

BUT WILL IT PLAY IN GRAND RAPIDS?  
THE ROLE OF GATEKEEPERS IN MUSIC SELECTION  
IN 1960s TOP 40 RADIO

By

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## ABSTRACT

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The decision to play (or not to play) certain songs on the radio can have financial ramifications for performers and for radio stations alike in the form of ratings and revenue. This study considers the theory of gatekeeping at the individual level, paired with industry factors such as advertising, music industry promotion, and payola to explain how radio stations determined which songs to play. An analysis of playlists from large-market Top 40 radio stations and small-market stations within the larger stations' coverage areas from the 1960s will determine the direction of spread of song titles and the time frame for the spread of music, shedding light on how radio program directors (gatekeepers) may have been influenced in their decisions. By comparing this data with national charts, it may also be possible to determine whether or not local stations had any influence over the national trend. The role of industry trade publications such as *Billboard* and *The Gavin Report* are considered, and the rise of the broadcast consultant as a gatekeeper is explored. This study will also analyze the discrepancy in song selection with respect to race and gender as compared to national measures of popularity. Interviews with disc jockeys, program directors, and music directors seek to determine exactly what role the individual air personalities had in determining the songs that were played and, as such, what role these specific gatekeepers had in shaping the popular culture of a decade.

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## **Chapter 1: Introduction and Purpose of Study**

The process by which popular music gains airplay on radio is worthy of careful consideration. Thousands of recordings are released each year for consumption by music fans, but of those a relatively small percentage are accepted for airplay by radio stations. This could perhaps be attributed to the scarcity of terrestrial radio signals. Each market is granted only so many radio frequencies for coverage, and therefore only a select number of decision makers are employed and charged with the responsibility of selecting music for airplay. If we consider this phenomenon historically, fifty years ago there were even fewer radio signals, and Internet radio was a futuristic dream. A small number of gatekeepers rode herd over what became the soundtrack of a nation's popular culture.

### **Purpose and Implications of Study**

The music business in 2016 remains a billion-dollar industry, and whether or not a song receives radio airplay – and how much it receives – can spell the difference in millions of dollars in revenue for songwriters and publishers. Taken from a purely historical perspective, however, the notion of playlist formation leads to some very interesting questions about how media reflected (or did not reflect) a particular culture. If one looks at past playlist information, for example, is one getting a real snapshot of what the culture of a city served by a radio station looked like? Or was the radio programming influenced by radio stations in larger cities by program directors in control of the sound of their particular stations? This research looks at historical data to see what forces, if any, were at work in determining what Top 40 radio stations sounded like and why.

The period of the 1960s is chosen for specific reasons. First, the decade falls within the pre-Internet age. In order to test if the programming of a radio station had any influence over

other radio stations, it would be necessary to remove other means of distribution of that station's programming. Currently tens of thousands of Internet streams carry terrestrial radio signals alongside Internet-only programming. By looking solely at the historical perspective, the effect of the Internet as a means of transmission can be ruled out. Secondly, the 1960s reflect a time when local stations were freer to generate their own playlists and not as subject to the corporate dictates and "must-play" orders given in the 21<sup>st</sup> century. The 1960s are also unique in that the discussion can be limited to AM radio only. By 1970 FM radio finally began to take listening shares away from AM radio; the first FM radio station to be rated number one in its market does so in Grand Rapids, Michigan in 1970 (Sterling & Keith, 2008, p. 139). Also, by looking at the 1960s, we get (or should get) a clear "before and after" picture of American popular culture with respect to the Civil Rights Movement, and a good look at time leading up to the various women's movements of the 1970s. This analysis looks at data from both before and after the Civil Rights push from a standpoint of race. Were stations willing to reflect national culture and the popularity of music by selecting songs, from a racial standpoint, that mirrored what was popular on national charts?

In addition, this research is focused on virgin data from a private collection. There is no central repository for radio playlist information, and the individual stations, sadly, have kept little if any record of their own histories over the years. As new owners took over properties, many evidences of previous management were discarded. Much of the collection of playlists that was used for this analysis was dutifully preserved by a radio fan who had the foresight to save each of the weekly playlists for his own enjoyment. No analysis of this particular playlist data has been performed to date. The chart data for Grand Rapids, Michigan, has not been worked with in any

way whatsoever, and this analysis represents the first attempt to make any meaningful conclusions based upon its contents.

Radio usage, while initially stifled by the birth of television in the early 1950s, began to roar back in the 1960s for a variety of reasons. The transistorization of radio in the 1950s made the device more portable and affordable. Census data shows that the percentage of homes with radio rose from 91 percent in 1950 to 99 percent by 1970 (U.S. Census Bureau, 1999, p. 885). Given that the mobilization of the population and the baby boom led to an overall increase in households, the percentage growth is more pronounced. Radio was also in a state of growth through the 1960s. The number of operating AM stations in the country in 1960 was 3,483. By 1970 the number had increased to 4,288 (Carter et al., 2006, p. 4-1028).

The nostalgia business is a lucrative one. The Oldies format, spotlighting music of the 1960s, is alive and well on terrestrial radio, satellite radio, and on various Internet stations and streams. The playlists for these stations are often compiled by radio personalities who were not working in the business when the songs were new or, in some cases, even alive at the time the music was released. As a result, their view of “what was popular” has been filtered, largely through re-readings of charts where available. Joel Whitburn’s series of books listing the *Billboard* magazine chart positions for songs are almost always found in the programming offices of these stations, suggesting a strong reliance on the historical record. By delving back into these historical records we can see just how representative these national charts were, and how much they may have differed from programming decisions made at a local or regional level.

## Chapter 2: Literature Review

### Theoretical Approaches

Existing study of rock and roll radio is usually limited to the period of time immediately after the establishment of the genre, commonly agreed by many writers to be in 1955 when “Rock Around the Clock” by Bill Haley and the Comets topped the popular music charts. Commercial radio programming dates back to 1920, however, so there is a long period of time where other formats attracted a targeted audience, as has been done with rock and roll radio. Whether music or talk, the notion of radio offering specific programming aimed at a particular audience is as old as the medium itself. Historical treatment of radio notes that stations selected programs of a dramatic nature to attract a female audience in the 1930s. These programs often featured stories of a romantic nature and were sponsored by soap companies, earning the title “soap operas.” The interplay between program and listener was deeper than just selling soap, however. Max Wylie, a program producer, argued that women “of the daytime audiences have physical and psychic problems that they themselves cannot understand, and cannot solve... these programs keep them away from their problems” (Rouse, 1978, p. 325).

Other work in the area of playlist formation and programming has been done by Jarl Ahlkvist. He first posited that homogeneity in the music industry led to the similarity of the sound of radio stations (2000, p. 302). In arriving at this conclusion he surveyed earlier research, most notably by Peterson and Berger in 1975 that found “an inverse relationship between competition in the recording industry and musical homogenization” (Ahlkvist, 2000, p. 302). It would stand to reason, however, that a lack of diversity in the available music would also lead to a uniform sameness in radio playlists across the country, which is not necessarily the case. To account for inconsistency in this regard, he also considered the decision-making process that

