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Black Radio's Contribution to Collective and Cultural Memory: Personnel Perspectives of Black Radio History in the United States

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Abstract

This interdisciplinary research investigates the significance of the community connection between Black radio personnel and their audiences through the lens of collective and cultural memory narratives. The study addresses two key research questions: first, how do Black radio personnel's collective and cultural memories contribute to the Black public sphere? Second, what are the defining characteristics in developing parasocial relationships and interactions between Black radio personalities and their audiences? The qualitative research employs an autoethnographic methodology and a questionnaire, utilizing insights gained from the author's experiences working at a Black-owned radio network and station. The questionnaire, distributed to key informants in the field, explores narratives related to Black radio station engagement, memorable moments, and public service programming. The findings reveal diverse stories, including community mobilization around social issues and the unique role of Black radio in shaping local and national events. The exploration of parasocial relationships among Black radio personnel demonstrates positive connections with listeners, ranging from on-air interactions to long-term friendships. Despite occasional challenges and boundary issues, the study highlights the deep emotional impact of these relationships and their role in fostering loyalty and engagement within the Black community. The research contributes to the documentation of Black radio history, emphasizing its role as a cultural memory maker and underscoring the need for expanded archival efforts in this area.

Introduction

In 2022, the Nielsen Company reported: "Across the U.S., Black-owned radio stations reach more than 6.4 million Black listeners each week." That statistic alongside UNESCO's World Radio Day recognition validates the medium as a whole and efforts to ensure that it will not soon become forgotten (Smith & Bland, 2022). However, there has been an erosion of Black-owned radio stations and stations that provide Black-oriented radio programming[1] due to media fragmentation and FCC deregulations (consolidation) that have worked against the growth of Black radio. Also, some might say that digital media, such as podcasting, threatens the future of radio in general and Black radio in particular. Due to this perceived attrition, we need to document our experiences of working in the radio industry from the perspective of Black radio personnel. Our collective and cultural memory of creating Black radio is vital to the Black public sphere.

From this author's perspective as a former employee of a Black-owned radio network and Black-oriented radio stations, stories and employment experiences at a Black-owned and/or Black-oriented radio station provide valuable insight into a rare enclave. Add to that thread the intricate community connection that Black radio personnel wield with their audiences. This essay will address Black radio history and parasocial relationships from this vantage point.

The literature review will address several topics: Black radio history, parasocial interactions (PSIs), parasocial relationships (PSRs) in radio, collective memory, cultural memory and Black Public Memory. Next, the methodology for this research essay will

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[1] For the purposes of this research the author will use the term Black radio to encompass both radio stations that are Black-owned as well as radio stations that provide Black-oriented programming.

be outlined. The findings will follow the method section. The discussion will connect the literature review material to the research questions and the conclusion will summarize this research's contribution to radio studies scholarship.

<div align="center">**Literature Review**</div>

Black Radio History

The documentation of Black radio's existence in the context of radio studies exists in several regards. This author focused on some historical contexts in a book chapter noting the Black-oriented programming block that began in 1929 with *'The All-Negro Hour'* in Chicago (2023) while Black radio listenership was documented via a column written by Joe Bostic in the 1940s (Stoever, 2019). Also, the successes and obstacles of Black radio networks were documented, and listed the National Negro Network (NNN) as the first in 1953 (Johnson, 1993-1994). Topically, scholars have investigated the language of Black radio announcers as well as their voices, delivery skills and aurality (Morant Williams, 2011; Baptiste, 2018; Fox, 2023). Methodologically, content analyses have been conducted (Oredein, 2015; Cobb Payton & Kvasny, 2012). Some theoretical approaches to academic research on radio include the power of radio to mobilize and inform the Black community through the lens of public pedagogy (Darder & Darder, 2013; Morant Williams, 2011; Cobb Payton & Kvasny, 2012; Johnson, 2004). A comparative analysis looked at programmatic practices between Black-owned and White-owned radio stations (Jeter, 1981), while Johnson's work compared KJLH-FM to other Black radio stations in the U.S. in terms of community connectedness (2004). Qualitative research examined how radio stations at historically

Black colleges and universities (HBCUs) were incorporated into teaching curricula along with the preservation of radio content (Smith & Bland, 2022).

