Program* can offer some perspective on the present moment which is characterized by interesting intersections between audio media and digital technologies. As Michele Hilmes (2013) asserts, the contemporary status of radio is one of shifting categories, uncertain terms and expanding possibilities (p. 43). This digital audio milieu is, according to Hilmes, marked by "a transformative new materiality" in which radio is no longer strictly ephemeral and non-recorded, by a "new mobility" in which radio interacts with digital technology, and a "new globalism" as local and national boundaries are less relevant in audio media (2013, p. 43). For Hilmes, radio should now be understood as "soundwork," sound art which is accessed through screens, has a newfound visual element, and which is characterized by experimentation with structure, soundscapes and genre (2013, p. 43, p. 55). She argues that soundwork creates "semi-private/semi-public spaces. . . where we interact physically with crowds or the environment while maintaining our mental privacy" (2013, p. 59). Hilmes asserts that soundworks "resonate intimately as they circulate globally, connecting us with voices and experiences outside our everyday lives" (2013, p. 59). And, in the years since Hilmes wrote about this expanding context, even more development and change has characterized the audio media milieu. As Neil Verma (2017) puts it, "what creators and historians used to call 'radio' without giving it a second thought seems up for grabs, from funding structures and listening publics to what a 'show' actually is, and how to disseminate it" (p. 1). While this media landscape is made up of several different forms and platforms, I will in this chapter, briefly focus on a form, or more properly put group of forms, which looms large in the cultural imaginary: podcasting. As a booming audio medium, podcasting is very popular in North America[34] and is at the centre of many popular and

[34] Recent market research shows that podcasting is growing in popularity, with 51% of Americans having engaged with podcasts, with an estimated 197 million people familiar with the medium, and these numbers have been steadily growing (Edison Research, 2019). These podcasts are mainly accessed through portable devices like smartphones or tablets, and the average US podcast listener averaged seven podcasts a week (Edison Research, 2019). Podcasts are listened to at home, in vehicles, and walking around and podcast demographics are interesting to note as well: those who listen are disproportionately white, male, educated and young in comparison to the overall US population (Edison Research, 2019).

academic discussions about sound, radio, and digital audio. Podcasts are often venerated for their ability to foster some of the very same qualities which *The Mary Margaret McBride Program* did; building listening communities, and fostering understanding and connection. Many podcasting conventions and structures are reminiscent of McBride's program, specifically a conversational tone, direct address, audioposition, and magazine format. As such, some of the insights I've offered about McBride's work are interesting to put into conversation with podcasting scholarship, and may offer scholars and commentators a starting point for the analysis of this popular cultural form.

Podcasting scholars have built on the assertions of both the intimacy and unifying potentialities of radio, emphasizing the use of headphones as a hyper-intimate mode of listening (Berry 2016; Lindgen, 2016; McHugh, 2016).[35] As Lindgren (2016) notes, "audio stories (readily available on smartphones) explore our lives through sounds and spoken words, intimately whispered into our ears. The personalized listening space created by headphones further accommodates the bond created between voices in the story and the listener" (p. 24), while Swiatek (2018) argues, "the podcast can be conceived as an intimate bridging medium" crossing "boundaries between individuals and groups from different contexts" (p. 173-174). Contemporary popular discourses also champion the intimacy of podcasting often asserting the ability of podcasts to strike emotional chords with listeners, to communicate authenticity, foster connection, and because of this, having democratizing potential (Dalton, 2017; de Maeyer, 2017; Weldon, 2018).

While form isn't a key factor in many of these discussions, form has also been a feature identified by podcasters as what differentiates their programs from radio. Julie Shapiro, executive producer of Radiotopia has asserted, "podcasting doesn't have to be different [from radio] but I think makers do feel a little bit more liberty with the form" (Shapiro in McHugh, 2016, p. 70). In her work profiling popular contemporary radio and podcast producers, Jessica Abel (2015) and her interviewees stress the importance of structure to their success in making compelling radio. Abel quotes Ira Glass, the host of the popular radio and podcast *This American Life.* Glass describes a story, "this is the structure of every story on our program -- there's an anecdote. . . -- and then there's a moment of reflection about what that sequence means, and then on to the next sequence of actions" (2015, p. 20). Abel presents Glass and other producers as

[35] Podcasting theorists stress headphone use as importantly unique to their objects of study despite there being a long history of radio listening and headphone use.

systematically focused on structure, and as highly cognisant of the form of their programs. She quotes Joe Richman, producer and host of *Radio Diaries* as he ruminates, "structure is always hard. But my stories are usually scene-based" (quoted in Abel, 2015, p. 115), while Soren Wheeler of *Radiolab* asserts, "if there's any action, information and exposition should always be embedded inside the action" (quoted in Abel, 2015, p. 119). Abel offers an account of contemporary radio and podcast producers as very aware of the structure and form of their work, with the digital audio landscape allowing for more flexibility in terms of form.