program directors of radio stations use when it comes to material that is aired. Ahlkvist begins with the supposition that decisions are made locally at radio stations rather than by corporate programming heads, which likely was truer in 2001 than today. For his study Ahlkvist conducted interviews with 20 music directors and programming directors at commercial radio stations in the United States. The interviews were supplemented by 120 hours of non-participant observation of the programming staffs (Ahlkvist, 2001, p. 345). From these interviews he devised four main philosophies: aesthetics, or programming by ear; audience, or the “surrogate consumer” method; research, or programming by test results; and industry, or programming by influence. Through most of the 1990s and 2000s programming by test results was most commonly used. Stations would spend tens of thousands of dollars each time they conducted an auditorium test to determine which songs should receive the most airplay. During the author’s tenure as a music director in Chicago, these tests were conducted up to three times per year and the data yielded from the tests, however flawed, was often the primary determining factor in placing songs in heavy or light rotation (determining frequency of play) on the station. Despite that widespread usage of data, however, the philosophy of programming by audience is most intriguing. Ahlkvist argues that this philosophy posits the programmer as a “surrogate consumer, quoting Hirsch’s (1972) conception of the programmer as “cultural gatekeeper” (in Ahlkvist, 2001, p. 347) which we will also see later in Gabriel Rossman’s writing. Later work by Ahlkvist continues to study programming philosophies. He and Faulkner (2002) suggest that program directors may take different approaches as to why to play a record or not, but ultimately these different approaches yield the same result: the radio station plays a small percentage of the possible recordings offered to it. This is because program directors “mediate between the recording industry and their audiences” (Ahlkvist & Faulkner, 2002, p. 191) and as mediators



make specific decisions that affect what the audience will and will not receive. For the 2002 study the authors interviewed 32 programmers at 28 music stations in the United States. The conversations were transcribed and coded. Different types of programming were determined from the results of the coding: subjective, objective, populist, and synergistic. Of these results the definition of the populist programming repertoire is perhaps of greatest interest. The authors note that this style can be traced back to the independent, locally focused, personality driven formats that emerged in the 1950s to compete with radio networks (Ahlkvist & Faulkner, 2002, p. 209).

Radio formats typically consist of one type or genre of music designed to attract a particular audience, selected along demographic lines, as listeners for the station. Of these formats, “Top 40” radio – the featuring of a small list of records determined each week based on relative popularity – is perhaps the most widespread. Programming adjustments made by Todd Storz in Omaha, Nebraska, that led to developing the format dramatically raised the ratings of his station, KOWH, eleven fold in just one year. Similar results were seen at stations he owned in New Orleans and Kansas City. Storz believed that audiences wanted popular songs whenever they tuned in, not on a once a week show such as *Your Hit Parade* as offered by the networks (Fatherley & MacFarland, 2014, p. 41). This notion of a conscious “alternative” method of programming endorses the idea that networks made a specific attempt to offer consistent programming that the masses would enjoy, and that that agenda needed to be countered in some way.

To what extent does the content of a radio station simply mirror the desires of the audience? Hennion and Meadel (1976) suggest that reciprocity is at work. Their research analyzed one of the most powerful stations in France, and concluded in part that the music

existed to give the performers a rest and set the tone for the station (Hennion & Meadel, 1976, p. 288). This did not make clear why specific song titles were chosen, but did give insight into the sound of the songs in questions. The “feel” of the records dictated the overall “feel” of the radio station, and that quality drew listeners looking for a particular style of presentation. Music was only one item considered in their research, however, joined by advertisement and news story selection, so the piece only serves as a basic first look into the concept of the overall feel of the program as dictated by song selection. Likewise, research by Hesbacher et al. (1976) into the programming available on Philadelphia radio suggested that sound format was thought of first when considering programming approach. This indicates that the “feel” of the station was just as valid a concept in American radio as it was in Europe. Later research by Simonelli (2007), while historical in nature, speaks clearly to the demands of an audience in determining the overall sound of a radio station. Young listeners in Britain made their preferences known, and despite the availability of progressive rock music on television, they still wanted it to be broadcast over their radios as well (Simonelli, 2007, p. 109). The most successful “pirate” stations in Britain in the 1960s realized this and gave a specific attitude and feel to their on-air presentation that served as an alternative to the offerings of the BBC.

Competition is a factor that can determine whether a station plays a record or passes on it. Research done by Levi (2010) analyzed the content of classical music stations in terms of the familiarity of the pieces played. Levi used the theory proposed by James and Rose-Ackerman (1986) that suggested reasons for the output of profit and non-profit organizations to conduct his research but noted that their theory did not consider “differentiation in product offerings due to competition” (Levi, 2010, p. 190). While this research only looked at one format of music (classical), it could be argued that the notion of format competition is not dependent on the style

of music that is chosen. To truly assess the reasons for whether or not a station is playing a song, it is reasonable to see if they have a direct format competitor in their city, and whether or not that competitor is also playing a particular title. In the case of songs that were not nationally-recognized hits, it could be argued that the appearance of a song on a station's playlist some amount of time after the same song appeared on a competitor's playlist would indicate that the song was chosen based on audience selection; that is, the programmer may have wished to lure some of the competitor's audience over to his or her station by replicating the sound of that competing station.

Some research has been done on Top 40 radio and the role of Black music in it. Weisbard (2014) wrote specifically about what he called "the triumph of Afromodernism" the success of Ray Charles, Motown, Stax, and King Records experienced in the early part of the 1960s (p. 42). Weisbard notes that "Black consumer spending rose from \$15 billion in 1953 to \$27 billion in 1963, and that R&B was heard on more than 800 radio stations," and that the percentage of regular radio listeners who were Black was 71% compared to 57% of Whites (2014, p. 42). These statistics taken together would point to a desire for even the most mainstream radio station in a large city to devote at least some programming time to material that would reach across the racial listening spectrum. Similarly, Jacqueline Warwick (2007) researched the role of female vocal-driven pop music, or the "girl group" sound. Warwick's work is applicable to this study specifically in that it considers the intersection of both Black sounds and female singers through the popularity of Motown. Warwick cites Motown's "relentless emphasis on the backbeat," which has been classified as "a pandering to White listeners' notorious inability to find a backbeat" (2007, p. 153) as a way of reaching across color lines and enticing White audiences to appreciate and even give preference to certain Black singers and performers. Warwick also notes

the absence of any “girl groups” at Memphis’ Stax records, a primarily Black label, and considers the female vocal an extension of “girl talk,” or the conversation between women in groups, suggesting the popularity of female vocals among women (2007, p. 155).

## **Radio History**

### **Top 40 radio**

Radio, after its “golden age” of network programming, almost died in the 1950s. The advent of television led many popular comedy shows, dramas, and serials to make the move to the new technology, leaving network radio with the remaindered offerings. Advertising money migrated to television as well. Between 1945 and 1962, network radio advertising revenues fell from \$134 million to \$44 million per year (Fatherley & MacFarland, 2014, p. 16). That is not to say that there was no remaining network component after 1962. News was the primary offering of radio networks along with a few entertainment shows. Don McNeill’s “Breakfast Club” did not leave the air until 1968 after 35 years of broadcasts, and remained on WLS even after its switch to Top 40 in 1960. It is safe to argue, however, that radio in the 1950s was in trouble. It would take a revolution in local radio to save it.

Broadcaster Todd Storz is widely credited with the development of the Top 40 format. Storz, owner of KOWH in Omaha, Nebraska, is alleged to have observed the music listening habits of patrons in a bar. He and program director Bill Stewart noticed that the same songs received play through the evening. They were most astonished to see, after closing time, the waitress spend her tip money to play the same song that had played all day ‘three times in a row’ (Simpson, 2011, p. 11; Fong-Torres, 2001, pp. 37-38). Interestingly, this same story is also attributed to Storz, but took place when he was stationed in the Army (Fatherley & MacFarland, 2014, p. 41), calling the exact creation of the format into question. The concept, though, to limit

the station's playlist to 40 records – the same quantity as was held in the jukebox – and offer the listening public the same sort of repetition is not in question, as Storz executed this format with dramatic results. Within a year, KOWH had risen to the top of the Omaha ratings, and Storz went on to purchase stations in New Orleans, Kansas City, Minneapolis, and Miami, and changed them to similar formats (Simpson, 2011, p. 11).