The Black press is a term that is used to reference print publications while the term Black media encompasses Black radio. The Black press and Black media comprise a large portion of the reflexivity in the Black public sphere (Dawson, 2012) and have a long history of community activism and community service. Sarah Jackson's 2017 book chapter on the Black press in Baltimore specified the Black press's role of keeping a "record of the African-American experience and offered African Americans across the country membership in a civil society with a shared set of knowledge and political goals." That inclination was also apparent in one particular article, The Tom Joyner Morning Show: Activist Radio in an Age of Consolidation, co-authored by Dwight Brooks and George Daniels, which offered considerable insight into the history of Black radio and the history of radio more generally. Their 2002 research article on the *Tom Joyner Morning Show (TJMS),* which was a nationally syndicated morning radio program that aired on Black radio stations, tackled many of the topics that are addressed in this article (this article will address Black radio in general in the United States): the value of Black radio in the Black community in terms of content, awareness and activism, along with the community connection Black radio personnel have with their audiences. Brooks and Daniels provided a thorough overview of the U.S. radio landscape and governance as a build-up to focus on the *TJMS'* ability to mobilize listeners, which they often referred to as a "party for a purpose" (Brooks & Daniels, 2002; p. 25). One example of the *TJMS'* activism was when they called out Christie's, the auction house, which was preparing to auction off slavery artifacts (Brooks &

Daniels, 2002). Following a commentary on the situation, the *TJMS* shared a phone number so their listeners could call Christie's and voice their concerns (Brooks & Daniels, 2002). Allegedly, within hours, Christie's removed the items with the intention of donating the material to a museum (Brooks & Daniels, 2002).

Another focal point of Brooks and Daniels' research was the *TJMS'* contribution to the public sphere. They noted, "The show's official web site also includes general news and information, Sky Show information (live, remote broadcast locations; usually from cities that aired his show), voter registration, and census data. These services follow the lead of the public sphere model by contributing to a broader societal mission" (Brooks & Daniels, 2002, p. 20). A multitude of opinions was a consistent theme they remarked on relating to the public sphere. Diverse expressions are the critical foundation for democratic dialogue. Their article mentioned Joyner's unfaltering belief that Black radio has a responsibility to the community (Brooks & Daniels, 2002, p. 24). There is no denying that Black radio stations were (and are) the town hall for Black communities in most cities.

The documentary *Black Radio: Telling It Like It Was 25th Anniversary Edition* highlighted the community service work of WDIA in Memphis, Tennessee, "the first station to have all-Black on-air talent" (*Hour Two: "Jack Cooper & Al Beson" and "WDIA, The Goodwill Station,"* 2021). In the documentary Martha Jean "The Queen" Steinberg, recognized as one of the first female DJs in the U.S., acknowledged the importance of Black people being seen and heard. She described the efforts of WDIA to assist "the [Black] crippled children of Memphis," who seem to have been neglected in terms of

transportation resources (*Hour Two: "Jack Cooper & Al Beson" and "WDIA, The Goodwill Station,"* 2021).

Speaking of Black women on the radio, though Steinberg's place in radio history is well established, it is atypical to other women's experiences. As a result, the National Black Women in Radio (BWIR) Historic Collection and Oral History Project launched in 2023. It is a collaborative effort between the BWIR organization, the Atlanta University Center Robert W. Woodruff Library and the Library of Congress Radio Preservation Task Force (RPTF). The archive is "America's largest historical collection of contemporary commercial radio professional women of color ("BWIR Historical Collections," n.d.). The need for this project was also addressed in radio producer and professor Sonja D. Williams' article, where she mentioned the difficulties of locating Black radio station archives when she was assembling the documentary series *Black Radio: Telling It Like It Was* (2023). The BWIR proactive initiative prevents the erasure of Black women in radio's contributions to this legacy medium.

The Archives of African American Music and Culture (AAAMC) began in the 1990s and houses a large Black radio collection (*AAAMC Black Radio Collections*, n.d.). Among their sub-collections are legendary radio pioneer Jack "The Rapper" Gibson (aka Jockey Jack) from 1942-2000, the archives of William Barlow, a Black scholar who authored *Voice Over: The Making of Black Radio* and many other collections of Black radio's elite (*AAAMC Black Radio Collections*, n.d.).

The above is just a sampling of the scholarly output about Black radio. There is, however, room for additional academic research on this topic, respectively to examine

the personnel in tandem with community engagement (Brooks & Daniels, 2002; Fox, 2023) and PSRs.