Some of McBride's signature techniques are mainstay aspects of many podcasts. Chatty and (seemingly) unscripted interviews are crucial components of many popular shows, and have partly defined the medium. Meserko (2015) notes the dialogic form of Marc Maron's popular program *WTF* and argues that "contestations of authenticity are foregrounded through revealing conversation" (p. 808). Popular interview program *Death, Sex and Money* from WNYC hosted by Anna Sale features "intimate conversations with celebrities and listeners about money, relationships, infidelity, career shifts, parenting, mental illness, divorce, gender identity, dying, and more" (Death, Sex, and Money, "About"). Gist (2018) notes how the popular fictional drama *Welcome to Night Vale* fosters an "intense intimacy between Cecil and the listener, with the potential for eliciting powerful affective response" through first person address and perceived spatial proximity (audioposition) (p. 87). Many of these techniques, forms, and styles I see as directly connected to *The Mary Margaret McBride Program* as I have characterized it in this research.

A significant connection is, as I've discussed, McBride's popularization of magazine format which has been hugely influential throughout the twentieth and twenty-first centuries, and continues to be a popular format and funding model in podcasting. Most podcasts are funded through advertising and listener support (McHugh, 2016) with some experimentation with subscription models having various degrees of success.[36] The influential podcast network Radiotopia "pioneered new funding models for a podcasting network through Kickstarter crowdfunding campaigns" with ringleader Roman Mars managing to raise over $170,000 breaking numerous records and launching the podcast 99% Invisible and Radiotopia as a network (Popovich, 2013). Radiotopia and most other podcasts also rely on advertising to

[36] In early 2019, audio streaming service Spotify bought out podcasting company Gimlet Media in a move towards diversifying their content offerings (Quah, 2019). While Luminary, a podcasting app and content producer launched in early 2019 with a number of hiccups not boding well for the subscription model (Barnes, 2019, Carman, 2019).

finance their shows, and magazine format is very popular with "a now familiar set of podcast sponsors, from mattress-makers to mail services" being readily identifiable to many listeners (McHugh, 2016, p. 75). These ads are mainly read or improvised by the hosts of the shows, the same voice you hear reporting or editorializing will at various points in the program discuss the merits of a product or service (Doctor, 2016; n.p.; McHugh, 2016, p. 75). Ken Doctor asks, after describing an ad on the *Slate*-produced podcast *Gabfest,* "what is *Slate*'s top editor doing pitching for a wine club?" (2016, n.p.). He asserts that such host-read ads seem "at odds with the old wall between business and editorial" but that "in fact, of course, the form harkens back to the likes of Paul Harvey, that dean of radio 'newsmen' in the latter 20th century" (2016, n.p.). Of talk shows in the 1980s and 90s, Susan Douglas writes, "if a host with whom they [listeners] especially identified, someone they trusted, read the ad copy, advertisers were convinced that sales were enhanced" (2004, p. 288). Mary Margaret McBride fans will know that host-read ads, or rather, host-improvised ads, are nothing new, and pre-date both the 1980s and Paul Harvey by decades.

However, there are also many developments in the funding and structure of audio media which are not as readily reminiscent of McBride's program. Podcasting giant Gimlet Media (among others) have been experimenting with "branded podcasts"[37] (Gimlet Creative, "About") in which they partner with one sponsor, and produce a show relevant to the brand's market, a structure which harkens back to the single-sponsor model which McBride differentiated herself from. Platforms such as Spotify - who have aggressively advanced into the podcasting market - have as Patrick Vonderau (2019) suggest become more than a music service, but rather "a media company operating at the intersection of advertising, technology, music, and—most importantly—finance" (p. 5). Such platformization will surely have implications for form, structure, user experience, and listening practices.