Simply playing popular music wasn't the only key to the Top 40 station's success. Promotion and personality were important keys, according to Bud Connell, general manager of Miami's WFUN. Anything that the station could do to generate buzz in the community would lead to its success. Connell once walked into the studio and said, into an open microphone, that the disc jockey, Bill Dean, "shouldn't have said what he did." Immediately calls flooded the switchboard, asking what exactly did the disc jockey say? As the stunt progressed, Dean was "suspended" for his actions by the station, and the story got attention in the Miami newspapers. A contest whereby listeners could win \$1000 if they could "find Bill Dean" gained great attention. The whole situation was a ruse, but it turned out to be great promotion for the station (Fisher, 2007, p. 22). It was also common practice for Top 40 stations to speed up their turntables in an attempt to make the songs sound "brighter" on their station than their competitors. Connell admitted to doing this at WFUN (Fisher, 2007, p. 22), and WCFL in Chicago was notorious for this practice in the 1970s.

Top 40 radio largely migrated to the FM band as the popularity of that service increased in the 1970s. This transition began in 1965 when the FCC ordered that stations could no longer merely simulcast the same programming onto both services, but had to offer unique programming on each frequency that they owned. Cleveland radio veteran Denny Sanders suggests that radio operators "didn't take FM seriously" and took an "anything goes" approach to

the FM side, which ultimately did gain listenership for the stations (Adams, 2002, p. 102). This lack of interest in FM properties was described by Sterling and Keith (2008, p. 218) as somewhat of a “chicken and egg” problem that led to FM receivers being expensive for manufacturers to produce, given the relatively small number of them that were sold. Had more operators offered programming of interest, then the sets might have sold in enough quantity to bring the price down further, which in turn may have led to more sales and the development of additional programming. Eventually, however, enough listeners migrated to FM, and perhaps as casualties of their own success, the progressive FM stations created as placeholders often saw their programming replaced by the larger cumulative audiences that Top 40 brought with them. One of the reasons also given for the decline in listenership to Top 40 radio on AM was “diversification,” in the words of Bill Gavin of *The Gavin Report*. By that he meant the tendency for stations to seek a niche rather than play a truly representative sample of all types of music that were popular (Fong-Torres, 2001, p. 245). By the end of the 1980s it was all but impossible to find an AM station that still played the format, as even Chicago’s venerable WLS had switched to talk programming. However, the Top 40 format, in its current iteration, continues to thrive on FM radio today.

#### *Top 40 in American Popular Culture*

Radio in general is a vital part of American popular culture, and Top 40 radio, for the last 60 years, has been representative of that culture. Mark Dinning released a song in 1961 called “Top 40, News, Weather and Sports” that summarized what Cooper and Haney (1995, p. 173) called “the essentials of pop radio programming.” In the song Dinning is composing a book report for school while listening to the radio, and the report he delivers the next day is a confusing mix of advertisements, pop songs, and references to Eisenhower, Castro, and

Khrushchev. Ironically, the song failed to make the *Billboard* Top 40, spending six weeks on the chart but stalling at number 81 (Whitburn, 2003, p.194).

Perhaps the best known name associated with the Top 40 format is Casey Kasem. Kasem worked as a disc jockey in Detroit and at KRLA in Los Angeles before rising to national fame as a voice talent (providing the voice of Shaggy on *Scooby-Doo* among other cartoon voices) and as the host of *American Top 40*, a syndicated weekly countdown show that featured a sequential playback of the top songs as reported each week by *Billboard*. “AT40,” as it was often referred to, was carried on stations across the country. The show was “considered to be the standard bearer in modern countdown programs” due to Kasem’s “unique style and warm personality” (Pendergast & Pendergast, 2000, p. 6). Each week Kasem would name some of the affiliate stations at random, and those that listened each week would pay particular attention to see if Casey would mention their hometown. The show encouraged listeners to write in suggestions for the “Long Distance Dedication” segment, which usually featured a sappy or tragic dedication of a recurrent song that would allow a pause in the countdown for a few minutes. Kasem hosted the show from its inception on July 4, 1970 until 1988. It has had a variety of hosts since then (including Kasem himself in the early 2000s), but remains on the air today hosted by Ryan Seacrest.

But why was Top 40 so important to the culture? As Fong-Torres (2001) put it,

Unless you were cruelly sheltered...you grew up with Top 40...It would be designed to draw adults as well as teenagers, but on the face, it was a hyped-up soundtrack for that other cold war of the early sixties: the one between adults and kids (p. 12).

It was the personalities that acted as the generals in that war. Marc Fisher (2007) summed it up this way, using New York radio personality “Cousin” Bruce Morrow as an example:

FDR’s voice connected adults to places and events – the White House, the war – they had only read about. Cousin Brucie took young people to a world that felt utterly new and

vaguely illicit. He mesmerized teenagers in city apartments and especially in the new suburbs... Kids who had been separated from their family and friends they knew back in their old city neighborhoods tuned in and heard a voice that sounded like home (pp. 63-64).

Radio personalities brought the music alive. They were able to transcend distance, both literally through electronic waves but also figuratively by giving all the listeners to their shows a sense of place and community. It is these personalities' impressions of the format itself that will figure prominently in this study.

### **Grand Rapids, Michigan**

This study focuses on two primary radio stations in Grand Rapids' history: WLAV and WGRD. To a lesser extent, their competitors, including WMAX, WOOD, WERX, and later WZZM-FM also figure into the history, but this work focuses on the two major Top 40 outlets of the 1960s, and the playlist analysis will look in-depth at these two radio stations to see how closely their selections matched the overall national Top 40 charts.

For the period between 1960 and 1970 Kent County, Michigan, where Grand Rapids is located, grew in population to 411,044 by the 1970 census. At that time the Black population of the city was 23,076, or about 5.6 per cent. The population was 48 per cent male and 52 per cent female in that same census (U.S. Census Bureau, 1972, p. P-1).

#### *WGRD*

Near the end of 1947 the "Music Broadcasting Company," a collection of Grand Rapids-area businessmen, launched WGRD at 1410 on the AM dial. An ad taken out in September of 1947 touted the station as "independent – locally owned – on the air soon" and listed Paul F. Eichhorn as president. WGRD set up shop without network affiliation in the former Immen mansion at 35 Lafayette NE in the area of Grand Rapids that is now known as Heritage Hill (Anonymous, 1947).



Largely in response to the success of WMAX with a Top 40 format in 1958, WGRD adopted the format in 1959. Bob Stickroe recalls: “They (WGRD) had to make an adjustment, and they hired Tom Quain and Jack Stack away from MAX, to help them replicate what was happening over there” (B. Stickroe, personal communication, March 8, 2016).

The changes at WGRD were enough to grab control of the rock and roll market: they vaulted into the #1 position in the ratings, and WMAX, without its known personalities in place, reverted back to the “middle of the road” (MOR) format – a mix of standards for adults – found across a good portion of the dial. The on-air lineup of WGRD consisted of known names such as Bill Merchant in the mornings, Bob “Yashu” Whitcomb in middays, and Skip Bell in afternoon drive. Merchant had come from WTRU in Muskegon, a station co-owned by WGRD, and he was moved over to take morning duties in the early rock and roll era. WGRD enjoyed sole possession of the rock and roll audience, but for a short while, as John Shepard’s WLAV became the next player in the rock and roll battle in town in 1962. Stickroe remembered it this way:

They hired Quain and Stack... in '62 and they started doing block programming with top 40 with those guys... This lasted from about November of '62 till July of '63, when station owner John Shepard hired (consultant) Mike Joseph to come in and change the format. The first thing Mike Joseph did when he changed the format was to get rid of Stack and Quain because he had worked with them before at MAX, and they didn't like his formatics, so he booted them out the door and brought in his own people (B. Stickroe, personal communication, March 8, 2016).

The 1410 frequency has undergone many changes over the years, and in the summer of 2016 reverted back to offering a music format aimed at an African-American audience.