Parasocial Interactions (PSIs), Parasocial Relationships (PSRs) and Radio

The definition of parasocial relationships (PSRs) involves "an enduring, one-sided connection between a viewer and a public figure" (Litner, 2022). This concept was first investigated in relation to media consumption by Donald Horton and Richard Wohl in 1956. They addressed this phenomenon from psychological and interpersonal communication perspectives using the terms performer and spectator, which when applied to audio-related studies has translated to host-listener relationships (Horton & Wohl, 1956). It is also important to cite the difference between parasocial relationships and parasocial interactions (PSI). According to Schlütz and Hedder, "PSI is a momentary, short-term activity within the situation and PSR as the long-term consequence of such interactions" (2021, p. 5). Also, "A parasocial interaction, an exposure that garners interest in a persona" (Rubin & McHugh, 1987) eventually becomes a parasocial relationship. Chung & Cho cited Horton and Wohl's work saying "Repeated exposure to the media persona causes the media user to develop illusions of intimacy, friendship, and identification" (2017, p. 482).

PSRs and PSIs, as applied to audio, have been explored extensively, from who has the upper hand in PSRs, hosts or listeners (Riles & Adams, 2021) to PSIs in talk radio (Rubin & Step, 2000) to the dynamics of host-listener relationships in podcasts (Schlütz & Hedder, 2021). Riles and Adams mentioned how PSIs develop into PSRs and once both parties recognize the association, they are classified as mutual social relationships (2021). Attraction is embedded into PSI and by default PSR. Rubin and

Step elaborated on the attraction element by correlating the perceived likeness the listener develops with the host (2000). The similarities and differences between radio and podcasts have been noted in academic literature, particularly with Schlütz and Hedder highlighting the intentional techniques that radio personnel use to increase the probability of extended listenership vis-à-vis audience engagement (2022). Naturally, the characteristics of PSIs and PSRs as mentioned above would likely exist in Black radio, however, the topic has not been explored from the perspective of Black radio personnel. The exploration of this research area would provide context to audience engagement outside of the typical consumer audience measurements like data from Nielsen. It is also an opportunity to build on listener loyalty and retention in Black radio.

Collective Memory/Cultural Memory/Black Public Memory

Mass media often documents history. According to Erll and Rigney, "'cultural memory' has emerged as a useful umbrella term to describe the complex ways in which societies remember their past using a variety of media" (2006, p. 111). Though Erll and Rigney's comments focused on cultural memory from the perspective of literature, they recognized the media's role in the process of cultural remembrance (2006). They posit that "Works of literature help produce collective memories by recollecting the past in the form of narratives" (Erll & Rigney, 2006, p. 112). My argument is the same for audio and the research essay's purpose. Often, people remember points in their lives based on music or films, what they saw on television news, or what they heard on the radio during a specific time.

The creation of oral history collections involving Black radio often summons the collective and cultural memory of the listening experience. It morphs into a community

phenomenon that includes historic Black events (like the assassination of Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr.), on-air contests, popular music, radio DJs, concerts, celebrity funerals and public affairs programming, just to name a few. These memoirs are valued as historical documentation and contributions to the Black public sphere. Black public memory of national events helps researchers and historians understand how those events have shaped Black communities throughout the U.S. Williams confirmed this ideology and shared how the *Black Radio: Telling It Like It Was* production team embedded the documentation and preservation processes into the making of the series and as a result captured some "undocumented revelations" that are now available in archival form (2023). Feminist scholar Caroline Mitchell makes the case for how the United Kingdom's community radio archive for Fem FM is also a "maker of cultural memory" (2015, p. 126). She says it is a way for women broadcasters to reclaim their place in history (Mitchell, 2015). The same can be said for other marginalized communities who are often left out of mainstream narratives about cultural production in media. Mitchell would go on to highlight an important note from Andrew Flinn on the usefulness of archival practices in the historical context (Mitchell, 2015). She says that Flinn points to the role of autonomous archival projects in the preservation process and specifies that user-generated and community-focused initiatives are influential for historical accounts (Mitchell, 2015).

