



# Women in Radio

RTF 308 // Kathy Cacace



# Key Concepts

**Cognitive listening**

**Dimensional listening**

**Associational listening**

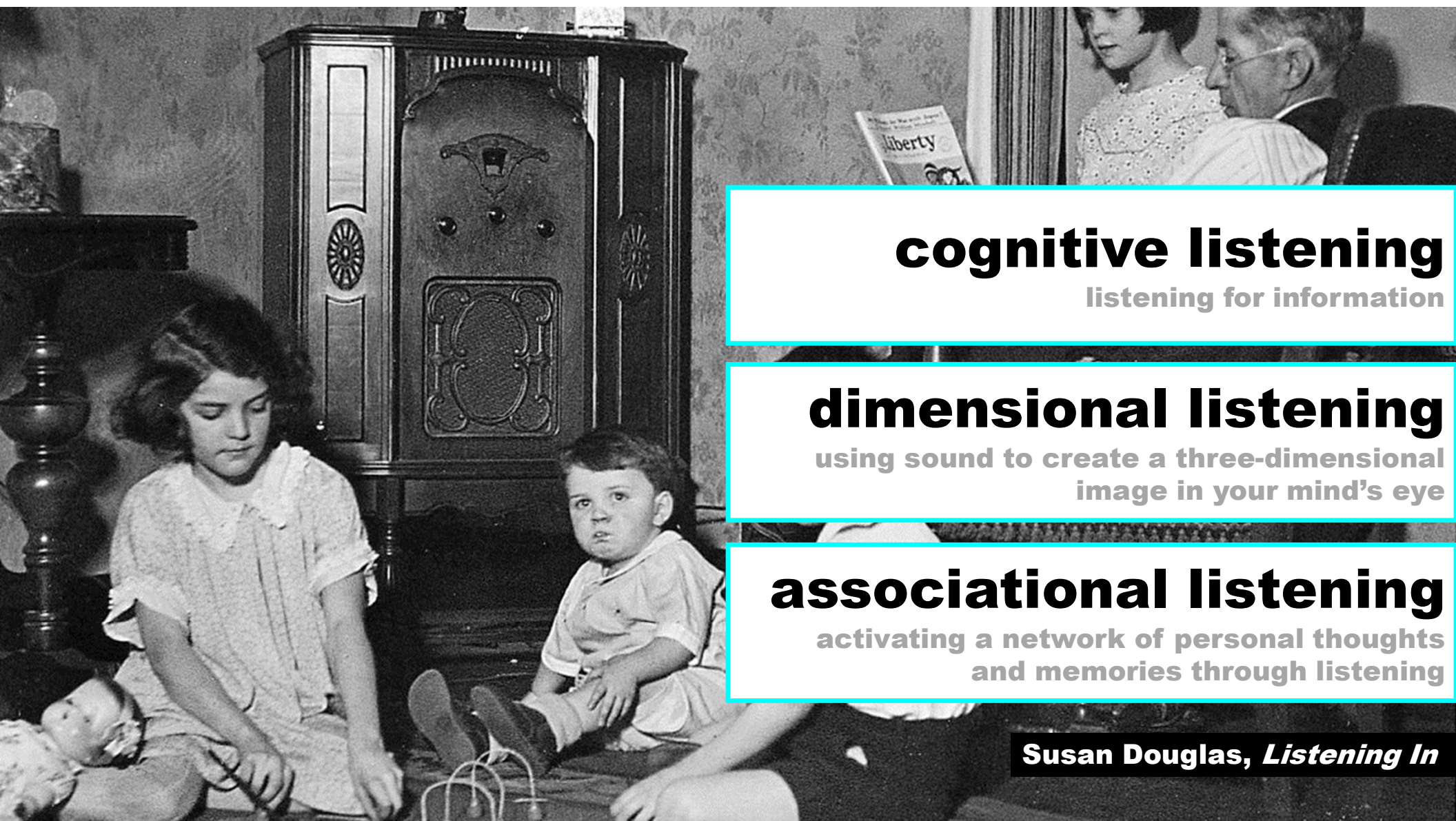
**Women in early radio**

**Women in “golden age” radio (30s-40s)**

**1924 announcer voice controversy**

**Mercedes McCambridge**

**Gertrude Berg**



## **cognitive listening**

listening for information

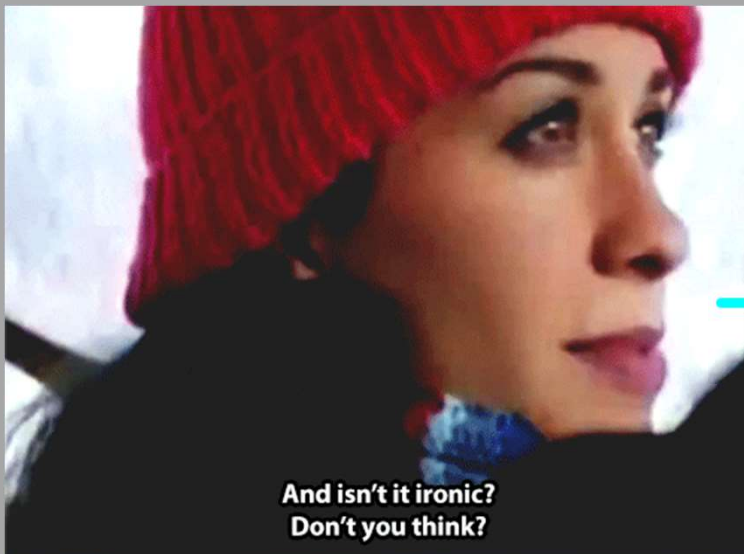
## **dimensional listening**

using sound to create a three-dimensional image in your mind's eye

## **associational listening**

activating a network of personal thoughts and memories through listening

**Susan Douglas, *Listening In***



And isn't it ironic?  
Don't you think?



**[Image of 13-year-old Kathy redacted to save a shred of my dignity.]**



**Listening to the radio  
Riding in my parent's van  
Winter  
Hot pizzas boxes on my lap  
Driving to the mall  
Going to the movies at the mall  
That mall now (almost dead)  
My Discman  
Scratching this CD; it skipped  
Yorktown Heights, NY  
Being a tween  
My middle school  
My middle school friends  
How much my town changed  
Watching MTV  
Alanis Morissette in *Dogma*  
Kevin Smith movies in general  
Karaoke with coworkers in NYC  
Karaoke last year in Austin  
Alanis's hair  
Bedhead hair products  
The smell of Herbal Essences  
Thin little 90s eyebrows  
Driving to Vermont in 2009  
My old roommate  
Her Vermont friends  
The Ben & Jerry's factory  
Postponed Alanis/Liz Phair tour  
Covid-19  
Quarantine**





## **cognitive listening**

listening for information

## **dimensional listening**

using sound to create a three-dimensional  
image in your mind's eye

## **associational listening**

activating a network of personal thoughts  
and memories through listening

**Susan Douglas, *Listening In***



Ida B. Wells-Barnett