### *WLAV*

In September of 1940, Grand Rapids businessman Leonard A. Versluis obtained a license for an AM station, to be headquartered in the Keeler building at 6 Fountain NE. He selected call letters based on his initials – and WLAV was born (Lydens, p. 345). It took more than one try,

however, for Versluis to get the license. At that time, the City of Grand Rapids issued its own broadcast permits. When Versluis first sought a permit for his radio station, a city official explained that the community did not need two radio stations, and that the existing offering, WOOD/WASH, two stations sharing one frequency, was sufficient to serve the citizenry. Supposedly a gift to a city inspector changed the minds of those who issued the licenses, and Versluis was able to launch his station. Grand Rapids was in the business of issuing broadcast permits until the late 1950s, when complaints to the FCC field office led to a need to remind the city that licensing was a function of the federal – not local – government, and the practice was abandoned (Anonymous, personal correspondence with author, March, 2016). Once Versluis got his station launched, his attention turned to launching the city's first FM station, which he did in 1947, and to television, creating WLAV-TV, which became the first television station in the state of Michigan outside of Detroit, in 1949 (Lydens, 1966, p. 346). The television station was sold to WOOD (the call letters that the station retains today) in 1951. Versluis continued to operate his radio stations, but sold them in 1958 to John Wismer and Associates, who hired Grand Rapids businessman John Shepard as station manager in 1959 (Lydens, 1966, p. 347). Shepard purchased WLAV-AM and FM in the spring of 1963, and the AM station expanded to 24-hour broadcasting and Top 40 rock and roll that summer. Jack Stack and Tom Quain were the best known disc jockeys on the station when it launched in 1963, hosting the Saturday Night Dance Party each week where the songs on the station's Big 50 countdown would be played in order. The frequency eventually reverted back to a simulcast of FM programming and experimented with other formats. Today it broadcasts news and talk programming.

#### *Other Top 40 Stations in Grand Rapids*

In 1964 there were three top 40 stations in the market: WMAX, WGRD, and WLAV. By

the end of 1965 only one of these remained – WLAV. WMAX left the format largely due to the political leanings of its station manager, Victor Lundberg. Lundberg had made the ascension from news director to station manager, and had a deep dislike for rock and roll. As WLAV's ratings increased, Lundberg made the case that WMAX's battle would be a losing one. He took to the airwaves on March 21, 1965 and, at the end of the Supremes "Stop! In the Name of Love," delivered an editorial which decried rock and roll as "decadent," assured the listeners "you'll never hear another rock and roll record on WMAX" (B. Stickroe, personal communication, March 8, 2016) and switched back to an MOR format. Lundberg went on to have his own personal success in Top 40, ironically. In late 1967, his spoken word piece entitled "An Open Letter to My Teenage Son" peaked at #10 on the *Billboard* charts. The piece extolled conservative values at a time of anti-war sentiment, and closed with these lines: "If you decide to burn your draft card, then burn your birth certificate at the same time. From that moment on, I have no son" (Lundberg, *An Open Letter To My Teenage Son*, 1967). Lundberg was still at WMAX when the record hit it big, and actually took part in record signing promotions hosted by competitor WLAV.

WGRD abandoned the format in 1964 as well, but returned to it in 1967. They never again left the format after that. In 1970 WGRD purchased FM station WXTO-FM from the Archdiocese of Grand Rapids. The station, operated out of Aquinas College, was initially a mix of religious programming of both Catholic and Protestant denominations (Lydens, 1966, p. 348) and later offered free-form album rock at night. The night show was hosted by Ed Buchanan, who called himself "Pope Edward the First." WGRD immediately began simulcasting its Top 40 programming onto the frequency after the sale.

WERX signed on in Wyoming, Michigan, a Grand Rapids suburb, in 1965 and played a

Top 40 format through most of 1967. The station was plagued by structural issues from the start, having been constructed in a flood plain. The daytime-only station was staffed mostly by young broadcasters, including John Landecker, then a student at Grand Valley State College. Landecker notes that he made \$1.50 an hour to play records and serve as the music director for the station, sorting through records sent to the station to design the format (Landecker, 2013, pp. 61-62). The station never managed much in terms of ratings success, however, and dropped out of the Top 40 game before the end of 1967.

Many of the personalities shifted stations over the years, crossing over from one employer to the other. Some of the best-known names, like Jack Stack, Tom Quain, and Bill Merchant, worked at all of the stations in town throughout their careers. Some of the personalities went on to greater fame. John Leader of WERX and WGRD later went on to a radio career in Los Angeles and to become the national host of “Countdown America.” John Landecker of WERX moved on to Philadelphia and later Chicago’s WLS. Jay Walker of WLAV, under the name Sonny Fox, went on to host Sirius XM radio’s comedy channel.

### **Chicago, Illinois**

There are three main radio stations that play a role in this analysis: WJJD, WLS, and WCFL. This by no means represents the entirety of the Chicago dial. The city has a rich complement of stations that served as erstwhile competitors for these Top 40 stations before, during, and after their time airing that format. While many works have been written about the history of Chicago radio, specifically WLS, it is worthwhile to briefly recap how the Top 40 battle played out in what was at the time the nation’s second-largest market.

The population of the Chicago metropolitan area grew quickly in the study period, increasing from 6,794,461 in 1960 to 7,612,314 by 1970 (Hobbs and Stoops, p. 37). At that

same time the population of the city itself fell from 3,550,404 in 1960 to 3,366,957 in 1970 (Hobbs and Stoops, p. A-6), showing that the migration of population from the city to the suburbs was well underway. The Black population of the Chicago metro area in 1960 was 889,961 (Taeuber & Taeuber, p. 124) while in the city proper, the Black population was 812,637, or 22.9 per cent of the population. That population increased to 1,102,620, or 32.7 per cent of the city population, by 1970 (U.S. Census 1990, p. 1). State-level census data on gender shows that Illinois went from 96.6 males per 100 females in 1960 to 94.2 males per 100 females by 1970, thus making it a majority female population through the period (Hobbs and Stoops, 2002, p. A-14). The migration of population from the city to the suburbs should have had little to no effect on the ability of the Chicago stations to attract an audience, however. The signals of both WLS and WCFL carried well beyond the suburbs and into neighboring states, especially in the evening when other daytime stations signed off of their frequencies, letting the 50,000-watt signals travel even further across state lines.

### *WJJD*

The first of the players in the Top 40 game was Plough Broadcasting's WJJD, a 50,000-watt daytime station on 1160 AM, which began airing a Top 40 format in 1956. WJJD signed on in 1924 and had been through a variety of formats, including the home of Chicago Cubs baseball in 1939 and 1940. Plough bought the station in 1955 from Marshall Field, the newspaper publisher and department store magnate, and in 1956 changed its format to capitalize on the rising popularity of rock and roll. WJJD was in a battle with WIND out of northwest Indiana, which also featured rock and roll music on its airwaves. During the daytime, the signal boomed across Lake Michigan, and provided the top 40 sound for Grand Rapids until WMAX switched to the format in 1958.

Review of the playlists of WJJD is an interesting exercise. The station blended rock and roll hits with popular adult standards in a sort of Top 40/MOR hybrid. It is not uncommon, for example, to see Perry Como and the Dorsey Brothers and the McGuire Sisters firmly placed beside Elvis Presley and Buddy Holly. One of the reasons that legendary Chicago radio personality Clark Weber, who spent time working on the station in the 1990s, suggested for the failure of WJJD was a lack of well-known personalities and a lack of a strong nighttime signal (Weber, 2008, p. 40). By 1966 WJJD bailed out of the Top 40 format and instead began to offer a mix of contemporary and classic country music to its audience. Today the frequency is owned by Salem Communications and broadcasts religious talk programming.

