Beauty and the beat:
Thoughts on female radio DJs,
media convergence,
and the proliferation of
media's idea of beauty

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Abstract
This study is about the representation of female radio disk jockeys (DJs) in Metro Manila, the Philippines. Radio used to be based solely on the broadcasting of sounds, but the advent of the internet has literally pulled radio DJs in view of their listeners. I explore how female radio hosts are visualised and talked about in this context of media convergence. This study is based on online ethnography and an analysis of discourses and images that prevail on radio websites. I analyse this material using the propaganda model of Herman & Chomsky (2002) and Aeron Davis's (2013) discussions on promotional cultures. I argue that representations of women and female beauty stay remarkably consistent in the evolving media landscape of the Philippines and that this can be explained by considering the business interests of radio stations. Rather than innovating or diversifying representations of women, radio stations attempt to capitalize on the beauty of their female radio DJs in the digital sphere.

Radio has been an established medium for decades all over the world, including in the Philippines. Radio relies on sound and therefore remains the most accessible medium compared to other known traditional or legacy media, such as television and film, which are highly visual, and print, which requires a level of literacy. I grew up listening to the radio. I can even say I grew up in a radio station; my grandmother Virginia V. Dolina worked and was popularly known as a voice actor and host in a regional radio station in the Leyte province. Eventually she became a traffic manager in a known radio company in Metro Manila. I was always with her whenever I could tag along. One way or another, this early exposure may have fed my fondness of this medium and even prompted my choices in terms of the field of endeavour I am in now, as subconsciously as it may be.

Even though radio has been around for as long as it has, numerous changes have affected the media landscape in which it operates. Importantly, we have witnessed the shift brought about by the Internet. Preconceived notions about how things work within media and its systems have always been present, but the rise of the Internet has made apparent that the ways things work is almost always evolving. One of the preconceived notions that the internet has shaken up is the belief that looks do not matter when you are a radio broadcaster. It is important to know that the relationship between beauty and success is also visible in jobs when looks do not per se matter (see for example Shellenbarger 2011). But given the aural character of radio, we expect that radio hosts bank primarily on their voice and its versatility. Radio disc jockeys (DJs) express their personalities through their voice. However, since radio has gone

online, a DJ's voice is now just one of the many factors to consider. Beliefs about the looks of radio broadcasters have been ingrained for so long that take a while to wither. See, for example, this set of online comments:

The media and its relevant industries in the Philippines have held onto specific representations of beauty, especially when it comes to women. These representations are particularly prevalent in television, film, and advertising. Growing up surrounded by visuals and narratives that deliver the same core message on beauty, it was a challenge to go against the grain and demystifying these visuals and narratives that feel 'normal' and 'natural'. My fondness of radio led me to develop a certain sensitivity to changes to the medium; I observed the emergence of a pattern in different FM radio stations in Manila. To give you an idea, the figures below are screenshots of the websites of some of the major FM radio stations in Metro Manila:
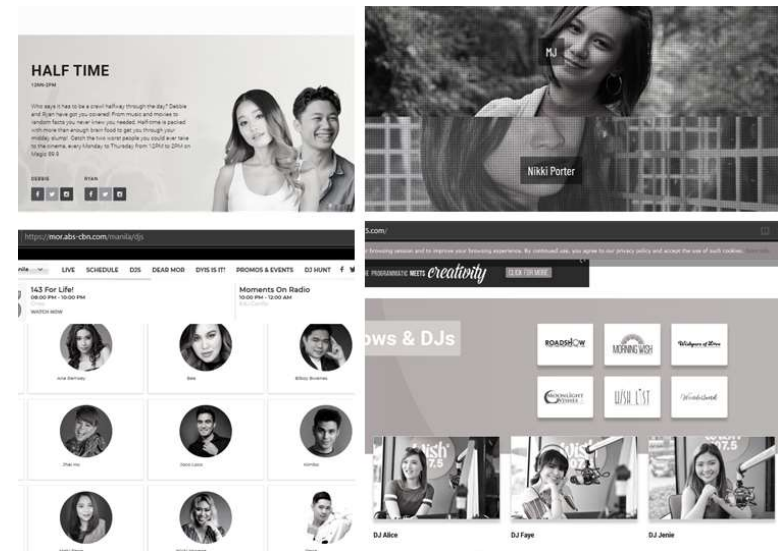
At first glance, these might seem like ordinary webpages that are part of the digitalization of traditional media, such as radio. However, looking at these pages through a critical lens can already lead to numerous inquiries. Keeping in mind the historical context of radio in the Philippines while critically appraising the recent changes in the media landscape, I ask the question: how are female radio DJs represented in the context of media convergence?