Regarding media content, the powerful and everyday moments in our Black history have not been totally undocumented. Medhurst, Winfield and Harris looked at the television show *The Wonder Years* in terms of Black public memory and Afro-Nostalgia, calling it "an intentional recuperation of Black public memory" (Medhurst et

al., 2022, p. 136). They would add that retelling Black historical experiences makes way for a better understanding and "advancement of contemporary Black resistance" (Medhurst et al., 2022, p. 136). According to the authors, Black public memory aims to "foster racially ethical engagement with historical events" (Medhurst et al., 2022, p. 149). Medhurst, et al, called the producers of *The Wonder Years* "cultural producers of Black counterstories" (Medhurst et al., 2022, p. 149), within this framework, my positioning is that Black radio personnel hold a similar position as storytellers for the Black community as a microcosm. Labeling Black public memory as Afro-nostalgia "enables the representation of Black joy and mourning" (Medhurst et al., 2022, p. 149). Black radio personnel play a key role in delivering news and information to the Black community, information that can bring happiness or sorrow. Thus, the documentation of their collective narratives is important to the Black public sphere.

The above points in academic literature will be assistive in the goal of this original research, which is to show the significance of the community connection that Black radio personnel have with their audiences. The framing of this research essay, through collective and cultural memory narratives, will address the following questions:

RQ1: In what ways do the collective and cultural memories of Black radio personnel enhance the Black public sphere?

RQ2: What are the defining characteristics in developing parasocial relationships and interactions between Black radio personalities and their audiences?

Method

This qualitative research has two approaches: an autoethnographic methodology and a questionnaire. Autoethnography is considered a decolonial qualitative research

approach that involves the inclusion of personal experiences (Ellis et al., 2011). The author has worked at a Black-owned radio network and a Black-oriented radio station. Those experiences afford her an insight that will correlate with the questionnaire responses from Black radio personnel. The questionnaire was designed for a small sample of key informants to capture short narratives that could be expounded upon for discussion. Traditionally, key informants are people who have attained an influential status (Marshall, 1996) like radio station personnel. This approach has been utilized in qualitative research in the humanities for the ability to extract quality data relatively quickly (Marshall, 1996). Speaking to the previous point, a small sample of key informants was sought under the rationale that an "analysis of smaller data sets may well produce more meaningful results" (Mahrt & Scharkow, 2013). The questionnaire was divided into three categories: Black Radio Personnel Narratives; Developing Parasocial Interactions and Relationships with Your Listeners and Demographics. There were 17 questions, mostly open-ended, not including the demographic questions. The questions asked included their Black radio station affiliation, memorable Black radio station listener moments, the value of public affairs programming on Black radio stations, and their perspective on developing parasocial relationships with Black radio listeners. There were also optional basic demographic questions relating to gender and age. The gender question was intentionally written as open-ended to give the participants agency and autonomy in their responses. The criteria for participation in the questionnaire was self-reported employment in Black radio. The questionnaire, a Google form, was circulated to potential respondents whom the author previously worked with, academics who worked in Black radio, and through communication with

12

current Black radio employees on social media platforms or email. In addition to addressing the research questions, the questions on the questionnaire were designed based on the literature on PSIs and PSRs. Finally, as it relates to mapping this research project, Mahrt and Scharkow mentioned that research questions should be designed with room to explore (2013). With that in mind, an inductive analysis approach was utilized to draw on the narratives from Black radio personnel concerning the topics posed in each research question. Next, the findings will be addressed followed by the discussion section.

Findings

There were 15 responses to the questionnaire, and participants stated they had worked at Black radio stations in Alabama, California, Connecticut, Florida, Louisiana, New York, Ohio, and Virginia. [2] Demographic representation skewed toward older adults, with all the respondents reporting that they were over the age of 40. Twelve of the 15 participants answered the open-ended gender question: seven were male, four were female, and one had no response. The thematically arranged findings section will address the data that was gathered from the questionnaire from the key informants. The first section focused on collective and cultural memory, followed by responses to the PSIs and PSRs questions. The findings section concludes with an autoethnographic narrative from this author.

Collective and Cultural Memory, the Black Public Sphere and Black Radio

There were various responses to the question about memorable moments at Black radio stations with many reporting experiences of being on-air or encountering

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[2] Several participants listed more than one Black radio station where they had worked during their radio careers.

celebrities. Some commented on situations relating to the listeners and celebrity-related incidents. One male who worked in the Midwest shared his story of how incarcerated individuals would call the radio station to leave voice messages and charge the call to the radio station. He began to call the phone line, The Lockdown Line. He recounted that it was a blessing on Mother's Day because he received many "loving, emotional, and moving messages to their mothers" from incarcerated individuals. Even though he says he felt it was a public service, the station administration did not see it as a financially sustainable option. Another male DJ, also from the Midwest, spoke of how, in 1990, he learned of the death of then-up-and-coming comedian Robin Harris. The radio station had heavily promoted Harris' upcoming comedy show and gave out tickets on the air. The DJ was on the air the night Harris was scheduled to perform in the city, so he had to break the news on-air that Harris had passed away that morning in Chicago. As a gesture of compassion, the DJ says he "took listener calls (some on-air, most not) and allowed people to express their emotions about the situation."