#### *WLS*

WLS began in April of 1924 under the ownership of Sears Roebuck & Co., taking the call sign WLS to represent the “World’s Largest Store.” The station was a country station, airing the popular “National Barn Dance” program each week (Childers, 2008, p. 14). Sears sold the station in 1928 to Prairie Farmer magazine, and the station was known as the “Prairie Farmer Station” until changing the format in 1960 (Childers, 2008, p. 26). WLS intermixed country programming with news coverage. The station’s news department is probably best known for its on-the-spot broadcast delivered by Herbert Morrison on May 6, 1937 when the airship Hindenburg crashed at Lakehurst, NJ. Morrison recorded the audio on site on lacquer discs, and his famous cry of “Oh, the humanity” was then re-broadcast across the entire NBC Red network (Childers, 2008, p. 40). On May 2, 1960, the station changed its format to Top 40 rock and roll, and the first “Silver Dollar Survey” – a listing of the station’s playlist, and the basis of this research – was printed in November of that year.

The original “Swingin’ Seven” members of the WLS air staff were morning man Jim Dunbar, midday hosts Ed Grennan and Mort Crowley, afternoon host and program director Sam Holman, nighttime host Gene Taylor, late night host Dick Biondi, and overnight host Bob Hale. Grennan was the only holdover from the Prairie Farmer station, and only lasted two months, saying that he “didn’t fit” the new station (Childers, 2008, p. 60). A later addition to WLS, Art Roberts, praised Holman as one of the best program directors he ever worked for, citing his ability to generate “word of mouth” popularity for the station:

One time, on a trip to San Francisco, he saw a billboard that read “one of two great beers in America.” He returned with a new station slogan, “WLS, one of two great radio stations in America.” The station was flooded with phone calls wanting to know who the other was. So, Sam turned it into a contest (Roberts, 2000, p. 17).

WLS remained in the Top 40 format until 1989, when it dropped music programming entirely to shift to talk radio.

### *WCFL*

The Chicago Federation of Labor launched WCFL at the end of 1925 ostensibly as a mouthpiece for organized labor. This became a difficult financial proposition, and by 1938 station management realized that it was possible to not only spread news of interest to the labor community, it could also be a powerful selling tool to those audiences. This led the station to turn its first profit in 1940 after sixteen straight years of losses (Godfried, 1997, pp. 216-219). WCFL went to 55 percent recorded music when it expanded to twenty-four hour service in the fall of 1949 (Godfried, 1997, pp. 258-259). At the end of 1965 the station opted to go with a top 40 format to cash in on the revenue being generated by WLS and upon rumors that WJJD had planned to exit the format. The station was also feeling some revenue pressure. Metromedia, the station’s national sales representation, had pleaded with the station ownership to “give them something to sell,” and the decision was made to hire program director Ken Draper from KYW in

Cleveland and launch a rock and roll format (K. Draper, personal communication, March 11, 2016).

WCFL's lineup consisted of morning host Jim Runyon, midday hosts Joel Sebastian and Dick Williamson, afternoon host Jim Stagg, and evening hosts Ron Britain and Barney Pip. Overnights on WCFL are notable for the inclusion of Yvonne Daniels, who hosted a jazz show and was the first African-American female to hold an on-air position on one of the city's 50,000-watt signals. Daniels is considered, in fact, to be the first woman to crack into top 40 radio in a major market (Fong-Torres, 2001, p. 217). After Top 40 took hold, however, Daniels left for WSDM-FM, a station that featured an all-female air staff. She later hosted the night show at WLS in 1973, and continued to work for WLS for nine years after that.

WCFL famously shifted from Top 40 to "beautiful music" in 1976. Under the call sign WLUP-AM, it broadcast comedy talk in the 1990s. Today as WMVP the station offers sports talk programming.

#### *The Other Competitor – WVON – "The Black Giant"*

WLS was the dominant force in Top 40 radio through the 1960s by virtue of its time in the format. It also dominated in revenue figures in the format, but lagged behind the adult stations in advertising sales for most of the decade. In 1965 WLS billed \$3.5 million dollars, good for third place in the market behind WGN and WIND (Smith, J., 1965, p. C8). WJJD, suffering from lagging ratings and poor sales, left the Top 40 format in early 1966, leaving WLS and WCFL to battle it out for popular music listeners. Through the period, however, both stations had a competitor for their younger listeners that is often left out of the discussion: WVON.

Black radio listening in Chicago was traditionally spread across three stations: WHFC, WGES, and WOPA. These stations offered a mix of Black programming and foreign-language



programming, and tended towards small signals on the right side of the AM dial. In March of 1963 Leonard and Phil Chess, owners of R&B record label Chess Records, bought WHFC, extended its programming to 24-hour-a-day operation, and renamed it WVON to represent “The Voice of the Negro” (Pruter, 1991, p. 14). Disc jockey Herb Kent “The Cool Gent” was the most popular talent on the station, and he was approached by Leonard Chess about the purchase of the station, noting that he got the Chess brothers and WHFC management to sit down and talk through the details of the sale, even negotiating the purchase price of one million dollars (Kent & Smallwood, 2009, p. 81). Chess removed the foreign language programming and changed the format to a full-time R&B music presentation (Kent & Smallwood, 2009, p. 82).

Despite the station’s 1000-watt daytime signal and 250-watt nighttime signal, it was a force to be reckoned with in terms of listening audience. By early 1964 the station was rated #2 in Chicago at night behind WLS (Pruter, 1991, p. 16). While the audience was chiefly Black, a number of White teens in the listening area gravitated to the station to hear Herb Kent spin tunes at night that were not featured on the mainstream Top 40 signals in town. The programming was different than traditional Top 40 as well in that personalities were encouraged to talk whenever the spirit moved them, even if that meant in the middle of the song. Leonard Chess “would say, ‘Come on, talk shit now, c’mon, talk shit!’ He said, “Open up and talk it while the records are going! Talk shit! You’re not talking enough!” (Kent & Smallwood, 2009, p. 84). This was a vast departure from what WLS was doing, and it kept listeners guessing. WVON became a force for “breaking” a record (being the first to play it), and Kent suggested that “90 percent” of the releases that Motown put forth were broken on WVON. The station also broke releases on Stax, Volt, Atlantic, and Philly records as well (Kent & Smallwood, 2009, p. 87). Because of the station’s powerful standing in the Black community, it also managed to break White hits for a

new audience. “(I Can’t Get No) Satisfaction” by the Rolling Stones and “Raindrops Keep Fallin’ On My Head” were not only not out of place on WVON, they were introduced to Black audiences by the station’s program director, E. Rodney Jones (Kent and Smallwood, 2009, p. 92).

#### *Other Chicago radio stations*

Radio listening was, by no means, limited to Top 40 in Chicago, but there were other stations who sought to attract, at least in part, a younger audience interested in popular music. For years WGN, owned by the *Chicago Tribune*, was the most-listened-to radio station in the city. While best known as a news/talk station for older adults, WGN briefly experimented with rock and roll. In 1958 station manager Ward Quaal hired Cincinnati radio personality Wally Phillips to host the “Coca Cola Hi-Fi Club,” which aired weeknights and played Top 40 tunes (Weber, 2008, p. 40). The show failed, but Phillips went on to host WGN’s top-rated morning show for many years, retiring in the late 1980s. Audiences were also drawn to WIND, a station licensed to northwest Indiana. WIND rated top listenership as a rock and roll station from the mid-1950s until 1960 and the launch of the much clearer WLS. The station was driven by personality Howard Miller, who was removed from the air after negative comments about African-American men being hired by the Chicago Fire Department led to picketing of the station (Weber, 2008, p. 37). Previously Miller had been so popular with Chicago listeners that he worked on both WBBM and WMAQ while under contract to WIND, which had no choice but to acquiesce to his demands of an open contract agreement.