To answer this question, I primarily looked into the radio industry's online activities and analysed and encoded significant texts that I encountered (Bainbridge 2008). I thus examined the online media landscape of radio through virtual ethnography in order to understand the interactions and interpretations within this space because "while symbolic or semiotic interpretations of the context of texts may be useful, it is important also to address the situated writing and reading practices which make those texts meaningful... The text becomes ethnographically (and socially) meaningful once we have cultural contexts in which to situate it" (Thompson 1995, in Hine

2000). I analyse my research material by using the updated propaganda model developed by Edward Herman and Noam Chomsky (2002). This conceptual model explains the workings of propaganda in corporate mass media. Herman and Chomsky argue that five 'filters' determine what kind of news and, in this context, materials the media presents. In this article, I focus on the first two of those filters: 1) the size, concentrated ownership, owner wealth, and profit orientation of the dominant mass-media firms; and 2) advertising as the primary income source of the mass media. I connect these aspects to Aeron Davis's (2013) ideas on *promotional cultures*. The political economy of media always had complicated implications when it comes to the kind of realities being represented – of truths being disseminated – and this had become more complex in the advent of media convergence. Will this convergence enable more realities to be recognized? Will this just echo and proliferate dominant truths? Will this open more opportunities to question backward notions?

Context and critique: radio and media convergence

If one is to talk about the truly ubiquitous media in the Philippines, radio can be considered a top contender up until today. Radio is still regarded as an effective tool for entertainment and source of information. Methods of sending information over the airwaves differ, however, and to a large degree determine differences in terms of listenership and the kind of content being aired. For instance, amplitude modulation (AM) is preferred for talk radio, even if it is in mono, because of its greater reach. Frequency modulation (FM) best suits music because of its stereo quality, even though its reach is limited. AM radio tends to broadcast more news while FM radio leans to music or entertainment. Nowadays, people can tune in to FM radio stations more frequently, given that mobile and smart phones are usually equipped with FM radio, tuning in can be mobile, portable, and accessible. The popularity of FM stations may also be attributed

to people's widespread preference of entertainment over news. To be sure, this is not a new phenomenon but was also the case even in the early days of radio in the Philippines (Enriquez 2008, 101).

Herman and Chomsky (2002, 1) state that the general purposes of mass media are "to amuse, entertain, and inform, and to inculcate individuals with the values, beliefs, and codes of behaviour that will integrate them into the institutional structures of the larger society". This happens through an interplay of industry decisions and audience preferences and support for various content. The kind of information that becomes available through different media can therefore communicate and translate into several interpretations and meanings. When looking at the various messages broadcasted on the radio, advertising is another factor to consider. Historically, radio advertising became institutionalised "as the principal support of radio programs in the 1930s", which also "led to a standard of professionalism in program production" (Enriquez 2008, 102-103). From those early days up until now, media advertising has flourished in line with various technological advancements towards digitalization.

In a study on the relationship between radio and Facebook in the contexts of the United States, Germany and Singapore it is noted that "radio adapted to peacefully coexist in the expanding media environment" (Freeman, Klapczynski and Wood 2012). This digital path had been expected in the Philippine communication and media landscape in the past decades and has led to some major changes. "With the presence of the Internet and of gadgets such as the iPod and MP3 player, radio has been forced to adapt to the environment and improve its ways of information dissemination and equipment" (Aseron 2012, in Viray &Viray 2014, 10). However, compared to the peaceful coexistence claimed in the foreign study cited prior, this local study in the Philippines expresses sentiments quite differently on how "radio now lives in the digital age and struggles to keep up with the rapid advancements in technology". It states that "radio is redefining