Radio station engagement with their audiences often comes in the form of contests. When asked about any memorable contests (RQ1) at Black radio stations where they worked, several responded that they could not recall. Those who did respond mentioned contests that included national sponsors like beverage companies Orange Crush and King Cobra. An intern from the south recalled when he first experienced radio's power as a street team member. They were tasked with issuing gas cards in response to increased gas prices. He says, "People were real grateful to get a little bit of relief at the pump."

Black radio stations have a rich history of coverage of local and national events. This question was asked of Black radio personnel key informants. Some respondents generally cited voter registration efforts, coverage of President Barack Obama's first presidential campaign, Black-on-Black crime, police brutality, Trayvon Martin's murder, Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr.'s birthday and AIDS awareness. The story about a missing, Black 6-year-old was shared by a former male DJ in the Midwest. The child had gone missing in 1998 and the community was called on to assist in the search for her whereabouts. To the horror of the child's family and the community, they discovered that she'd been murdered. Just as Black radio listeners came to support one household, in the Northeastern U.S., one former male radio announcer mentioned how the community rallied around a councilwoman who was labeled as the least qualified by the local mainstream newspaper. He did not provide specifics like the name of the radio program but said the councilwoman was invited on the show, to be interviewed and listeners were invited to call in and voice their opinions during the show as well. He says that the councilwoman ended up winning her reelection and "she was the top vote-getter." Other examples of community mobilization involved the *TJMS*. A female participant, who was employed at several Black radio stations, noted when Joyner and Tavis Smiley, a frequent contributor to the *TJMS*, addressed the issue of Non-Urban Dictates (NUD). NUD was the undocumented and inequitable practice of advertisers excluding Black and Latino radio stations from advertising contracts ("FCC Adopts Proposal to Eliminate a No Urban Dictates Advertising Practices," 2007). The former female announcer says Joyner and Smiley encouraged their audiences to take action by calling CEOs, not purchasing specific products and boycotting companies like

CompUSA, who were reluctant to advertise to Black audiences directly; it's a case that Brooks and Daniels elaborated on in their research article (2002).

With thousands of radio stations in the U.S., what makes Black radio stations unique? Black radio personnel indicated that mix shows, abandoning music to discuss violence-related issues, interviewing Black leaders on issues related to the Black community and the *TJMS'* audio drama "It's Your World" – part of the *TJMS'* syndicated program offerings. Public service programming has been a staple for Black radio. The respondents also noted the importance of addressing the topics presented in those programs like minority health issues and racial capitalism.

Most Black radio personnel also grew up listening to Black radio. They fondly emphasized the influence of Black radio in their lives. One former female DJ who worked in the Pacific professed, "Black radio was the soundtrack of my young life." She cited several music groups, like The Blue Bells, as being the inspiration for her interest in singing. A male announcer who grew up in the Midwest and went on to work in the region concurred about the music. His memories of the station he listened to as a teen balances with his recollection of the music from the 70s and 80s as "simply the best!" Black radio intrigued another male to the point that he became a "professional broadcaster." He worked for nearly forty years at radio stations in Louisiana, Ohio, Georgia and others. Finally, a different male key informant said, "I gravitated towards working in radio as I grew older, but I also recognized the importance of an actual community and the importance of sharing information." The documentation of local Black history, like musical influences and voter registration drives, through the narratives of Black radio personnel, as mentioned here, captures unrecognized stories

and builds on Black radio's role in the Black public sphere. This point will be addressed more fully in the discussion section.