## Chapter 3: Theoretical Framework

### Gatekeeping Theory

Gatekeeping is described by Shoemaker and Vos (2009, p. 11) as “a framework for evaluating how selection occurs and why some items are selected and others rejected.” In the instance of music playlists, the gatekeeper, depending on the radio station, could be the program director, the music director, or both working in concert to determine the selections that the station will feature, and a relative ranking of the appeal of those selections to the audience within a particular week. Shoemaker and Vos point to the work of Lewin (1951) as being formative to the theory. Lewin defined the use of “gate” as an entry point to a channel of communication, and argued that that gate was controlled by one or more “gatekeepers” who determined what information passed through the portal (Shoemaker & Vos, 2009, p. 13).

Walking through the Shoemaker and Vos model, it is easy to draw a parallel to the decision of a radio station to adopt or reject a song for its playlist to the model. The first gate is crossed when a gatekeeper forms information about a message (Shoemaker & Vos, 2009, p. 22). In the case of a song for airplay, the song is the message, and the program director and/or music director learns of the song, hears it, and decides whether or not it would be appropriate for their station’s audience. Those decisions can be influenced by others who have already made the decision to adopt. Whitney and Becker (1982) drew the same parallel in a study of how news editors chose stories in a similar fashion to how news wire services selected stories.

Shoemaker and Vos cite Gandy’s (1982) concept of “information subsidy,” calling it a “positive force” placed on a bit of information (Shoemaker & Vos, p. 28). For our purposes, a “positive force” can be as simple as press in a local newspaper about a local band or an ad in a national publication taken out to increase awareness about a musical release. On the darker side,

it may also include payola, the practice of offering radio station employees cash bribes to ensure airplay that was officially banned in 1960 but, as some respondents in this study will argue, never truly left the radio business.

In establishing their model Shoemaker and Vos determine specific characteristics of gatekeepers, among them personality, background, ethnocentricity, small-town pastoralism, and individualism (Shoemaker & Vos, 2009, pp. 42-45). Others are explained, but these are the most applicable to the role of the program director. Personality and individualism are linked in that individual taste often can play a role in the initial selection of a song for a radio playlist. When the author was programming 89FM in Gisborne, New Zealand in 1994, he famously failed to select a song for the station based on personal preference, claiming it would not likely gain favor with listeners. The song, “All I Wanna Do” by Sheryl Crow, ended up peaking at number 2 on the *Billboard* chart and winning the Grammy award for Record of the Year (Whitburn, 2003, p. 163). Personal preference was the only factor that delayed the song’s debut on that radio station. Likewise, background and ethnocentricity could also be factors that play into the decision to add a song to a playlist. Programmers of radio stations that are not performing as well in the ratings may have a tendency to “play it safe” and to “go with what you know.” Songs that are most similar to the programmers’ backgrounds (more likely to have been the type of song played at prior radio stations) or most similar on ethnic qualities may be more likely to catch the attention of the program director first.

Later work by Shoemaker with Stephen Reese (2014) delved further into the idea of background and broke it into component parts. Shoemaker and Reese noted that background is made up of characteristics such as ethnicity, gender, sexual orientation, and class/status (Shoemaker & Reese, pp. 211-212). The concept of gender is certainly worthy of consideration.

In 1960s radio, much like in 2010s radio, an overwhelming number of program directors and music directors in Top 40 radio were male. The notion of a male gatekeeper influencing the selection of music, specifically indicating a preference of performers by gender, cannot be overlooked. Sexual orientation would be much more difficult to apply to 1960s radio as the orientation of non-public figures (the program director was not always a popular member of the air staff at a larger radio station) was kept more of a secret than the orientation of public figures such as those in Hollywood. Ethnicity, as mentioned above, also must be considered. The Top 40 stations in both Chicago and Grand Rapids to be analyzed in this study were programmed exclusively by Whites. WVON-AM, the Chicago station discussed but not analyzed due to incomplete survey data, was programmed chiefly by African-Americans throughout its run as a popular station.

A specific application of gatekeeping theory to radio playlist formation was made – and rejected – by Gabriel Rossman in 2012. In his book *Climbing the Charts: What Radio Airplay Tells Us about the Diffusion of Innovation*, Rossman looks specifically at the process of how songs diffuse, or become popular, and become successful. His work focuses on Top 40 music in the 2000s and considers the spread of music through Internet means as well as FM radio, which he does note still plays an important role. His book includes a number of quantitative analyses of radio playlist content. One of his studies looks at what stations claim to monitor the playlists of what other stations, and from this he constructs a model of a “social network” of Top 40 stations (Rossman, 2012, p. 50). Ultimately Rossman finds that while radio plays a role in the diffusion of music, he argues that selection of specific songs is not dictated from a corporate “gatekeeper” that makes the decisions as to what the listeners of a station will or will not be exposed to; in short, if an agenda is being set, it is not coming from one corporate office. In his discussion of

the notion of the gatekeeper, Rossman goes back to Hirsch (1972) and used the gatekeeper model, which is shown in Figure 1.2 in Rossman's book. Having worked in corporate radio, this author would argue the correctness of Rossman's assertion of the lack of the corporate gatekeeper in modern radio. Just as radio station websites look similar within a company due to the use of designed templates, so too do their playlists, based on the use of templates created by corporate programmers. In the 1960s, however, such corporate influence was much more limited, but it did exist. WLS disc jockey Bob Hale recalls the station looking to ABC properties in Pittsburgh, for example, for guidance on whether or not to add a song to the playlist (B. Hale, personal communication, March 9, 2016).

Gatekeeping in radio was also studied by Dimmick (1974). Dimmick found that gatekeeping in radio works in two stages. The first, sensing, is a process by which decision makers evaluate all available material and choose which is most appropriate for air or will bring the greatest audience to their radio stations. The second stage, valuation, is where the relative worth of each piece of material is weighed against each other to determine its relative importance and therefore frequency of airing. Dimmick's work, as with most gatekeeping research, has been applied to news radio and the selection of news stories for air. But if we apply these roles to music radio, the sensing stage would be determining which records might best fit the radio station, while the valuation stage would be determining each record's position on the playlist. The music director would be the gatekeeper primarily responsible for the sensing stage, since one of their primary roles was to whittle down the available universe of music to a manageable size (in Rothenbuler & McCourt, 1992, p. 108).

Does the relative position on a chart matter? The existence of radio rotations may suggest that the radio station is itself attempting to create salience with the listener with respect to certain

songs. Burns (1998) noted that since the music played on a station does not usually sequence from one to forty and then back again, but that certain songs are given weight based on their relative strength, the radio station may be attempting to set an agenda by causing certain songs to appear more important to listeners than others. Burns cited Rothenbuhler's (1985) and Kelliher's (1981) studies of music radio gatekeepers, which argued that choosing music for a radio station was similar to the gatekeeping seen in news rooms (see also Whitney & Becker (1982)).

### **Was Racism a Factor?**

Arguing whether or not racism exists in society as a whole is well beyond the scope of this study. What can and should be asked, though, is what role racism, whether overt or covert and if at all, played in the formation of local radio station playlists? And, given the cultural impact that radio has, did any such segregation with respect to popular music translate into attitudes and beliefs about race in the overall culture? From a strictly programming standpoint, was this simply a matter of social cognitive theory at work: we want “our” radio station to look and sound like “their” radio station? Or, in the case of Chicago and its Black-oriented formatted radio stations, was it a matter of programmers of the White-oriented Top 40 stations attempting to be sure that “our” station did not sound too much like “their” radio station?