itself by being on the Internet and on mobile phones" (Viray and Viray 2014). This study on the digitalization of radio in Manila acknowledges the troubles faced by broadcast radio. In light of the fact that FM stations are so "music-heavy", the proliferation of Internet Radio and access to music downloads present serious challenges to broadcast radio (Viray and Viray 2014, 44-45). Sourcing out data from three FM stations with different formats, the data that Viray and Viray (2014, 46) gathered and analysed showed the "phenomenon of convergence" and the evident "commercialism and the profit-driven nature of radio stations." Numerous efforts have been implemented by radio stations including "going portable, improving fidelity, [and] encouraging creative personalities" and it just goes to show how the Internet "is becoming a necessary precondition for radio stations to survive and remain relevant" (Freeman, Klapczynski and Wood 2012). These efforts are paying off according to recent industry studies that state that radio is being rediscovered by advertisers. Especially radio's reliability and its capacity to boost ad memorability and reach is highlighted in these studies (The Nielsen Company 2017). If we look at these developments through the critical lens of the propaganda model, we see that media companies "have found it possible to capitalize increased audience size and advertising revenues into multiplied values of the media franchises—and great wealth" (Herman and Chomsky 2002, 7). Radio was able to adapt, and it continues to do so. In this new media landscape, radio stations seem to solely focus on profitability.

Filipinos nowadays, especially the younger generations, can't seem to live without online access, be it through a computer or through smartphones. Merging technology and socializing, they have been called "the world's most active texters" (Locsin 2014). Media convergence is thus a key element of people's lives, especially of those in metropolitan areas – with their fast-paced lifestyles and the demand for streamlined and immediate access to information.

Radio stars and celebrity culture

The creation of radio personalities is one of the key ways in which the medium has tried to cope with the demands from the Internet. The use of Facebook, for example, enables radio stations and listeners to interact through wall posts. In their analysis, Freeman, Klapczynski and Wood (2012) identify three purposes of these posts: 1) generate engagement; 2) promoting station benchmarks and listening; and 3) promoting radio personalities. The third category of posts is important for radio stations because it helps them to develop relationships with their listeners. Aeron Davis (2013, 113) for example, has noted that "Celebrity offers alternative forms of intimacy and guidance, albeit of a 'para-social', distanced kind. It is through celebrity that social and ethical norms and values are played out and understood. Thus, individuals construct their own identities, in part, through engaging with celebrity texts". By fashioning personalities on social media, radio DJs create an intimate space for interaction between them and their audience. Because Facebook profiles allow them to see who they are communicating with, they give the interactions the appearance of having a personal relationship.

It is good to note, however, that this is not an entirely new phenomenon brought about by social media. In earlier days, the emergence of radio personalities was spawned by advertising. In her history of colonial broadcasting in the Philippines, Elizabeth Enriquez (2008, 103) describes how "sponsored programs were produced by the advertisers themselves, who selected, hired, trained, and polished the radio performers and then turned them into celebrities through entertainment programs that aired often and regularly, creating audience expectations and developing the habit of listening among audiences." Radio has thus always relied on the creation of celebrities.

"Radio is always exploring ways to add value while keeping costs down" and "to monetize the experience and determine the return on

any investments" (Freeman, Klapczynski and Wood 2012, 8). Indeed, the cultivation and maintenance of celebrity personalities has become widely institutionalized and commercialized. "In effect," Aeron Davis (2013, 114) argues, "celebrity itself has become an industry". Now, I ask here, what are the implications of this celebrity industry for radio in the Philippines when it comes to representation?

Examining representations in the convergent radio landscape

It was a conscious decision to limit the scope of this study to a specific social networking site (SNS) – Facebook – since most of the radio stations and their DJs primarily utilize Facebook profiles and pages, and there is an undeniable abundance and richness of texts, of information, readily available in this specific SNS. As I was initially trying to grasp where I should start, I have encountered articles identifying the roster of attractive radio DJs, which bolstered a deemed reality within the radio industry's promotional culture. I started with an initial analysis of texts primarily shared in Facebook, which are online articles of *When in Manila* listing the prettiest female radio DJs (Arsua 2015). These were contrasted with supplementary texts – the articles on attractive male radio DJs (Beltran 2015). Almost all the known FM stations in Metro Manila were represented in the lists, with some appearing to dominate the lists with the number of attractive DJs, both male and female, making it to the rosters. Among these were RX Monster Radio 93.1, Magic 89.9, 90.7 Love Radio, and 101.1 Yes FM.