The Development of PSIs and PSRs Among Black Radio Personnel

The questionnaire included definitions of parasocial relationships. This definition was mentioned previously in the literature review section. Regarding parasocial relationships, 13 of the 15 participants responded positively when asked if they had experienced a parasocial relationship at some point during their career in Black radio. Their 'good' stories included conversations with regular callers like this scenario shared by a male key informant, "I remember there was a woman who would call in to a station that she actually couldn't hear based upon where she lived. She just wanted to be put on hold to listen to what was playing." That same participant provided another example that highlights the impact of PSIs and PSRs, he said, "I've also developed friendships/relationships that started during on-air shifts, that extended into the real world. Some folks I still interact with even after being off the air for twenty-plus years." One respondent did not elaborate on PSR but mentioned groupies. Another respondent framed their comments on PSR as the following: "Listeners that were acquaintances seemed to think they were promoted into the friend's category (sometimes they would). Some strangers would speak to my co-host and myself as if they knew us." The perception of boundaries came up as well from several participants. One person commented, "Others have overstepped boundaries by asking us to hang out." Another participant said, "I have experienced a few parasocial relationships throughout my years in radio. They have varied from professional to personal. Nothing has resulted in anything severe. Most are relationships that I still maintain to this day." While someone

else stated, "I do know a few people that know me through my work and feel we are actually friends, rather than just being familiar. They see and live through social media posts and always want to be included on activities that they wouldn't normally be invited in on if they are not a friend." One more perspective: "Once we got flown out by fans to surprise their husband at a party. Others have overstepped boundaries by asking us to hang out." The comments from Black radio personnel key informants

Autoethnographic Narrative from My Black Radio Days

This author's experience working in Black radio led to understanding better how and why host-listener relationships develop, including how PSRs develop into real-life relationships. For example, my memory of one long-time listener was that she often called the radio in the 90s, proclaiming to be the biggest Luther Vandross fan. Furthermore, she often owned up to that fandom by consistently getting through on the contest line, answering trivia questions, and showing up at station events usually related to Luther Vandross. At some point, the listener and this author exchanged phone numbers and conversed outside my morning drive-time hours. It has been years since I have worked at a Black-oriented radio station in the Mid-Atlantic region, but I still keep in touch with that listener. Not all my interactions with listeners turned out as my friendship did with that listener. One day, I received a very graphic letter from an incarcerated person who also informed me that he would visit me at the station when he was released. The look on my face must have shown my disbelief because one of my colleagues asked me what was wrong and insisted on reading the letter. Thankfully, things moved pretty quickly concerning what to do, which was to report the case to several authorities who, among other things, insisted that I have a police escort for an

extended period of time. It was nerve-wracking, but thankfully, it ended up being a minor incident. Let me share a more positive PSI to balance out the incarcerated person-as-a-listener experience. As one male previously mentioned, individuals with justice system involvement not only listen to the radio but will also try to call the radio station and often write letters. My colleague and I hosted the morning show, and we invariably mentioned personal attributes like birthdays. Well, one day in the last hour of our morning show and around the time of my birthday, the post office delivered an abnormally-sized envelope addressed to me. My colleagues encouraged me to open it while we were still on the air, and I did. Inside was a large handmade birthday card signed by what seemed like all of the incarcerated people at a correctional facility within listening range of the radio station. It was touching that they would use their time to contact me that way. I was (and remain) appreciative of their gesture, and of course, we gave them a shout-out on the radio. The irony of documenting some of my experiences working in Black radio is that the history of the radio stations where I've worked is not archived; sure, you might find an article or audio clip here and there, but there is no official collection of the memories and accounts of PSRs or PSIs that are shared here in this research. It is my desire to share my pride in having worked in Black radio because it is a unique opportunity. As active contributors to the Black public sphere, Black radio personnel broadcast music and entertainment and are deeply connected to and engaged with the cultural, social, and community aspects of the Black experience. Black radio has offered and continues to provide a platform to celebrate diversity, address critical issues, and foster a strong sense of community.

Discussion

The discussion of the findings offers specific accounts of Black radio personnel's collective and cultural memory of Black radio (RQ1). This point harkens to Stoever's research of Joe Bostic's print archives (cultural memory) of Black radio listenership in the 1940s (2019). For the first research question: How does collective and cultural memory contribute to the Black public sphere in relation to Black radio personnel experiences (Dawson, 2012)? The key informant testimonials included in this research build on the aforementioned archival projects (*AAAMC Black Radio Collections*, n.d.).; BWIR Historical Collections, n.d.), contributes to cultural remembrance by connecting Black public memory to historical national and local events (Medhurst et al., 2022), recognizes Black radio personnel as influencers in collective and cultural memory space and pays homage to the tireless work of Black radio personnel and their audiences as harbingers of community service.