5.2 Aural Intimacies

As Charles Acland (2007) has noted, figures from the past can be "surprising and unsettling. . . They creep up to remind us of their existence and of the influence they wield in the present" (p. xiii). My analysis of McBride's work can do precisely this in relation to the contemporary audio media landscape. As podcasting and other forms of digital audio boom

[37] Gimlet has several branded podcasts, partnering with companies such as Tinder, New Balance, Adobe, Squarespace, Reebok, Mastercard, Microsoft, Virgin Atlantic, Lyft, Blue Apron, Interac, eBay, and Gatorade (Gimlet Creative, "Shows").

worldwide, many commentators effuse the power of podcasting to communicate authenticity and interiority, and consequently, to break down social and cultural barriers. My research shows the continuities in perceptions of intimacy of sound, radio, and audio which inform many contemporary popular and scholarly discourses about these media. As Juliette de Maeyer (2017) writes in *The Atlantic,* "podcasts bring you to places you've never been, they give you the impression of sharing an animated kitchen-table banter (or a loud bar argument) with a couple of friends" and "the intimacy of the format has the potential to make listeners feel things—and emotional resonance affects how people perceive information" (de Maeyer, 2017, n.p.). Some point out the eros of podcasting, as Jess Joho writes, "He murmurs into your ear. . . making your heart beat quicker, breath heavy, lips part. This isn't a sexual encounter. It's a podcast. Dan Carlin's *Hardcore History* to be exact. And I'm horny for it" (2019, n.p.). Joho argues that "it's about time we all acknowledged the unspoken eroticism of podcasts" (2019, np), gesturing to perceptions of "audile-erotic sense" of radio (Sterne 2003, p. 226) and the eroticism of the "dream of communication" as Peters (1999) has characterized it.[38] Glen Weldon, writing for NPR asserts, "I fell in love this week. . . My husband's cool with it. He always is; we have an understanding. Also the object of my love is a podcast" (2018, n.p.). Weldon professes his feelings for the hosts of his favourite podcasts and argues, "It's not logical, this sense that your favorite podcast hosts are your friends, but it's hard-wired, inescapable" (2018, n.p.). Today, as in McBride's era, listeners, commentators, and scholars, connect audio media with intimate feelings, imbuing the technology with this power without recognizing the conventions, techniques and forms which are so crucial in the construction of these atmospheres.

Podcasters seem to be very aware of these dynamics, and are invested in them as McBride herself was. The independent podcast network Radiotopia posted to its official Facebook group on 3 July 2018 an image of a young man talking and laughing with a billboard as if they were a group of friends and the words, "how it feels to listen to podcasts." The official Radiotopia account captioned this meme "~ we're your friends ~" (Radiotopia, 2018, see Figure 6). Scholars such as Mia Lindgren (2016) note the rise in popularity of the "genre of personal radio journalism in podcasting" and argue that the "movement towards personal narratives is intrinsically linked to the intimate nature of the audio medium" (p. 24). Much contemporary

[38] These academic and popular discourses draw on radio theory, however, the relationship between radio and podcasts is debated among scholars. Some argue that podcasting is a distinct medium from radio (Berry, 2016, McHugh, 2016), others argue that podcasting should be understood more as a repackaging of radio (Markman, 2015, Lindgren, 2016), or as simply a continuation (Sterne et al., 2008, Loviglio & Hilmes, 2013).

commentary on podcasting notes the intimacy of the medium, then gestures to the hopefulness for democracy, and social and cultural change because of it. These discourses remind me of Loviglio's (2005) 'intimate public' or what Peters calls the twin frames of "democracy and eros" which have typified discourses about new media in general and radio in particular (1999, p. 224). I see these conversations as a continuation of the types of discourses which valorized radio technology as transcendent and otherworldly in the early twentieth century, and characterized McBride's show as a "magic spell right into your own heart" in the 1940s (Siegel, n.d.). Linking specific technologies with utopian desires for community and democracy, and imbuing audio media with power to connect on a close and intimate register are discourses which are alive and well.

Figure 6. "~we're your friends~" [meme from the official Radiotopia Facebook page] Radiotopia (2018).

