

Pass The Mic- Women Finding Space on Air: Transcribed Interview Becky Coles

Interviewer One: How long have you been in the radio industry?

Becky Coles: Uh, Since 2002. which is.. when I do the math I always go ‘Wow, It's been a really long time now!’ I always feel like I just started, but apparently I haven't! (laughs)

Interviewer One: About 14 years, that’s great.

Becky Coles: Yeah

Interviewer Two: Did you ever feel you were at a disadvantage as a woman? Please explain.

Becky Coles: I think you always feel that way because you go in and you, you think, ‘no we're all equal!’ And then you realize that as much as you'd like to pretend there's not an old boys club, I think it's still exists. Especially when I first started out where you would go into a room and the men were going out to have a drink or going for wings, but the women were rarely invited. It was-- you really had to become one of the guys to do that, which was fine for me. I was more that type, but I still felt like I had to kind of fight my way into being included in the things. If it was mainly a male thing that was going on.

Interviewer One: Hm, what did you have to do specifically to fight your way in?

Becky Coles: Just kind of always have to be ‘Hey! remember me?’ like without being, without literally saying ‘Hey, remember me?’ So you always wanted to just be present and make sure they knew who you were. And if you saw them having a conversation, even if really you had work to do unless it was time sensitive because it was on the air you kind of felt like, ‘Oh, I should sit around and talk and be social’ I was a shy person, so for me to kind of be that social person wasn't always easy. But you felt like you were missing something, If you weren't part of that. Or you hear ‘Oh, the other day we had this discussion!’ and you realize it wasn't at work, they have this discussion somewhere else. So you felt like you were always missing part of part of that discussion or part of the detail that had already been decided.

Interviewer Two: So did you feel like you had to adapt to this kind of “boys club” mentality? To work your way into that part of the industry?

Becky Coles: I think so. luckily, I always got along with men better than women anyway, so from that aspect, it was fine. But I think for me I felt like I wasn't going to go as far as I wanted to, if I didn't know the men in the business.

Interviewer One: Um, so a lot of these questions will probably cover similar ground, but I'll ask anyway..

Becky Coles: Right! No, that's okay.

Interviewer One: Uh, did you ever experience sexism in your job? Please explain.

Becky Coles: How would you define sexism? And I have a reason for asking that, but I just want to make sure that I'm interpreting it...

Interviewer One: Well, how would you define sexism? (Laughs)

Becky Coles: Um, well I think being treated differently because you're a woman. That's how I would ultimately describe it, but I know everyone has kind of a different definition. So I just want to make sure that that's--- Okay (laughs) because I just, my answer would be different, depending on what you you interpret It is as. Um definitely I've seen it over the years, but most recently in the past couple of years, which may people may find funny because they might think 'Well, no, we're all its 2015 and it's progressive and everyone's moved on.' But I think I've certainly felt like I've gotten the "pat on the head" more than once. And I think if a man had gone in with similar concerns, It would have been treated differently..and I don't know if it would have the issue would have been dealt with differently? But I know for sure the reaction from the boss would have been different. And my boss is a man, and I think that if I had been a man going in, he maybe would have said 'Yeah, whatever' or laughed with you about it or said ' Oh the guy's a dick'. But because you're a woman, it's kind of, 'Well, don't take things so personally.' which i was, I know what they meant. But that's not the answer you want to hear when you're going in, especially as a woman to get something dealt with. You kind of want to feel like you're being understood, and I think.. um, to kind of expand on that there's always this fear is a woman to come forward and mention things because you're going to be treated as too sensitive. You know, and you're like, No, this is a real issue.

Interviewer One: So to clarify you were actually going to a male boss to talk about an issue of being treated in a sexist way? Is that...

Becky Coles: Um, not necessarily

Interviewer One: Okay

Becky Coles: It was more just like a personnel issue, and you kind of go, 'I don't want to be.. I don't want anyone to think I'm being over sensitive.' So I'll wait and wait, and then finally you go no, I have to come forward and just say that this is an issue And it's not me being a sensitive woman, it's me being an employee feeling that I'm not being treated properly. But the response was, 'Well, don't take things so personally.' And I think if I was a guy would have, the response would have been different.