To identify by race requires specific categorization of “Black records” and “White records.” Taylor et al. (1978, p. 779) cited Bruner (1956) in suggesting that categorization is simply the brain’s way of reducing the complex to the simple. Fortunately (or not, depending on your perspective), this was very easy for radio programmers to do in the 1960s as the music industry had a long history of classifying music. Some of the earliest 78 rpm recordings at the turn of the 19<sup>th</sup> century featured both popular White performers in blackface as well as Black performers singing what the labels themselves described as “coon songs,” which were targeted to

Black record buyers. Often these were on record labels geared toward Black buyers, such as Swan and Black Patti, but they were also released by mainstream labels as well. The term “race records” was used by major record labels from the 1920s through the 1940s to signify music aimed at a largely African-American audience, and the term was often used in advertising. *Billboard* magazine itself published a chart specifically for race records in the late 1940s. Race was not the only marketing distinction: Victor Records, later RCA Victor, marketed some country and western records as “hillbilly” titles. When RCA released their new 45 RPM records in 1949, they used different colored vinyl to denote the type of music contained on the disc. The colors were chosen to “represent, in the board’s opinion, the psychological and aesthetic color connotation of the type of music represented...grass green for Western...and cerise for blues and rhythm” (Elliott, 1949, p.3) . Not only was there segregation in place by genre, there was now visual segregation in the record shop. With this practice put in place briefly at the end of the 1940s, it would stand to reason that those programming radio stations through the 1950s and into the 1960s would be familiar with the terms and may well have thought to classify records presented for play on their stations in the same way.

The distinction between Black and White records was also as close as the television. By 1952 *American Bandstand* was a local television success in Philadelphia and a national phenomenon by 1957. But its viewers typically saw sanitized versions of rhythm and blues songs performed by White artists – versions that differed greatly from the original Black artist recordings featured on local radio stations (Delmont, 2012, p. 41). Who got to participate in the audience of the program was also problematic. The producers of the show selected a committee of teens to “maintain order” among those who appeared as dancers on the program, taking care to enforce dress codes. But the teens left in charge, coupled with changes in the ability for local



teens to get tickets to tapings, left the *Bandstand* audiences almost all-White by 1954 (Delmont, 2012, pp. 43-44.)

The early response to the sudden popularity of rock and roll and R&B in the late 1950s was not positive, and much of the concern expressed by parents had to do with race. Groups like the North Alabama White Citizens Council suggested that the National Association for the Advancement of Colored People (NAACP) was “infiltrating” southern White teenagers with rock and roll (Denisoff, 1986, p. 380). That organization, and others, attempted to persuade stations in the South not to play music by Black artists. Asa Carter, the executive secretary of the organization, went so far as to argue that rock and roll was a problem in terms of both race and Communism, saying that

...the obscenity and vulgarity of the music is obviously a means by which the white man and his children can be driven to the level of a nigra... If we choose to call it the Communist ideology, I think we hit it fairly on the head (Garofalo, 2001, pp. 116-117).

The Citizens Council of Greater New Orleans circulated a poster encouraging parents to lean on advertisers to boycott stations that featured “the screaming idiotic words and savage music” that was “undermining the morals of our white youth in America” (Denisoff, 1986, p. 380). While it may be difficult to find explicit examples of threats of boycott leading to playlist decisions, it would stand to reason that many programmers in the South decided to avoid controversy – and angry members of these councils – by eliminating some selections from their radio stations. From a social perspective, rock and roll threatened to upset the separation of races present in the United States for most of its history. It was “everything that middle-class parents feared: it was loud, vulgar, manufactured, urban, sexual, and black” (Garofalo, 2001, p. 111).

The notion of Black music and “out-group” membership is complicated by the radio landscape in a large metropolis such as Chicago. Top 40 was not the only format to be found on

the radio, and, depending on one's social identification, which songs were in fact the top 40 songs was up for considerable debate. The format had become more integrated: between 1955 and 1963 the number of Black artists making the top 10 on the *Billboard* charts increased by fifty percent (Douglas, 1999, p. 249). But would the top 40 songs in each city necessarily be the same? Chicago had WVON, purchased by Leonard Chess, owner of Chess Records, in 1963. Ostensibly, Chess bought the radio station to help sales of his records in the Black community. In doing so, however, he may have relegated some of the label's product to the station that powerhouses WLS and WJJD did not want to sound like. Likewise, other record labels may have been alienating White listeners without realizing it. Berry Gordy Jr. of Motown supposedly had an agreement with WVON by which the station would receive new recordings first before other stations got their copies of the records. Yet Gordy himself believed that seventy percent of his sales needed to come from White audiences, and therefore he tailored the sound of his records for Top 40 radio (Barlow, 1999, p. 200). Gordy likely developed this belief having watched the rise and fall of Vee-Jay Records, a Black-owned label in Chicago that saw substantial crossover success in artists such as Dee Clark and Jerry Butler, but also benefited from briefly having The Beatles and The Four Seasons on its roster. Vee-Jay was able to get its product on White radio and have its records stocked in White record stores (Early, 2004, p. 92). As a result of Gordy's business model, 75 per cent of the 537 singles Motown released in the 60s charted, and 79 made the *Billboard* Top Ten (Jackson, 2015, p. 30) – an impressive rate of crossover to the pop charts. What made the crossover phenomenon possible? Early (2004, p. 80) cites the phenomenon in the 1950s of White cover versions of R&B songs. These covers “conferred a kind of respectability and mystique” on the original Black versions, prompting some White teenagers to seek out the original recordings. Those teenagers of the mid-1950s became record-buying adults in the 1960s,

and it is very likely that that quest for what they thought was “Black authenticity” led them to take an interest in the product of Motown Records.

While no complete collection of WVON playlists is known to exist, surveys that are available show a pattern of the station debuting Black crossover music well before the White stations did. “The Tracks of My Tears” by Smokey Robinson and the Miracles was first reported on the playlist of WVON on July 2, 1965. WLS added the song three weeks later. Wilson Pickett’s “In the Midnight Hour” was first played on WVON on June 18, 1965 and was not aired on WLS until almost three months later. On July 17, 1964 WVON advanced “Under the Boardwalk” by the Drifters to the top of their playlist. That same day WLS reported that they had just begun to play the song in a regular rotation. Whether these delays were simply a matter of differentiating one radio station for another or out-and-out racism may be impossible to determine as it is unlikely a program director would ever admit to making a decision based primarily on race. Clearly, however, some categorization of the music must have been taking place in order for discrepancies to exist between the local and national reports of what was popular.

In similar fashion, categorizations may have been made and playlist decisions hinged on whether the singer was male or female. Garofalo (2001, p. 125) notes that in the early days of rock and roll very few women managed any level of sustained success, with most falling into the “one-hit wonder” category (Brenda Lee being a notable exception). This may have been due in no small part to the mindset of radio station program directors striving for a specific “sound” for their station, and that sound was based on their definition of variety. Early commonly-held programming “segue rules” dictated that female vocalists needed to be separated from each other. (This belief was still in effect when the author began programming radio stations in the

1990s.) Given that an hour is limited to sixty minutes in length, and commercial messages, news programming, and disc jockey talk would take up a portion of that time as well, there was a finite amount of music that could be played in an hour. Were there to be further restrictions on how many songs by women or how far apart those songs must be kept, the total number of available spaces for songs by women would be minimized. If we assume Burns (1998) to be correct – that radio stations intend to create salience with certain records – then these underplayed records would be relegated to either limited airplay or lower positions on the playlist.