As Jonathan Sterne has influentially argued, ideas about the special role of sound in communicating authenticity have a long history. Sterne argues that much thinking about sound and related phenomena idealize "hearing (and, by extension, speech) as manifesting a kind of pure interiority" (2003, p. 14-15). As these types of arguments are often made in relation to the properties of vision and the visual, Sterne dubs this theoretical move "the audiovisual litany" and

argues that it has it roots in "particular religious prejudices about the role of hearing in salvation" and that "these religious prejudices are embedded at the very center of Western intellectual history" and as such can seem obvious and given (2003, p. 14). Sterne argues that the audiovisual litany "is essentially a testament of the longstanding spirit/letter distinction in Christian spiritualism" with hearing being linked to the spirit and vision to letter and cites St. Augustine, Plato, and Walter Ong and proponents of this type of thinking. (2003, p. 16). I see many of these patterns being played out in discourses around radio and audio media's supposedly special ability to communicate intimately. Sterne questions these associations, not taking as given the "interiority of sound, and the connection between sound, subjective self-presence, and intersubjective experience" (p. 18). Following Sterne, in this work, I have tried to not take these supposed properties of sound as a given. I have not presupposed radio's ability to communicate intimately or chalked the McBride phenomenon up to the nature of sound itself, but rather have investigated the cultural origins and specific contextual factors which contributed to McBride's work and the feelings it produced. I have aimed to explore and interrupt these discourses, while not discounting the powerful feelings which evoked them. While I may not agree that radio itself is necessarily an intimate technology, I do think that the connections which McBride's listeners effused were very real, very meaningful, and very significant, and should warrant careful and considerate critical inquiry even as they contribute to an "idealized fantasy that the radio receiver is somehow more freeing than the screen" (Verma, 2012, p. 223). I see perceptions of intimacy of audio media in McBride's era and today in relation to this framework. As I have done with McBride's work, it is necessary to contextualize the discourses about the intimacy of podcasting and other digital audio media in relation to the social and cultural milieu in which they operate rather than assuming the connection between aural content and an intimate register.

5.3 Old Dreams and Old Anxieties

In this work I've explored the historical origins of the perception of intimacy in audio media. I've suggested the cultural formation of *The Mary Margaret McBride Program* and McBride's relationship with her listeners is intricately connected with what Sterne calls "old dreams" and "old anxieties" about the role of sound reproduction technology in our lives (2012, p. 11). I've argued for the importance of treating audio media in general, and historical radio in particular, on formal terms, muddying strict divisions between form and content and instead offering an account that sees them as overlapping and linked. I've aimed to tease out the

intricacies of how form and format are discussed in radio history and media studies, and to highlight form as an important framework for thinking holistically about media and the social and cultural contexts in which they exist.

I've foregrounded the role of magazine format in McBride's program, and the ways in which her overall funding model and structuring principle was a key component of the atmosphere of intimacy and familiarity by which her show was characterized. I see my research as a continuation of the important work started by Michele Hilmes (1997) in crediting McBride with the popularization of this format, and in writing women into radio history. I've noted several key components of McBride's show and argued that the forms and techniques that McBride pioneered and conventionalized are part of her and her team's aesthetic strategy to build an imagined listening community which could sustain her program and her goals. I've argued that through her format, approach to advertising, and several temporal and spatial techniques, McBride produced a show and a persona which listeners connected to on a personal level, contributing to radio's reputation as a particularly intimate medium.

In addition to my formal and aesthetic analysis, I've been attentive to the reception and interpretation of McBride's work. I've speculated on McBride's hypothetical listeners and their listening practices, noting how they seem to have integrated the feelings they had in relation to McBride's show on terms familiar to them, and in accordance with the social and cultural order of their lives. I've suggested that her listeners built imagined listening communities as many radio scholars have theorized, but also that they built non-imagined listening communities, reaching out to other McBride fans on the phone, through the mail, or in person. I've aimed to further confirm the practice of active listening by women in the denigrated and disparaged hours of daytime radio, offering a picture of McBride's program as a companion to (mainly) women in difficult and isolating situations.

5.4 Emergent Form

As early as 1941, McBride recognized the ways in which her methods had been taken up by others,[39] and it seems undeniable that McBride's signature funding model, form, style and techniques have been appropriated widely in radio and other broadcast and audio media. As contemporary readers will be well-aware, magazine format has been a common model of

[39] Hilmes notes that by the 1940s, McBride had "what one commentator estimated to be more than three hundred imitators on the air" (1997, p. 278).

broadcast media in the twentieth and twenty-first centuries. NBC President Sylvester 'Pat' Weaver modeled the popular *Today* show on McBride's program,[40] (Hilmes, 1997; Ware, 2005, 239-240), and shows structured by content mixed with advertisements from multiple different sponsors are very familiar to contemporary audiences across media forms. Her unscripted and informal chats with guests foreshadow the many talk shows which have become a major component of radio, TV, and digital audio. However, other aspects of McBride's work are less familiar today. Her flow and pace are quite unique and striking, as are some of her advertising techniques. Contemporary listeners would likely be shocked if guests on their favourite podcasts were to pipe in with the host on one of the advertisements, and in contrast to McBride's uninterrupted flow, contemporary radio hosts re-orient the listener frequently, repeating the name of the guest they are interviewing, recapping the discussion, and making sure to provide the necessary information for listeners at regular intervals.