Interviewer One: Yeah

Interviewer Two: Um, do you feel women have a harder time getting on air jobs?

Becky Coles: Yes! (Laughs) Um, I I think obviously, anywhere will tell you 'We want the best person for the job.' But studies actually will prove that a woman's voice is harder for people to accept. And so, whenever we put a woman on the air, when we look at the text boards, if let's say you have a man and a woman and they're pretty equal, you'll get the rudest, most violists text in about how they hate this woman, but the guy's great. Even though the guy maybe said something really inappropriate, doesn't matter because for some reason the women-- and I've seen, it like normally I would say 'Prove it' But I've seen it happen where the women just don't test the same. Um, but obviously you wanna have equal, but I think men just seem to... to kind of pass by. I don't know how else to explain it, but listeners will just accept them, even if they don't agree with them. They just kind of, they'll accept them. Especially in a talk radio format, women seem to test worse. Where we get the most criticism from listeners, which is interesting. But even at one of the stations I've worked at in the past, I said, 'Did you know you have no women announcers?' and this was a music format and they looked at me and they said, 'Well, we have-- Oh, no, you're right because she's not here anymore.' And I said, 'No, you don't even have a traffic reporter anymore.' I said, 'It's now a male traffic reporter' and I said 'You should have a woman even if its voice tracked' Because there wasn't a lot of live announcers, 'I think you should have a woman on there ' and they laughed. (laughs) They said, 'Well, why would we want a woman?' And i didnt know what to say... I just kind of said ' Well it was just a suggestion.' (Laughs) Because I don't see why.. Why wouldn't you? Especially if it's a music format that is both men and women listening. What's wrong with a girl? It's not like it's gonna be.. stereotypical female type of content, like I just, I was really confused with what they were worried about, but I just kinda 'Okay, well, bye!' And because I honestly didn't know how to answer it without just being like ' You're stupid!' because I really just.. at this point in the business, Why why would it matter? Wouldn't you want different voices? But maybe that's just me. I don't know. (laughs)

Interviewer One: Do you feel women have a harder time getting management jobs

Becky Coles: I don't know. I think there's just more men in the business, so I think when they're looking at managers, they tend to have a bigger pool to pick from from men. Although, where I work, our General Manager is a woman and she worked through and did sales. So I think she proves that it's not impossible. I'm trying to think now if I look back, we tended to have men as managers or in positions of authority. But... maybe it's part of that whole socializing thing where it kind of continues on, right. So you see okay, well, they're they're going out there, hanging around and then who are we gonna promote? 'Oh, well, there's more men to choose from, and we all socialize with this guy, and we played golf with him and everything else.' But lots of women play golf...so I don't think you could really use that as an example anymore. And last a few years ago, you know, the now mayor of the city made a reference about people playing golf, and he didn't mean it as a woman or man thing. He just said 'that's a good way to be social and get ahead' but people took it as a man woman thing. But I used to work with them, and I'm pretty sure he didn't mean it that way. I think he meant you have to do other things to be social in the business, and that happened to be... it just kind of fell apart on the comment. (laughs) Um, but I wouldn't say It's impossible or difficult, I think it's just the pool you're choosing from still is a lot of men in the business.

Interviewer Two: And do you feel women in general are treated differently than men in the radio industry? How?and if you have any examples.

Becky Coles: I think people are still afraid that women are sensitive. And I, you know, I would say I'm a pretty tough person... like I'm overly emotional about everything in general, like everything makes me cry, but like even good things. But, um, I think there's always this fear of, 'Well, how is she going to take it?' Instead of just.. like I'm pretty tough, so just tell me, Is it not working? Is it-- do you need to make it staffing adjustment, or do you want me to do something different? But they're afraid of how a woman's gonna take it more than a man where, like, believe me, men have just as big an ego, especially in this business. But for some reason they're more worried about how a woman will take news, instead of how a man will take news. And for me, I go look, if you tell me respectfully that 'something's not working or we need to move you into a different job' I'm fine with that. It's... I don't know how else to explain it, I think that they were still that fear that women will get over emotional, that things are, How will they handle it? Because they're a woman and they might not come right out and say that, but that's, that's how they're approaching things, is they will sit you down differently to talk about things,

Interviewer One: Have you or any other women you know, ever been paid less than a man doing the same or similar work in the industry that you know of?

