Sexism from another era is easy to recognise. In 1967, when Barbara Castle introduced the breathalyser test in Britain, a BBC radio interviewer opened with a challenge that now seems breathtaking in its smug masculine superiority: “You’re only a woman. You don’t drive. What do you know about it?” It is hard to imagine such overt sexism being articulated on the contemporary airwaves, without so much as a hint of reflexive “irony.”

In broadcasting since then, battles have been fought and won to gain acceptance for women’s voices and faces, for both frontstage and backstage work. These days, female media professionals are highly visible and audible. Women newsreaders are now commonplace, even covering the male preserve of football. Female DJ’s are no longer restricted to night-time slots and have a share of the primetime broadcasting schedule. For young people who have grown up immersed in a “post-feminist media culture” (Gill, 2007), sexism must indeed seem like a thing of the past.

And yet there is a range of mainstream programming in which a masculine smugness and sense of superiority is very much in evidence. In this study, I attend to so-called “zoo format” media and the limited discursive space it makes available for women. Examining male hosts’ positioning of female colleagues on their programmes, my main focus of attention is informal talk on BBC’s Radio One Breakfast Show, hosted by Chris Moyles.

Keywords: radio, sexism, interaction, zoo format

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hosted by Chris Moyles. I will also refer briefly to another radio programme, *Radio One Drivetime*, hosted by Scott Mills, and to a television programme, *Chris Moyles’ Quiz Night* broadcast on Channel 4.

The study of media texts is dominated by a focus on representation, especially in cultural studies. In fact, in the Birmingham tradition, attention to text is defined in those terms (e.g., Hall, 1997). Presented in Figure 1 is a recent version of the cultural circuit in which media discourse circulates; text is in the representation node. Examining texts as part of an investigation of media discourse, however, needs a model that facilitates attention to more than just representations; aspects of the interpersonal are crucial: “If we are to have a comprehensive account of the role of media discourse in the reproduction of social life, then it must be one that includes the interpersonal dimension of talk as well as its ideational aspects—the social relational as well as the ideological” (Montgomery, 1986, p. 88). Critical discourse analysis has since argued strongly that the social relational is, in any case, full of ideological significance (e.g., Fairclough, 1995).

In this study, I present one detailed example of media interaction as representation. My focus of investigation, then, is interaction on air as a performance for a mass listening audience. While focusing on the representation node in the model, I attend to issues of participatory structure, power and control in enactments of social relationships that are broadcast for consumption by distant listeners. The study is a continuation of my own previous CDA-influenced media discourse analysis (e.g. Talbot, 2007). In order to investigate the participation framework of daytime radio, however, I have had to adopt a more informal method, combining discussion of transcribed data with anecdotal observation.

**BACKGROUND TO THE STUDY**

A few words of explanation are in order for D-J talk as the chosen topic. My attention was drawn to women’s positioning in the participation framework of daytime radio as a potential cause for concern a few years ago. While on research leave
in 2006—working on a book on media discourse—I was a regular at my local gym. Consequently, I became an enforced listener to Scott Mills’ slot on Radio One in the afternoon. A new producer, Beccy Huxtable, had just taken over the programme. I was startled by the abusiveness I was hearing from Scott Mills, both in the tone of his interaction with the producer and in the regular prank calls. “Wind-up” phone calls to unsuspecting members of the public were one notable and, to me, distinctly unpleasant, feature of the programme. Regular put-downs of the female producer were another (cf. Cook, 2000). As note-taking in public places is difficult, only a single sample of these put-downs made it into my notebook. It was the following remark to Beccy Huxtable: “I don’t mean to be cruel, but you really are stupid, aren’t you?” I identified this type of D-J discourse as a potential topic for future investigation. Of course, when I finally return to it several years later, things have moved on considerably. Bulletins from the period by Ofcom, British broadcasting’s regulatory body, make interesting reading, however. The following extract reports on an investigation into one of the “wind-up scenarios” that I had heard, a prank call to a woman at home:

Scott Mills—BBC Radio 1, 2 February 2006, approx 16:48

Introduction

[...]

A listener had nominated his partner for a “revenge” call after she mistakenly threw away his football tickets. The co-presenter rang the woman at home and pretended to be from an after-school club that her son was due to attend. He then outlined what he said were the “rules of the club” which included: “Rule 1: I don’t take any s***” and “Rule 2: Shut the f*** up” and referred to the woman’s son as a little s***. As the exchange continued, the co-presenter called the woman an idiot and she became increasingly angry and upset. The co-presenter finally revealed his identity and explained that the woman had been “set up.”

[...]

Decision

[...]