At first glance, the female radio DJs in the article seem to be positively represented in images and texts. A closer look at these profiles, however, reveals a different story. These photos are similar in that they depict the women in them in a sensual way by using close-ups and showing skin framed with tight camera shots. The contrast with profiles for male radio DJs is striking: in general, they

are clothed and are framed with tight to mid camera shots, usually showing the whole upper body. The captions under the profile photos further emphasize these visual representations. Descriptions of female radio DJs are mostly concerned with their physical appearance and might give some side notes on other small interesting facts. Even if the ranking depended primarily on physical looks, descriptions of the male DJs also highlighted traits, hobbies, and interests. This situation is characteristic of a gendered discourse that starts at a young age when little boys are asked what they want to be in the future or what games they play or things they like to do, while little girls get compliments on their looks and clothes. These online profiles, even if the articles were from an organization separate from the radio companies, are exemplary for the way in which radio DJs have become visible and have been shaped into generic representations as celebrities. The representations also create and maintain a relationship between the DJs and the radio stations they work for. The names of the DJ's appear side by side the name of the radio station; in effect, the DJs become vehicles for the company names and brands.

The new technologies that radio stations use thus enable listeners to see the face behind the voice. This means that, unlike before, the physical appearance of radio DJs has become a key aspect of their marketability. Whether or not these practices are formally required or simply implied, radio stations do bank on the marketable value of the appearance of their DJs. They do so on two levels: 1) by promoting their stars, radio stations promote their own organisations and products; and 2) the promotion of celebrities helps the stations to gain listeners (Davis 2013, 15). In this remarkable turn of events, beauty and good looks have become essential to the profession of radio show host.

After exploring the profiles on this ranking website, I ventured into other virtual terrains. I have selected a few female radio DJs from the articles who have public Facebook profile accounts and/or pages,

and with a considerable following. Radio stations and fans expect this of them: it is a space for "fan service" and following. Most of the accounts I looked at were public pages that were categorized as "public figure" or "entertainer", ascertaining their celebrity status. Most of the accounts also mention the company or radio station they work for. Each of these pages and accounts garnered numerous followers: from several hundreds of followers up to several thousands. A good number of them do modelling stints and photo-shoots, and they produce and post videos on various themes, topics, and products. Nearly all of the female DJs use their profiles to endorse several products. This is another level at which radio stations use their DJs for commercial interests. As Davis (2013, 116) has noted, organizations use celebrities by providing them with free items and products, assigning them key roles in promotional campaigns, and offering them advertising contracts to endorse the brand. To be sure, however, Davis reminds us that this is not a one-way process. "Celebrities", Davis writes, "both promote themselves and are part of elaborate promotional nexuses… they cultivate their own public images. They also represent and promote their organizations, the cultural products to which they contribute, and goods produced by other companies. As such, they are human 'commercial intertexts'." (2013, 112).

Next to their presence on social networking sites, radio stations maintain their own websites. Most of these contain profiles of the DJs with links to their social media accounts and photo galleries with portraits. Two FM radio stations, Yes FM and Love Radio take most advantage of the online presence of the DJs. Their website profiles also include video outlets, signifying the need for DJs to produce video content in order to update this part of their profiles. Furthermore, on the website of Yes FM's, the profiles of the DJs are structured in a question-and-answer format, which are written in such a way that they contain suggestive meanings and sexual innuendos. The sexualization of DJs is characteristic of YES FM's general branding strategy.

So how should we understand these online representations of radio hosts from a gender perspective? It has been widely noted that media of any kind are powerful forces in the creation and reinforcement of particular images of gender (Thompson and Armato 2012, 208). Investigating how media actually reproduce these images is a complex task. The complexity arises from the dual meaning of gendered representation: "While the first [meaning] refers to a numerical analysis of women and men's presences in the media, the second is more complex to understand and involves study of the ideologies of gender" (Krijnen and Van Bauwel 2015, 21). In line of this latter point, "media are thus viewed as an arena for the struggle of cultural meanings" (Krijnen and Van Bauwel 2015, 21). It is this second aspect of representation that is the most challenging and the most fulfilling concept to critique and to unravel.

Returning to the online profiles of the female radio DJs, I noticed that the comment section of these pages and accounts were used by listeners to express their admiration for the DJs. This admiration, however, was almost exclusively focused on the physical appearance of the female radio hosts. Many people commented, for example, on how "pretty" or "beautiful" a DJ is.


People also commented specifically on the relation between radio and looks. People shared, for example, that they started tuning in once they saw how pretty the DJ was or write that they find the DJ "too beautiful for radio". In general, it is clear that these DJs are referred to

as idols or celebrities, and many people express the wish to meet the DJs in person.