Becky Coles: Not that I know off. I wouldn't be surprised, but I can't prove it either. Which is... um, I tried to kind of ask around and not obviously get a number before I came here. But I tried to kind of get an indication, and it sounded like I think we're all, well, pretty, equally paid. Um, but it wouldn't surprise me if someone said, 'Oh, this guy makes five or ten grand more than you.' but, um, I'd like to hope that its ability factored into that, not just man or woman, but I don't know. When you read stories, you go. 'Oh okay! maybe there's more that then I think there is, right.

Interviewer One: Yeah. Yeah, I guess one of the issues is if there is no salary disclosure for people that you don't really know, the negotiation is done in secret right? So it's hard to know

Interviewer Two: Do you feel the radio industry is a fair and equitable place for women today? Why? Why not?

Becky Coles: Oh, I don't know. I think sometimes it feels like, 'Yeah, we're given more opportunity!' or just, I should say just as much opportunity as anyone else. But then there's times when you go 'Wait a minute.' When you think about it, you go 'Was that decision made because that person's a man?' But then you.. I don't know, there's this fear as a woman to go ' Am I worried about the sexism side of it? or am I worried about being treated differently because of a woman? Am I over reading things?' When really no the guy was better at the job right? and I think that's a negative aspect of it, too. As woman where they kind of go down that cycle of 'Is it because I am worrying about it for the right reasons? or am I worrying about it for the wrong reasons?' And sometimes I think people end up in jobs just because... that's where they end up. And I think we read too much into it. But as women, when you read stories of other jobs where this has happened, you think, 'Oh, well, maybe there is, maybe I've given them too much benefit of the doubt that they looked into it, and really it was just It was easier to hire a man.' I don't know, but I think we kind of, we women over analyze it instead of just kind of 'Okay!' But maybe sometimes we need to over analyze it, but sometimes maybe we need to just accept whatever decision was made as like it was fair. But we're thinking it's not, I don't know. I'm not sure to be perfectly honest. I don't know if that's really the answer you're looking for, but I think sometimes it feels like it, and sometimes it doesn't.

Interviewer Two: There's right or wrong answers (laughs)

Becky Coles: (laughs) Well, I don't wanna kind of like also taken answer were like that's not at all what we were hoping for.

Interviewer Two: (Laughs) no that's fine, if we end up with 'Everything is equal and great!' that's a good outcome too.

Interviewer One: What advice do you have for radio owners and managers with respect to women working in radio?

Becky Coles: Um, I think to be more transparent about why decisions are made... in general. And I would say that for any employee, but especially with women. Um, let them know, Did you make that decision because you know the woman has a family? And um, because-- I think I don't have kids, but I certainly see friends of mine that have young kids that are worried to do things, or worried they're gonna miss an opportunity because they have kids. And so, there's always that question. And then I think the boss needs to have the discussion ahead of time and say, 'Do you want the job?' or Whatever it might be or the extra but the responsibilities And like often a woman might say 'No, because I want to go home and take care of my kids.' Okay, fine. They may still get offered that job, and then it's up to them to say no, but give them the option to say no or give them the option to... to at least be considered for something. Because I think often they go, 'Oh, well, she wouldn't want in any way.' Well how do you know? Maybe she can make it work, maybe she has her mom who can look after her kids, as far as kids go on. And um, that's not even, that's not personal, that's just what I've seen for people that have kids. But I think, um, assuming that a woman can't handle news is... and when I say news, I don't mean hit like news broadcasting, but news as far as changes at the station or something like that. I think, um, let them react and they're gonna react. However, they're going to react, and they might handle it well or they might cry, or they might who knows... but don't kind of change how you do it just because you want it.--you think you're being sensitive. Because really, I feel like it's just I would say it's head padding, but that's kind of I feel like how it's kind of, um, that's how it's approached. And I think women can handle a lot more than they're given credit for and um, let us make the decision and let us react how we're gonna react. But we see men handle things inappropriately all the time. But for some reason, anger is okay. But being emotional about things in other ways isn't. At least that's how I've interpreted it is, if I go in and I'm concerned about something, don't treat it as a woman being oversensitive, which it might be. But a man could come in with the same concerns, and it might be a guy being oversensitive about the situation, not necessarily emotional over sense of just not reacting properly. But I think if broadcasters understand that.. there's a lot of great women out there and we're all willing and able to work hard, we just maybe we don't approach it the same way. We don't approach, not working the same, like that's why men and women get along and don't everything so differently. So if they understand, and maybe that's something for management to understand that.. and I don't-- I'm not one for forcing people to take sensitivity courses or anything like that. But even just getting the difference and how we work and how we approached jobs. Like I'm not the best at going into a manager and just kind of