Women's Suffrage Movement  
19<sup>th</sup> amendment passed in 1920





**“...although women have always been the primary audience of broadcasting’s commercial address, their agency as active “speakers” and producers in the medium has been severely and deliberately circumscribed.”**

Michele Hilmes, “Desired and Feared: Women’s Voices in Radio History,” in *Television, History, and American Culture: Feminist Critical Essays*, ed. Mary Beth Haralovich and Lauren Rabinowitz, Durham: Duke University Press, 1999.





# desired

**the radio needs women to  
succeed**

# feared

**female audiences and voices  
might feminize radio; link to  
stereotypes about women**





# **Questions at stake in early radio industry**

**Women in public discourse?**

**Women as creators?**

**Radio as women's medium?**

**Women's programming?**



## **Early Radio (1922-1927)**

**Like early film**

**Women as station managers & announcers**

**Programs not based on audience gender**





**Judith Waller, station manager of Chicago's WMAQ in 1922**



## **Early Radio (1922-1927)**

**Like early film**

**Women as station managers & announcers**

**Programs not based on audience gender**

## **“Golden age” radio (1927-1950s)**

**Male announcers, producers, managers**

**Female hours & programs**

**Day = female, low budget, ads, soaps**

**Night\* = male, high budget, “serious”**

**\*women were still predominant audience!**

**Women moved to appropriate roles**



## Radio announcer debate of 1924

**“When the speaker is not seen in person, and if that speaker be a woman, her voice is very undesirable, and to many, both men and women, displeasing...People will not pay good money to listen to the talking record of a woman’s voice. Consequently, I believe that a vote of radio fans would show great disapproval of woman announcers and speakers.”**