Since the social media accounts are set on 'public', inappropriate comments also make it onto these pages.
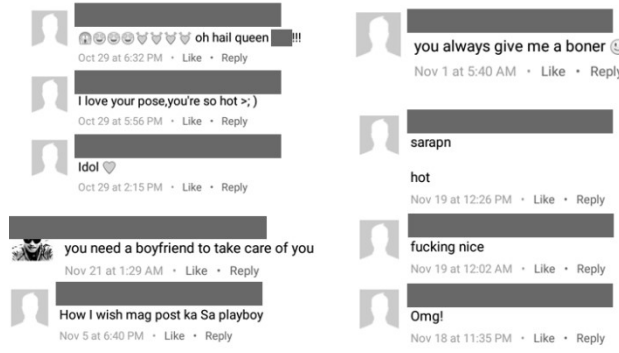
But what is generally considered beautiful anyway? What do people mean and regard when they say this?

Beyond voices, limited faces?

In the Philippines, people tend to be deeply fixated on beauty, as evidenced by their reverence for things like pageants and beauty

products. In this context, the pressure to be beautiful can be unnerving and even damaging if you do not fit the cookie cutter mould appreciated by most. "Beauty is so well rewarded in the Philippines, that beautiful women – and beauty queens – enjoy fame and power" (Gutierrez 2018). Such power, however, can be both destructive and creative. Which is which in this context?

Even when advertising was a driving force for the development of radio personalities in the early stages of the medium, there was no direct preference specifically for the level of attractiveness of a radio host. The talent, quality of voice and the ability to engage listeners were key identifiers for a good radio DJ. Historically, radio stations employed more men as DJs, most of whom were Filipino *mestizos* – of Spanish-Filipino or American-Filipino descent. When looking at the gender representation in terms of numbers, the disparity between male and female radio DJs appears to have diminished. When it comes to culturally entrenched ideologies of beauty and gender, not much has changed, although Western influences have altered standards of beauty for women in the Philippines. The combined forces of colonialism and global popular culture have led to a historical shift in Filipino women's definition of beauty. Jeanne Frances Illo describes this development in a compelling way:

> Unlike the pre-war poets (who 'generally extolled the attraction to soft, dusky skin, sometimes alluding to the brownness of the earth; the *morena*, the *kayumanggi*'), the new image-makers stress not only color (fair, *mestiza)* but also a particular body shape. Print advertisements invariably show models who, although dark-haired, are fair (*maputi* or white), taller than average Filipinas, and curvaceous. While Twiggy and other 'hungry look' models… have entered the national consciousness, the image that lingers is still that of a beauty-pageant sort of body: slim but well-shaped" (Illo 1999, 49).

Similar observations can be made of the online presence of female radio DJs. Their pictures demonstrate a remarkable commonality in physical traits: sexy, well-shaped, smooth and fair-skinned, straight hair, small face, and pointed nose. There are a few DJs that deviate slightly from this mould, for example, because they have a different body type or complexion, but their faces and their projection would still lean back to the same mould, nonetheless. These characteristics are reminiscent of the results that Illo found when she conducted a survey among women in a Metro Manilla mixed-class neighbourhood. Illo asked women of different age groups about their definition of a beautiful or ideal body, and these are the words they used:

15-19 years	not too thin; tall; with small waist, long shapely legs, and fair complexion
20-29	proportionately built, slim, medium height (neither short nor tall), with healthy skin
30-39	sexy; well-poised; healthy; slim, but with curves and a 25-inch waistline
40-49	sexy, neither too fat nor too thin
50-59	tall, medium built (neither too fat nor too thin)
60+	With 34-24-34 (body) figure and smooth skin, although not necessarily fair (Illo 1999, 51)

If one takes this survey as an indication of beauty standards across decades, then very little seems to have changed. Rather than transforming notions of ideal looks, media convergence may add to the proliferation of a dominant gender ideology. What becomes apparent as well is that women are represented in particular ways to generate profit and other gains. Radio stations, then, capitalize on particular dominant ideals of female beauty. The convergence of media – or, in other words, the use of online platforms by a medium that previously only relied on the broadcasting of sound – produces an echo of problematic representations of women.