hanging out in their office. Were as guys are a lot better, I find it just kind of stopping by they're more comfortable with 'Hey, how's it going?' Were as me, I'm like if I don't have to go in there-- maybe it's because I've had host that have gotten in trouble. You know, I'm not volunteering to go in to talk to my boss if I don't have to because I'm more of the.. well I have other stuff to do. But is it right? Or wrong? I don't know, but it's that's just my style. So I think if they understand that, it's it's not, It's not a woman man thing.. It's just how people work. People work differently, so that would be probably my my biggest, my biggest recommendation would be to to be fair with pay. I don't think there needs to be a difference, and I think if you're paying differently, it should be responsibility based, not gender based.

Interviewer Two: Yeah, And what advice do you have for women seeking to build a career in the radio industry?

Becky Coles: It would be the same for a man or woman. Just learn as much as you can and be willing to do as much as you can. And what your... what you're available for now may not be what you're available for in the future. But if your lifestyle is to be flexible now, we'll do it. Take as much as you can, as far as learning goes. And then down the road, if you have kids or, you know you might have to take care of your parents, well, then you go to your boss and you explain it to them that things have changed. But I think... that there seems to be in a younger generation-- although I'm considered a millennial. But there seems to be, like two generations and millennials (laughs) where there's a lot of entitlement and a lot of...just thinking things are going to be given to you. And it's like in this business, especially now...man or woman, you're gonna have to work three times as hard. So if you're a woman, show that you're available and show that you want to learn and be-- Don't be afraid to stand up for yourself, because I think that's the thing to for women were afraid to stand up for ourselves. Because I know, I guess there's still that feeling, at least for my generation of you don't stand, you just do whatever you're told in general man or woman. But especially as a woman, it's like 'I don't want to cause trouble! I just want to keep my job and do my job well..I just won't say anything' And then you have situations where you then eventually have to go in like I did, and then it's like, ' Well Why did you come to me?' 'Well, I didn't want to cause anything... ' Okay, well, sometimes there's a good reason to stand up for yourself, and I think women need to, you gotta pick your battles. But don't be afraid to... you know, jobs come and go and bosses come and go. And you might feel like 'Oh, well, I don't wanna..' and well the boss could be gone tomorrow, you don't know. And wouldn't you rather say, 'At least I tried to do something.' Like, you know, you look at the Ghomeshi trial as an example, and I totally get why that became the mess that it did. Because no one wants to-- especially in the CBC...no one wanted to be the person that kind of... necessarily got him fired or got themselves fired. But I think now, like there's kind of pre Ghomeshi trial for example, in post, and I think now that we've heard so much about it, no, you don't have to put up with things. And but that's a man or woman, that's not necessarily-- I think men are afraid to

speaking up to. But as women more, more were more inclined to just be quiet because that's traditionally what has happened, right?

Interviewer One: So do you have any other stories or anything else that you want to share on this topic of, you know, whether you have particular barriers or challenges or moments that you want to relate...