**Letter to Jennie Irene Mix from a phonograph salesman  
*Radio Broadcast* magazine (1924)**

**“Few women have voices with distinct personality. It is my opinion that women depend on everything else but the voice for their appeal.”**

**–W.W. Rogers, KDKA (Pittsburgh)**

**“I do not believe that women are fitted for radio announcers. They need body to their voices...when women announcers try to be congenial in their announcements, they become affected; and when they attempt to be business like they are stiff.”**

**–J.M. Barnett, WOR (New York)**

**“...a well-modulated male voice is the most pleasing to listen to [because women’s voices] tend to be monotonous.”**

**–M.A. Rigg, WGR (Buffalo)**

**Symposium on women announcers  
*Radio Broadcast* magazine (1924)**



**Survey by a New York  
radio station manager of  
5,000 people said  
listeners prefer male  
announcers to female  
ones 100 to 1.**

## **Radio announcer debate of 1924**

“It is difficult to say why the public should be so unanimous about it. One reason may be that most receiving sets do not reproduce perfectly the higher notes. **A man's voice “takes” better.** It has more volume. Then, announcers cover sporting events, shows, operas, and big public meetings. Men are naturally **better fitted for the average assignment** of the broadcast announcer...

...But perhaps the best reason suggested for the unpopularity of the woman's voice over the radio is that it has **too much personality.** A voice that is highly individual and full of character is aggravating to the audience that cannot see the face and the expression to go with the voice...

The woman announcer has difficulty in repressing her enthusiasm and in maintaining the necessary **reserve and objectivity.”**

John Wallace

*Radio Broadcast* magazine

1925 feature on women announcers



SIGN IN

NPR SHOP

DONATE

NEWS

ARTS & LIFE

MUSIC

SHOWS & PODCASTS

SEARCH



36:38

+ PLAYLIST

DOWNLOAD

EMBED

TRANSCRIPT



ARTS & LIFE

# From Upspeak To Vocal Fry: Are We 'Policing' Young Women's Voices?

July 23, 2015 · 1:49 PM ET

Heard on Fresh Air

FRESH AIR



# GENDER AND THE SOUNDSCAPE OF MAJOR LEAGUE BASEBALL

*KATHY CACACE / THE UNIVERSITY OF TEXAS AT AUSTIN*

[July 29, 2019](#)

[Kathy Cacace / University of Texas at Austin](#)

[Leave a comment](#)









# Martha Jean “The Queen” Steinberg

**DJ and radio personality in Detroit**

**One of the first Black female disc jockeys**

**Got her first on-air job by winning a contest**

**Stayed on the air for *two days* in 1967 to**

**protect her community during uprising**

**Led protest for more Black station**

**employees**

**Bought her own station**

# Mercedes McCambridge

**“the greatest living radio actress in the world”  
–Orson Welles**

**Acted in radio from 1930s-1950s  
Starred in *Defense Attorney*  
Played the lead, a lawyer  
Boyfriend reporter as sidekick  
Crime drama *not* soap opera**





# The demon Pazuzu

*The Exorcist* (1973)  
d. William Friedkin



# Gertrude Berg

*The Goldbergs* (radio) – 1929 to 1946

*The Goldbergs* (television) – 1949 to 1956

Adapted into a play, musical, and film

**Reading: “The Goldberg Variations”**

Father ran a hotel in the Catskills

*Sole* writer and producer of *The Goldbergs* (radio)

Sought to fix negative stereotypes of Jews

Hopeful, comforting Mom for the Depression

**May 1931** - 3,302 letters, only 11 negative

**April 1939** - Episode alludes to *Kristallnacht*





## Listening to *The Goldbergs*

Engage with associational listening by jotting down what it makes you think of

Engage dimensional listening by doodling the scene