Wind-up scenarios are a common feature of many radio stations’ programming output and they are generally good-natured.

[...]

Given the circumstances, the call made for, at the least, very uncomfortable listening. Although the swearing was bleeped, the frequency and severity of the language was clear. Furthermore, the tone of the call was aggressive and unpleasant. Ofcom had not received a complaint from the mother, and so whether permission was given by her to broadcast the conversation was not a matter of this investigation. Nevertheless, she clearly appeared at the time of the broadcast to be distressed, angry and upset. The item was not suitable for broadcast when children were likely to be listening and was therefore in breach of Rules 1.3 and 1.5 of the Code. Moreover, we consider that the treatment of the woman in this way caused offence and breached generally accepted standards and was therefore in breach of Rule 2.3.1 (Ofcom, 2006)
When I returned to Scott Mills’s show again in 2010, aggressive prank phone calls involving members of the public were no longer a feature of the programme (at least, I heard none during the six week period when I was listening), though the same producer was still routinely positioned as a figure of fun.

The same Ofcom bulletin from 2006 covers various complaints about Chris Moyles, including complaints about him addressing several women texting in as “dirty whores.” Shortly before, he had been reprimanded for addressing the newsreader as “slut” as he handed over to her. Chris Moyles has also been called upon to apologise for homophobic and other discriminatory remarks. Such breaches and reprimands are ongoing; at time of writing, Chris Moyles has recently been in trouble with the Polish community. An upshot of these regular brushes with the regulating authorities is that fines are now in force, rather like in Premier league football. Such punitive measures are perhaps appropriate, as these D-Js do indeed have salaries of Premier league proportions. It is not surprising, then, that in such a context explicit abuse is in abeyance.

“Zoo Media:” A Clichéd Format

My focus is on interaction, particularly the participation framework of a broadcast in so-called “zoo media” format. This format involves the regular and deliberate breaching of the professional broadcasting procedures that keep behind-the-scenes talk out of a broadcast. The distinction between frontstage and backstage talk (Goffman, 1981) becomes blurred as a result of seepage of in-house talk into the broadcast itself. As a broadcasting style, zoo has been in the UK since the 1980s, imported from United States.² It was adopted by the BBC in a bid to win back the youth market in the 1990s, and it is now somewhat clichéd. The D-Js employed to do this were initially Steve Wright and then Chris Evans (an account is provided in Tolson, 2006). Zoo, then, involves what Richardson and Meinhof (1999) have called an aesthetic of “liveness.” It indicates authenticity, spontaneity and lack of pretension and mistakes are positively celebrated. A small sample below serves to illustrate this last point. Rachel Jones, who is actually the producer of the Radio One Breakfast Show, also used to be a very vocal frontstage contributor in it. In extract 1, she is talking about putting a pair of tights on eBay (see the appendix for a transcription key):

Extract 1
1. Rachel: actually I’ll put the American tan one in
2. Chris: American tan

² In relation to broadcasting, the term ‘zoo’ itself can be traced back to New York in the 1980s, to a radio show on WHTZ called The Morning Zoo that offered “a wacky mix of music, conversation and comedy” (Popik, 2006)
As she is the producer, Rachel Jones is presumably the person who has the regular job of pulling Chris Moyles into line about breaches of the broadcasting code of practice. This situation would explain the degree of hilarity at her falling foul of a broadcasting occupational hazard in line 3 (namely, anticipatory interference of an initial consonant, leading to unintended utterance of a taboo word). Notably, the producer attempts to pass over her mistake (‘nothing (.) moving on’ in lines 12-13), but these attempts are ignored.

The zoo format keys the talk in it as non-serious. As Richardson and Meinhof (1999, p. 55) point out, “there is pleasure for broadcasters and audiences in the “rawness” of the transmitted text—an indication that this is not to be taken too seriously.” Edgy live radio has “transgressive” appeal; the impression of “getting away with it.” One can readily draw parallels between this format of radio broadcasting and the “lad mag” genre in publishing.³ My interest in broadcasts in this laddish environment lies principally in the position of women who participate in them.