One could argue that these representations are not only problematic. Some view these images of female beauty from a different perspective and associate them with liberty and empowerment. As I already noted earlier, images, bodies and texts do not necessarily convey a single meaning. "Rather, our identities, perceptions, actions, and experiences take on meanings – for ourselves and for others – based on socially available interpretations" (Rakow and Wackwitz 2004, 173). Davis (2013, 126), for example, describes how the celebrity persona of Jennifer Lopez offered a "complex mix of images and character traits which both challenge and sustain dominant social and cultural norms." Lopez was able to overplay or downplay certain aspects of her persona, such as her ethnicity, upbringing, and body, depending on her "collaboration with dominant cultural norms". According to Davis the gendered image of Jennifer Lopez conveyed "female submissiveness, personal commodification and sexualized objectification" as well as it challenged "patriarchy and the male gaze" (2013, 128-129),.

I argue, however, that in the case of radio DJs in the Philippines this perspective is too closely tied to the interests of promotional culture. False truths may be veiled in notions of liberation, equality, and empowerment. The representation of female DJs can "also present certain gender roles that reproduce male patriarchy and the commodification of female bodies" (Davis 2013, 121). To truly explore more inclusive representations, we should not only consider who is represented, but also how one is represented (Krijnen and Van Bauwel 2015, 36). While female DJs may have freedom and opportunities of growth and development in the industry, their images reproduce the media's dominant gendered ideologies of beauty. The images of female DJs show them adhering to particular understandings of beauty and sometimes even portray them in a sexualized manner. Fans reinforce these portrayals by expressing their admiration of DJs' looks, stating that physical beauty is a reason to

listen to a DJ's voice and further sexualizing the DJs in online comments. All these aspects together show that the online presence of female radio hosts follows the dominant formulas of representations of women.

At the core of it all, the technological advancements that broadcast radio in the Philippines has made through the Internet has not translated into similar progressions in practices of representation. As Herman and Chomsky (2002) argue, the Internet is both a boon and bane. It provides a valuable platform for dissent and important social movements, but it also bolsters the scope and reach of those who already have established their brand, a huge following, and large resources. The latter usually being the large media companies and conglomerates who proliferate dominant ideologies. Reflective of the latter viewpoint, instead of exploring opportunities to present more realities, radio stations in the capital of the Philippines subscribe to dominant notions of marketability. This reflects the fact that cultural representations of women are anchored to the business motives of radio stations. In their online portrayals of female DJs, radio stations reproduce representations that have been tried and tested. Rather than striving for innovation, it thus seems that the stations prefer to minimize risks to maximize profits. Findings show that these female radio DJs turn into celebrities and are fit into the narratives of promotional levels for advertising. "With advertising," Herman and Chomsky note, "the free market does not yield a neutral system in which final buyer choice decides. The *advertisers*' choices influence media prosperity and survival" (2002, 14-15). I argue that this development can lead to an alarming cycle of unrealistic beauty standards for women in the name of marketability and business interests.

In reflecting upon and critiquing the beauty myth furthered by the online marketization of female show hosts, I share Naomi Wolf's perspective. Wolf (2002, 3) argues that gendered ideologies of beauty came about because "they served a purpose" and this purpose often was a financial one: "to increase the profits of those advertisers whose ad dollars actually drove the media that, in turn, created the ideals". She notes that these gendered ideals are also political, pointing to the fact that when women started to become politically active, "the heavier the ideals of beauty would bear down upon them, mostly in order to distract their energy and undermine their progress" (Wolf 2002, 3). Some would argue that this beauty myth is a thing of the past as evidenced by a growing representational diversity in media. Yet as my exploration of media convergence in the Philippines shows, the beauty myth is still strongly present and is driving visual and textual portrayals of women.

Moving forward

There are still numerous texts, visuals and experiences that can be examined when trying to understand media convergence and the representation of women in the Philippines. For this initial exploration, I have not, for example, investigated the kind of content that DJs produce, the conversations they have with various audiences through different media, or the way that DJs themselves think about their roles in meaning-making. This article, then, can be seen as a prologue as I aspire to expand my analysis and critique of these issues. I am still listening to the radio and I am hopeful that changes are underway that would make the medium more inclusive and progressive. Several social networking sites have emerged that aim to address the problematic practices of representations in a similar way as I do in this paper.

There is no guidebook for the progression of media convergence and how this should be done properly. We can, however, continue to be mindful of the cultural messages communicated by this variety of media, both as part of a listening audience or from within the media industries that cultivate these notions. Widespread awareness among

audiences of cultural ideologies and their strategic use by businesses is significant and beneficial, especially when it comes to beauty and gender. Regarding representations of women, it seems like we are on a country road that is long and winding. Nonetheless, I see this as a road worth exploring for more realities to unfold.

Acknowledgments

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