While McBride's show existed at the very time often described as 'the golden age of radio' during which radio was a major player in the media landscape, I think it's interesting to think about her program in conjunction with Raymond Williams' (1977) framework of dominant, residual and emergent cultural formations. As Williams puts it, "emergent" formations offer "new meanings and values, new practices, [and] new relationships" (1977, p. 123). While radio was by no means an emergent medium in the 1930s, 40s, and 50s, I think that McBride's program constitutes an emergent cultural formation, articulating novel structures, techniques, and most importantly, ways of relating. As McBride and her team drew on existing forms and practices (for example multiple sponsorships, 'women's' content, and direct address), they constructed a unique cultural formation which reflected and produced a new "structure of feeling" (Williams, 1977, p. 133). As Williams has famously described the concept, structures of feeling are comprised of "characteristic elements of impulse, restraint, and tone; specifically affective elements of consciousness and relationships: not feeling against thought, but thought as felt and feeling as thought" (Williams, 1977, p. 132). McBride's program, and its innovative combination of unscripted conversation, listener participation, and gendered atmosphere seems to me to have articulated a type of "solution" (Williams, 1977, p. 134) to the "social conflicts most relevant to radios 'soul'" (Hilmes, 1997, p. xiv). Here I am thinking of issues of mass and consumer culture, national identity and renegotiations of gender, race and the public and private

[40] She also references radio and television host Arthur Godfrey whose work was part of the development of magazine-concept radio, (p. 239) but I haven't found much scholarship on this topic.

spheres, social conflicts which formed the context of radio's dominance in American society (Hilmes, 1997, p. xiv). I suggest that McBride's program should be understood in relation to this context; as an emergent formation in which close feelings and companionship were fostered amongst women facing differing types of social isolation, a formation which has since been taken up in many different contexts across time and space. As Williams put it, "The idea of a structure of feeling can be specifically related to the evidence of forms and conventions -- semantic figures -- which, in art and literature, are often among the very first indications that such a new structure is forming" (Williams, 1977, p. 133). Hilmes seems to agree; she argues that in daytime programming, "women addressed the issues confronting them during the conflicted decades of the 1930s and 1940s, especially the tension between the enforced domesticity of the 1930s and women's increased frustration with this limited role, in forms developed specifically for this purpose" (Hilmes, 1997, p. 154). As McBride's and her listeners cultivated the familiar atmosphere I've noted on her show, they articulated solutions for their "ever shifting social conditions" forging "new opportunities for struggle" which have been taken up vigorously since (Acland, 2007, p. xxi).

5.5 Further Research

The current audio media context, characterized by "soundwork" as Hilmes theorizes it, shares various similarities and continuities with radio of McBride's era, and of course, instantiates key differences and ruptures as well. Historicizing the audio media present through insights such as I've offered in this work may help scholars make sense of these formations and contemporary audio media which seems to be shifting at a fast pace.[41] I hope my work on *The Mary Margaret McBride Program* can help explain the role of audio media within certain specific social and cultural contexts and the affective transfers possible in audio media cultural formations. Similar to Neil Verma's (2017) work on fictional serialized podcasts and their connections to radio drama, I think that similar work is begging to be done in relation to talk shows both on the radio and in digital audio form. I have an inkling that comparative or stand-alone work on talk show conventions, forms, and aesthetics would be very interesting put into conversation with my research on *The Mary Margaret McBride Program*. Susan Ware (2005) connects McBride's work to that of Oprah Winfrey (p. 10), and notes how some of McBride's

[41] For example, in another context, I've engaged in research on alt-right podcasts and their ability to build imagined listening communities. This will be interesting to put into conversation with my research on McBride's program.

innovations have been taken up by talk show hosts of all types, from Terry Gross (p. 238) to Rush Limbaugh (p. 239). Ware notes how McBride's practices of reading letters on the air and allowing listeners to call into the network for discussion "foreshadowed some of the interactive aspects of call-in talk radio" (p. 239), practices which have further morphed into many contemporary radio and podcasts interactions with listeners on social media. How talk show conventions have persisted, morphed, been reborn, and the structures of feeling they articulate would be an interesting avenue for future research. As Williams (1977) notes, structures of feeling "are often more recognizable at a later stage, when they have been (as often happens) formalized, classified, and in many cases built into new institutions and formations" (p. 132). While I've argued that McBride's program constitutes an emergent cultural form and structure of feeling, it may be difficult from the current vantage point to recognize the emergent forms and structures of the contemporary audio media moment.