The documentation of the small sample stories for this exploratory research essay contributes to previous and ongoing efforts to capture the radio phenomena from the standpoint of Black radio personnel. Though *Black Radio: Telling Like It Was* was repackaged for its 25th anniversary in 2021 (Williams, 2023) and the AAAMC hosts an online and physical archive (*AAAMC Black Radio Collections*, n.d.), there remains a plethora of stories that could be replicated using the oral history methodology. The documentary series won numerous awards and recognitions, which adds a level of validation for the need to share the narratives of those who have been employed at Black radio stations, such as those shared in this research. This research speaks to the historic role of cultural remembrance (Erll & Rigney, 2006). For example, the telling of

the passing of comedian Robin Harris, who experienced posthumous fame based on projects released after his death. Archives and recollections of historical events of interest to Black communities give agency to Black radio personnel as "maker[s] of cultural memory" (Mitchell, 2015). The online collections from AAAMC BWIR support the cultural memory maker positioning. The BWIR projects ensure their constituency's stories have a place in American radio history. As a part of this research, some former Black radio personnel discussed mobilization efforts like the call for the community to search for a missing Black child. That action was like the activist power of the nationally syndicated Black radio program, the *TJMS*, as detailed in the work of Brooks & Daniels (2002). Black audiences possess the clout to make a difference and Black radio personnel are keenly aware of that characteristic, which they capitalize on when needed. The counternarrative of the experiences of Black radio personnel is necessary in an environment where hostile entities are working to scrutinize the contributions of Black and African people. Perhaps more importantly, conjuring Black memory as joyful Afro-nostalgia is its own reckoning (Medhurst et al., 2022).

The second research question was more exploratory in nature. It focused on identifying the defining characteristics of developing parasocial relationships and interactions between Black radio personalities and their audiences. Those characteristics include harnessing the affordances of radio, intimacy and closeness through voice (Fox, 2023), and setting boundaries as it relates to PSRs. Black radio personnel admit that on-air interactions, PSIs, which are often generated based on familiarity, can frequently lead to PSRs and even long-term interpersonal relationships. Horton and Wohl (1956) stated that recurrent interactions could result in bilateral

relations. Through this closeness, Black DJs establish a rapport, thus giving them the capability to actuate their listening communities. As a result, Black radio exemplifies a level of loyalty that is unrivaled. This was confirmed in Nielsen's 2022 radio report with listenership reaching over 6.4 million people per week. This research demonstrated that Black radio personnel use their instinct in terms of boundary setting related to PSR. Setting boundaries of who was given permission to move through the PSI-PSR-interpersonal relationship process was not made explicit, however, some participants seemed to act on their intuition in their judgment of opportunities to move forward from a PSR and into mutual social relationships (Riles and Adams, 2021). This heuristic component of the research identified the Black radio host's role in PSIs and PSRs and the results could be meaningful for future research on audience development.

Conclusion

The perspectives shared here about Black radio personnel provide a glimpse into the work environment at Black radio stations. The impact of this research and the narratives that have been shared are far-reaching and contribute to the Black public sphere as a record of the Black experience (Jackson, 2017). This interdisciplinary scholarly output also appeals to audience studies, especially in terms of documenting previously undocumented accounts of Black radio personnel as it relates to PSIs and PSRs. The radio preservation efforts provide a missing component in terms of digital ethnographies for Black radio archives. The collective memory of community activism, concerts, celebrity appearances at radio stations and the fandom of it all adds to the fabric of this centuries-old medium in America.

The limitation of this research was the small sample. However, a small quality sample of key informants could merit salient data (Mahrt & Scharkow, 2013). The collective and cultural memory lens brings a sense of community and belonging to the topic. This can be illustrated more fully by capturing a sample that broadly covers the United States. To build on this research, in-depth interviews and focus groups could be administered to keenly look at the emotionality that radio listeners develop regarding PSIs and PSRs specifically among Black radio personnel.

Meanwhile, the potential erasure of Black memories related to Black radio is plausible. More efforts to expand on existing archives, like BWIR and the AAAMC's Black Radio collection, should be initiated. Additionally, autobiographical content and oral history projects of Black radio personnel should be actively sought. This research essay contributes to documenting the livelihood of the host-listener relationship from the perspective of Black radio. The bond between the Black community and their DJs is thick and as a result, the development of PSRs is a given.

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