Becky Coles: I think for the pay thing, um, there was a lot of time where I didn't know how to negotiate pay. So you go in and you're thinking like, for example, especially if you're part time and then they go, 'We want to give you a full time job.' You're like, 'Hey, that's great!' and they go and 'This is what we want to pay you' And you think, 'Well, that sucks' And you know that the business in general doesn't pay what it should. But you accept that, and then you say, 'Well, is there any movement there?' And they go 'No.' And you go, 'Oh, okay. Well..' And then you're thinking, well, if I push back on that, is that because... you start double thinking yourself. You're like, was it because that's what the budget is? Or is it because they feel that's what I'm worth? Or is it because I'm a woman and that's what I'm worth? And, and I don't know if men have the same thought process or if they just say, well, I want this much more. Like I don't know how the negotiation goes like I'm sure I should probably negotiate better (laughs). But, then I think there's still that fear of a woman trying to ask for too much...and I don't know why we put that on ourselves, because I don't ever told me you're worth a certain amount. But, I think especially in this climate, who doesn't want a full time job? So you kind of just 'Okay, thanks!' because I don't want to get into it. and then find out, 'Well we found someone else that will do it for the first price' And then uh nevermind! So I think that's something, but I don't know if that's just man, woman or just more women. I don't know to be honest, because sometimes when I talk to people but pay... which is something like stab you, you don't want to talk about it. But then you find out, 'Oh, like men are going through it just as much.' just maybe in a different way. But.. so then I think, Well, maybe it's just me that's afraid to to really try and poke for it, (laughs) and you know, because you don't want to, you don't know out price yourself. Well, they go 'Ah, never mind!' like oh what did I do! (laughs) I could have at least had a job, it wouldn't have paid what I wanted, but least I would have had something, right? Um.. but I think I think I pretty much tried to cover it in my answers of giving examples. There's just, they're still men that feel that they are, they're in charge. And that I think there's a generational thing where some guys were really respectful about how they treat you, even though they're still treating you is the 'Gal in the office'. But then there's people that, um, they're not respectful and there's fingers not being in that type of thing. Like I've never had that from someone I've worked with, It's been more people that have come in as guess. Where they--because if the role I have, I get them their drinks and everything else. But it's very like 'Well isn't that cute? they have a girl that gets your drinks.' And it's like, What the heck? Like why would you say I don't loud? like, Yes, that's what I do,

but to say that it's cute, I think especially for someone like me that's not as girly...you just kind of go, 'Where did this come from?' 'And then you don't want to say anything because it's like never mind. And you're also trying to be respectful of people that have come in, cause you've invited them in! So you don't wanna invite the man and then tell them off-- Although some of them you'd really like to (laughs) But I think there's just those stereotypical roles, but that's-- they happen to hire a woman in the job that I got, and that's part of it is making sure the guests are comfortable. And if its part of it, getting them coffee then it's part of it, but I never I'm never offended by it until people say stuff like that. Where I kind of don't understand where it came from, but okay, fine. And then often you look at the age... and you go, Well, that's what it is, Um.. It's the age of the man that has said that ,where you go 'Okay, so they're 60, 70 and that's, that was a novelty or very mad men.' I think..luckily, we're well past that. Trying to think, I think women are afraid to push back if a man is flirting, because then they'll seem oversensitive. Whereas I have a good sense of humour, I can put up with a lot, but then sometimes guys will say stuff where to me is fine, but I think they've said it to other people where you go 'I don't know if that's appropriate to say to them.' But that's for them to say, like unless it was something really bad, you just stay out of it because maybe they're fine with it or I don't know. But I would certainly have no problem saying to them afterwards 'Did you have an issue with that?' And just saying 'Because if you did, like, you could say something about it' Um, but I don't know, like men are funny (laughs) like so are we, but men are just interesting. And how they approach things and feel that flirting is, is okay. And sometimes it works, and sometimes you go, 'Well, that was way to far' Right? So I don't know how you kind of go into a workplace and say, 'Well, there should be none of that' Because sometimes that's part of how you get along with people is just kind of like a sense of humour. But then, sometimes I think people take that too far. But I don't know... It's, I'm kind of different that way where I just ignore it, and some people don't that's fine. But then some people... I'm trying not to name names or give full examples, cause I don't want to-- I'd rather you be able to use it, then me to have to say, 'Oh, no, I don't want to use it.' But there's still people that use, you know, 'honey' to talk to women or 'sweetheart' or something, and I think.. sometimes that makes sense. But sometimes I don't know the person well enough for them to call me that. But then you decide... 'Well, I work with this person every day.' So at what point do I tell them that that's a problem? And I think that's an individual thing... But sometimes they say to men, So you go, Uh I don't (Laughs)

END.