5.6 Conclusion: Scarcity and Abundance

This project has also given me some insight into working through both abundance and scarcity. While many radio scholars lament the unavailability of historical primary sources in audio form (Douglas, 2004; Hilmes, 1997) I had the opposite problem: abundance. With the majority of McBride's broadcasts being recorded, preserved, and available, I have had to make choices about where to focus my attention, and how to delimit my corpus. I have had to accept the partiality of my sample and my knowledge. Writing about the abundance of born-digital audio artifacts, Sterne suggests that we re-evaluate the connection between sound recording and preservation, and embrace the ephemerality which audio is so known for. He asserts, "forgetting is also an important part of living," urging readers, historians and archivists to reconceptualize the role of audio media and digital technology in our collective history (Sterne, 2009, p. 57). He argues that "scarcity is a fundamental condition of possibility for historicity, but that scarcity has to be created from a condition of abundance" and that to produce this necessary scarcity, we must embrace the loss and forgetting which will ultimately be the fate of many audio works (Sterne, 2009, p. 60). Sterne argues that for both analog and digital audio, forgetting and loss are not tragedies but necessary conditions for preservation, historicization, and remembering and should be embraced as such.

In contrast to this problem of abundance, I've had to deal with scarcity in relation to the listener letters which were such a central part of the discourses about McBride, and a key factor in her relationships with her fans. I had originally conceived of this project as centrally involving

these letters in my method and analysis, but had to deal with more scarcity than I had bargained for. I knew that McBride had donated a number of her letters to a scrap paper drive in WWII (Hilmes, 1997, p. 278; Ware, 2005), but I had assumed that due to the sheer volume of letters she received, there would still be a good amount held in the collection of her papers (especially in light of the two out of eight boxes labeled "Correspondence" in the finding aid). Instead, when I arrived, I found these boxes were mainly made up of letters not from McBride's listeners but from personal friends, sponsors, and guests on her show. Only a very few letters from listeners were included. In both these scenarios, I've had to embrace the partiality, forgetting and loss upon which my research is based.

In addition to these 'archive stories'[42] this project was a learning experience in listening as method. While very familiar with visually analyzing content, aurally doing so was a unique challenge. It was a struggle to pay attention to the audio for hours on end, to make accurate notes with timestamps, and it was difficult to navigate within each audio file due to the interface available for playback. If I wanted to replay a segment, it was difficult to precisely find it. I wasn't permitted to import the audio into any type of transcription software, wasn't able to alter the speed in any way, and as such, transcription was a lengthy process which I reserved for the very most interesting of segments. Because of these factors, I am sure that I missed out on important material, and in hindsight, wish I had transcribed more sections than I was able to. As such, this work, as all work, is very deeply based in my particular listening experience, and reflects my 'standpoint acoustemology'[43] as Bryce Peake has characterized it.

From my particular standpoint, I've aimed to illuminate the ways in which McBride's deft and innovative use of radio technology enabled her to connect to her large listening public on an intimate register. I've argued that as she deployed various techniques, conventions, and forms, she constructed and produced a gendered and familiar media environment. I've centred my analysis on McBride's work itself, and her contributions to radio forms and history. In addition, I've noticed some similarities in the discourses which surrounded McBride's show and those connected to contemporary podcasts. I've offered some preliminary thoughts on how my analysis of McBride's program may offer some insight into these conversations, and into how

[42] As Antoinette Burton and others (2005) characterize the conundrums scholars face in doing archival work.

[43] Building off the work of Donna Haraway and Pierre Bourdieu, feminist standpoint theorists Sandra Harding, Patricia Hill Collins, and ethnomusicologist Steven Feld Peake have been explicit about the ways in which our subject position influences our listening.

contemporary media forms and practices may transmit affect to their listening publics. In an era in which audio media are enjoying a boom in popularity, and in which the intimacies of such media are often highlighted, I insist on recognizing and historicizing the aesthetic strategies involved in the production of such atmospheres. My work interrupts discourses which venerate aural intimacies as a given feature of certain cultural forms, and gestures towards a more nuanced understanding of the production of connection and closeness on *The Mary Margaret McBride Program* in particular, and audio media in general.

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APPENDIX 1 - RADIO BROADCASTS

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