ANALYSIS: 
“WILL YOU SING ALONG, TINA?” EXTRACT

For this study I recorded six broadcasts of Radio One Breakfast over a space of six weeks in March and early April of 2010. Chris Moyles’ early morning shows have a prime slot and are, by his own account, popular with children (Jeffries, 2010). Close listening to the six broadcasts I recorded formed the basis for the general observations that follow about the show’s format and character. It begins at 6.30am with lengthy rambling chatter, the only music being a backbeat. There is at least half

³ Both, for example, signal friendship by the assertion of shared values. These shared values are asserted both in the othering of out-groups and in ways of performing friendship and transgression simultaneously, by means of ritual abuse and other humour, offensiveness and taboo-breaking (Talbot, 2007, pp. 51-57).
an hour of such chatter before any discernible content is introduced—by “dis-
cernible content” I mean items such as music from the charts, jingles and trailers,
light-hearted quizzes and games and so on. The show’s track list is relatively short;
in other words, there are fewer songs played overall than on other shows. What
remains is, on the basis of both soundscape and topic, arguably simulated pub ban-
ter. Overall the soundscape consists of overlapping dialogue, much of which is
very rapid and difficult to catch. There is often an impression of indiscernible things
going on in the background. As a consequence, it is impossible to capture ade-
quately in transcription the full texture of this soundscape. Topics range from the
previous night’s television, to football, formula one racing, boxing, boozing, scat-
ological jokes and not least “slagging.” “Slagging” refers to an aggressive kind of
ritualised abuse that has been observed in male-dominated workplaces, including
building sites and off-shore oilrigs (Faulkner, 2008; Watts, 2007). In order to counter
any impression that verbal intimidation is an exclusively male preserve, however,
I turn to a study on violence among girls for a definition: “an umbrella term cov-
ering a range of different types of verbal intimidation, including gossip, threats,
ridicule, harassment” (Alder & Worrall, 2004, p. 193). Wind-up scenarios in D-J dis-
course can be viewed as a form of slagging. They are a key component of Chris
Moyles’ repertoire. I have selected one of these “wind-up scenarios” from a single
broadcast for transcription and close attention (given the nature of the talk, a key
criterion for selection was simply that the interaction was transcribable at all).

The institutional space of the studio defines institutional roles clearly. These are
the people present who are potentially within the participation framework of the
broadcast talk:

Chris Moyles host/main presenter
“Comedy Dave” Vitty comedy content assistant
Rachel Jones producer
Aled Jones daytime producer
Dominic Byrne news
Tina Daheley sport
Un-named technicians

Some of the discourse roles that these institutional roles involve are quite con-
ventional, clear-cut and obvious: the newsreader reads the news, the comedy con-
tent assistant sets up quizzes and games, and so on. However, within the
participatory framework, when these overt, “official” activities are set aside, the
remaining talk is the simulated pub banter. Here, things look rather different:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Star</th>
<th>Sidekicks</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1st person narratives</td>
<td>1st person narratives</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Teasing and ridicule</td>
<td>Reaction work (laughter etc)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Pranks and practical jokes</td>
<td>Other support work (endorsing ridicule etc)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Boasting</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

On-air, Chris Moyles is the star, needless to say; all the rest are his sidekicks. He
and his principal sidekick, “Comedy Dave” Vitty, supply almost all the first-per-
son accounts. The other activities are far less evenly distributed. I do not wish to
imply here that Chris Moyles does not participate in the laughter. He does. What I
am doing is drawing attention to a conversational division of labour that is probably not apparent at all on normal listening. On the whole, the star initiates, the side-kicks react.

A second, more substantial extract below contains an extended “wind-up” of one of the participants and provides examples of some of these verbal activities. The extract begins about five minutes before the eight o’clock news and contains a little episode where Chris Moyles tricks Tina Daheley into singing along on-air:

**Extract 2**

McFly’s ‘Everybody Knows’ is playing

1. Chris: [singing] ‘Everybody Knows’ it
2. c’mon (.) McFly On McFly day
3. Will you sing along Tina?
4. Tina: I er- b- er Yeah
5. Chris: You’ve got a good voice
6. Tina: No you said I’ve got a better scream than I have a 7. singing voice
8. Dave: I thought you nailed it
9. Chris: Shall we have a little sing-along?
10. Tina: Not on my own
11. Chris: Together
12. Tina: We go “ooh ooh”?
13. Chris: Yeah (We’ll have to) get the timing right though
14. CHRIS CUTS MUSIC
15. Tina [singing slightly off-key]: ooh ooh ooh ooh ugh (.)
16. [with echo effect] you’re supposed to join in
17. MUSIC RESUMES

Chris Moyles does not join in with Tina Daheley, as he implicitly promises (lines 11 and 13). Instead he records her singing (in line 15). A good deal of mockery ensues, including some from listeners, whose texted remarks are read out by Dave Vitty:

20. Dave: sounded like a chimpanzee
21. Chris/Dave: [intermittent wailing]
22. Dave: someone’s texted in “are you in pain?”
   [30 SECONDS OF WAILING AND LAUGHTER. OMITTED]

Chris is evidently pleased with the sound artefact he has created at Tina’s expense and invites the audience to join in:

23. Chris: If you enjoyed Tina’s singing please text
24. “Tina amazing” (eight double one double nine)
25. that’s eight double one double nine
26. Tina: Why would anyone do that? =
Between lines 27 and 28 I have omitted most of the news and sport bulletin from the transcription. These segments of the broadcast were relatively formal; highly conventional in delivery, in fluent and articulate professional newsreader voices. I take up transcription again at the point Tina performs two self-repairs (lines 28 and 29):

28. Tina: and Alan Argreaves (.) Hargreaves even (.) will
29. make a football r- return to football after
30. eighteen months (xxxxxx) injured

31. Chris: [wailing] Alan Argreaves
32. TINA’S OFF-KEY SINGING REPLAYED

After Tina’s second self-repair, Chris cuts in. He does this initially with mimicry of her singing, then with mocking repetition of her pronunciation error (both in line 31), then a replay of her singing (line 32). These incursions disrupt the professional delivery and undermine Tina’s newsreader identity. Her complaint (line 33) elicits more of the same:

33. Tina: Oh stop it (.) I can’t (.) listen to it again
34. SINGING REPLAYED AGAIN
35. Chris: [wailing]
36. Tina: [short laugh] Hargreaves played forty-five
37. minutes...

[TINA COMPLETES THE SPORTS NEWS. OMITTED]

The sports news completed, Dominic Byrne acknowledges her with a receipt token (line 38), as he performs a conventionally professional take-over of the floor. As soon as he finishes the weather report, the mockery resumes:

38. Dominic: Tina, thanks.
39. Chris: [wailing]
40. SINGING REPLAYED FIVE MORE TIMES
41. Chris: It’s that cracked bit at the end
42. Tina: It’s because you didn’t join in
43. Chris: Tina sounds like the wookie off of Star Wars
44. SINGING REPLAYED
45. [Laughter]

From line 46, Dave Vitty joins in the teasing with enthusiasm. The ridicule of long-suffering Tina develops as a co-production:

46. Dave: Can you imagine- Can you imagine karaoke with Tina?
47. Chris: Oh it’d be brilliant (.) Two hours
48. Tina: [Sigh]
49. Dave: Don’t take any lessons, don’t change who you are
50. Tina: No (I want) singing lessons
51. Dave: Don’t change who you are
52. Tina: Charming
53. Chris: You are rubbish
54. Tina: (alright then teach) me to sing
55. Chris: Twelve quid an hour
56. No it’s lovely
57. SINGING REPLAYED EIGHT MORE TIMES
58. Dave: Tina Tuner
59. Chris: Tina Tuner
60. [Laughter]
61. Chris: All right I’ll stop
62. SINGING REPLAYED
63. Tina: (I’m never gonna get a) boyfriend
64. Chris: What?
65. Tina: I’m never gonna get a boyfriend if you keep playing
66. that
67. Chris: But it’s part of your personality Nobody’s gonna
68. care if you can sing in tune or not (.) Never
69. gonna get one anyway You’re too high maintenance

At this point, Chris inserts a pre-recorded voice, some promotional material for the show:

70. Prerecorded voice: [gravelly movie-trailer delivery]
71. Leonardo da Vinci (.) Donatello (.) Raphael (.) Sir
72. Isaac Newton (.) and Chris Moyles (.) The world has
73. always loved great artists and this one is here
74. every weekday morning

(Radio One Breakfast Show, 19 March 2010)

Earlier I identified boasting as another verbal activity by the star of the show. While there is no bragging from him directly in this “wind-up” extract I have selected, there is, however, a great deal built into the same show on his behalf, as in lines 70-74. Of course, the boasting is made ludicrous in the extreme by exaggeration. But an implication is that the teasing-of-Tina is a prime example of Chris Moyles’ work as a “great artist.” The bragging may be absurd but it is relentless. Every programme listing is a fanfare: “The award-winning Chris Moyles Show with the award-winning Chris Moyles.” His website profile hails him as the “saviour of Radio One.” On the morning after an annual awards ceremony in March, his boasting throughout the show became overwhelming.

**DISCUSSION**

In the “wind-up scenario” extract above, no one is being sworn at and there is a great deal of laughter, in contrast with the broadcasts that had sparked my initial interest in D-J talk several years ago. Unsurprisingly, much of the laughter comes, not from Tina, but from the two who gang up on her in their co-production of
ridicule. Chris Moyles returns to this episode repeatedly throughout the broadcast. Moreover, a segment of the wind-up is used later in the day as a trailer for the breakfast show. Consisting of lines 1-16 (“Will you sing along Tina?” etc) plus some of the wailing and laughter I omitted between lines 22-23, this trailer is broadcast on the afternoon show hosted by Scott Mills. From its use in this way, it is clear that it is being used to represent the spirit of the show: what the show is all about.

I have focused here on a twenty-minute segment from a single broadcast. In it, a woman reading sports news is the butt of humour. She is not targeted because she is reading the news; that’s just why she is present at all. I selected it from a sample of six breakfast shows that I recorded and listened to over a space of six weeks. From that listening, I would say that quite aggressive humour is common, but there was only one other lengthy segment where one person was singled out as the butt for prolonged ridicule. It was again Tina and it took place the morning after the award ceremonies. (I did not select that broadcast for close attention because the broadcast talk was virtually impossible to transcribe. Consequently I don’t have a sample.) Tina was allegedly given permission to sleep off a hangover in the studio. This situation triggered thirty minutes’ speculation on what kind of practical joke to play on her, which also generated a long sequence of listeners’ texts with suggestions for unpleasant things to inflict on her sleeping form. The potential offensiveness of the texts was gleefully exploited. Towards the end of the show, for example, they did not miss the opportunity to reading out a text that was apparently sent by a listener disappointed that they did not, after all, actually inflict anything on her (“Bloody woman! What an anti-climax!”). The teasing for being hung-over continued for the rest of the broadcast.

I have been attending to a radio broadcast before the watershed, where the participants are mindful of potential breaches to Ofcom regulations (specifically 1.3 and 1.5 relating to children). Chris Moyles’ show for Channel 4 television is for broadcast after the watershed and, while not live, seems to be attempting something similar to the live radio format. On the basis of a similar sample of viewing of this odd hybrid of chat show and quiz show, there seem to be fewer constraints on the potential for wind-up scenarios than on daytime radio. Women’s place on the show is highly predictable. There is a female guest-contestant most weeks and she is invariably heavily sexualised. On one show, a fellow D-J from Radio One, Fearne Cotton, was subjected to mock-threat of assault on her breasts. On another, the actor Billy Piper appeared to be dying of embarrassment as some sexually explicit scenes were screened, to a very vocal, leering audience on stage and off, from a television drama in which she played a prostitute. These are arguably in breach of Ofcom’s Rule 2.3, which would of course be taking it very seriously.

But how seriously should we take it? Well, the zoo format keys the talk in it as non-serious; its appeal appears to lie in the impression of lightheartedness and “getting away with it.” Moreover, Chris Moyles is sometimes the butt of humour himself. He is occasionally teased about his weight, or more specifically his multiple chins, as his fans are quick to point out. We are not supposed to take it, or him, seriously. But if it really is the case that the professional identities of women working in the media are being systematically undercut within the zoo media format, then how could we possibly do otherwise?

Of course, asking how seriously we should take media representations begs the question of how much influence they have, for which there is no ready answer. A group of studies of “shock jock” discourse on Québec radio has explored at some
length its “contagiousness” as it circulates in the community (Turbide et al., 2010; Vincent & Turbide, 2004; Vincent et al., 2007, 2008). The authors argue that depre-
cating talk, and aggressive forms of expression generally, have become part of the “natural speechscape” of public discourse as a consequence of the radio hosts’ in-
fluence. Now Chris Moyles is no shock jock; his shows are low key, tame perhaps, in comparison to the toxic discourse that Turbide et al investigate. Yet he does have celebrity status and his discursive style in hosting primetime radio and TV shows puts into circulation particular patterns of interaction that are liable to be nor-
malised. His celebrity status imparts influence, since a discourse of celebrity pervades media discourse and informs our understanding of the social world beyond the media:

Mass media images and representations of famous people, stars and celebri-
ties are vehicles for the creation of social meaning. A celebrity always rep-
resents more than him- or herself. So celebrity conveys, directly or indirectly, particular social values, such as the meaning of work and achievement, and definitions of sexual and gendered identity. (Evans 2006, p. 2)

In the past half-century, women have made major inroads into professional media environments. But the samples of zoo media I had looked at suggest that the dis-
cursive space women occupy there is severely limited. Tina may have achieved the
position of sports newsreader but she is routinely positioned as the butt of humour, as a foil for the host’s wit. I began this article by remarking on the sense of smug masculine superiority of Barbara Castle’s radio interviewer in the 1960s. The mas-
culine identity that Chris Moyles offers for daily consumption today sounds every bit as smug, self-satisfied and superior.

Transcription key
:: vowel lengthening
(.) pause
= latching (immediate follow-on)
xx- incomplete utterance
(xx) indistinct utterance
(h) laughter in speech

heavy emphasis
[gestures and other “business”]

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