### **The Problem of Genre**

A potential pitfall in any study of popular music is the fluid definition of genre. “Top 40,” a term commonly used to represent popular music, is not in and of itself a genre of music. Analysis of Top 40 charts of the 1960s show, upon sight, a wide variety of styles of music represented. Unlike modern radio’s highly segmented formats (one station in Grand Rapids, for example, identifies itself as “Today’s Hits Without the Rap,” which can be argued as an incorrect statement), what passed for Top 40 radio in the 1960s was usually a mixture of a variety of instrumental hits, remade standards, Rhythm and Blues (R&B), pop, rock, girl groups, etc. There was no one definition of what constituted Top 40. The *Billboard* chart served not to define a genre but rather to reflect relative reported popularity of music. But even *Billboard* changed the way that listeners referred to popular music through the naming of its charts. The term R&B fell out of favor in 1964 when the magazine decided to rename that chart the Soul chart, and usage of the term “soul music” followed that decision (Tawa, 2005, p. 194). Even in discussion of the genre across its fans, “soul” is not a rigidly defined term. It can be further divided into sweet soul, Memphis soul, hot soul, etc (Tawa, 2005, p. 196, 201).

Likewise, “black” also cannot be assigned as a genre of music. The sounds that were produced at the Motown family of labels in Detroit had a very different feel than what was recorded at Stax/Volt in Memphis or at King/Federal in Cincinnati or at Chess or Vee-Jay in Chicago. Fabian Holt, in his work *Genre in Popular Music* (2007), splits Soul/R&B into R&B, Memphis soul and Motown, and for later recordings, soul-funk and contemporary R&B (p. 16). To simply study whether or not radio stations played “Black” product may not tell the whole story.

There is no purely statistical method that can account for differences in the “feel” of a record. But there is clearly a difference in sound between the “Motown Sound” and the “Stax sound” that was discernible to both radio listeners (and record buyers) in the 1960s and today. Isaac Hayes summed it up by describing the Motown sound’s driving beat as “not soulful to us at Stax, but baby it sold” (Jackson, 2015, p. 30) and while Motown had the crossover appeal, Stax recordings were “down-to-earth, raw, very honest music that represented the common man – the common black man... a music of the people” (Gordon, 2013, p. 71). Soul purists describe the Stax sound as having “grittier” vocals and more horns than strings, differentiating it from the Motown sound (Jackson, 2015, p. 141). Employees at Motown saw their process of making records as akin to the assembly line used in the auto industry, from musicians, to lyricists, to vocalist, to completed production. While Stax identified by race, Motown identified more by age, using the slogan “The Sound of Young America” (Gordon, 2013, p. 70).

Simply determining the feel of a record by the race of the performer is problematic, also: the house band at Stax, Booker T. and the MGs, was an integrated band. There were not many truly integrated bands through the 1960s, but the sound of those that were (and even some that were not but crossed over into the rock style, such as Jimi Hendrix and the Chambers Brothers)

was not immediately apparent to a radio listener who had not seen the band on television. Evolution in the sound of music across the decade may also be important to consider. Early (2004, p. 87) suggests that as the more “raw” sound of Stax soul gained popularity by the late 1960s and early 1970s, many younger Blacks thought Motown sounded “too White, too crossover, and not authentically Black enough.” Early suggests that this was not as much a function of a change in Motown’s sound but a by-product of marketing, arguing that there was a growing tendency for Whites “to co-opt Motown as their own cultural authentication” (Early, 2004, p. 87).

Despite this slippery slope of attempting to define what constitutes the “blackness” of music, some definition must be made for the purpose of this analysis. This study will differentiate between “Black Pop,” defined as pop songs performed by Black artists and released on labels such as Motown or Capitol, and “Black Soul,” which will encompass the more “urban” sounds typically found on Stax/Volt or early 1960s recordings by singers such as Sam Cooke.

### **Who Are the Gatekeepers?**

#### *Program Directors and Music Directors as Gatekeepers*

Ultimately, the decision to add (or not to add) a song to a radio station’s playlist rests with an individual at that station. Program directors by definition are responsible for all material that airs on a radio station, whether that material is music, promotion, commercial matter, or news. The program director ensures that the station operates within the confines of proper regulation as set forth by the Federal Communications Commission. Their role in the selection of music is what this study is most interested in.

Program directors, and their music directors, served at many stations as “judge and jury” over what particular pieces of music made it onto the station’s printed playlist and were played

for the audiences to enjoy. It is natural to assume that some level of personal preference and/or bias may have entered into the decision to play (or not play) certain pieces of music. As a part of this study, interviews were conducted with a variety of radio personalities who, at one time in their careers, filled this role of gatekeeper, and in those interviews the subjects were asked about how they made their decisions. Sadly, many of those who held these very influential roles in the 1960s have passed on and could not be interviewed for this project. Careful research, however, can yield some clues as to some of the factors that may have shaped the decisions to play or not play particular pieces of music.

The program director, and where present, the music director function in a system that includes musicians, record producers, promoters, and the public (Rothenbuler & McCourt, 1992, p. 103). They engage in what Hirsch (1969) called pre-selection, which is a means of anticipating and making choices for the public. The program director attempts to figure out what the public will appreciate, plays the music, and then waits for the results.

In 1968 the late Art Roberts served as music director of WLS, working under program director John Rook. In a Chicago Tribune column written by Robb Baker, Roberts explained some of what went into his decision-making process. He suggested that he auditioned music sent to him by record companies, either in his office or on the record player in his car. After narrowing the list down, he did his “checking.” This included listening to the opinions of fellow disc jockeys and reading a variety of trade publications. Roberts also listed “secret sources” – other radio industry figures whose opinion he trusted (though did not indicate who these sources were). Roberts cited the decline in reliance on sales from local record shops, decrying the “decline of the small record store and the mushrooming of harder to judge business in large discount houses” (Baker, 1968). Perhaps most importantly, though, Roberts cited his

“commercial ear” – the ability to single out what would appeal to a mass audience. He specifically noted that an artist’s third hit can be most important. “I always watch an artist’s third record. Second records aren’t that important, as the artist can coast on the fame of an original hit” (Baker, 1968). Roberts then would make his recommendations to Rook, who had the final say over the station’s choices.

A promotional film prepared for the WLS sales department in 1969 states that John Rook came to the station with “a highly sophisticated approach to programming – a scientific precision and control never before attempted in the Chicago market. One that would deliver the target audience that advertisers want,” which was adults between the ages of 18 and 49. Rook developed the “more music format,” which the promotional film described as “mass appeal radio.” In the film, Rook explained his technique:

So I monitor constantly, competitors as well as LS. And I dictate into a tape recorder the things that I find wrong, and I can always tell when a song is being played out of category or when an engineer misses a cue. I listen for things you’d never even notice. But it’s those things that make a difference in our sound, and why more and more people buy it. I guess I am a perfectionist, and we are never perfect (Hare, 2012).

There is no question that nothing happened on this station without John Rook hearing it, and a disc jockey was not going to suddenly make changes to the execution of the format without first consulting with the program director. Sadly, Rook passed away in March of 2016 just as this study was being completed and unfortunately could not contribute to this research.

Across town at WCFL, Ken Draper served as program director and then later in the combined role of program director and station manager between 1965 and 1968. Draper explained that while the complete air staff discussed what music would be added or not added to the list, the ultimate decision was his and his alone, and that was for a specific reason: to remove any doubt as to whether payola was a factor at the station.



Just prior to my arrival in Cleveland, the station and Westinghouse (its owner) had been through a big payola scandal, and two or three of their major personalities were involved and had to be canned. So Westinghouse was incredibly sensitive about payola and process. When I came to Chicago...I wanted a system where I didn't care about what my disc jockeys did. They didn't have control over the music we were going to play...and therefore they were relatively protected in that sense. That way, nobody could buy them because they didn't have control over anything (K. Draper, personal communication, March 11, 2016).

As a result, this allowed for a tremendous amount of decision-making power to rest with the program director, establishing their role as a gatekeeper.

### *The Disc Jockey as Gatekeeper*

It is important to assess the role of the individual disc jockey in their role not only as gatekeeper but as influencer of public opinion as well. In 1966 famed Los Angeles disc jockey (and later Chicago talent) Robert W. Morgan explained that a poll of teenagers who were asked “who is the biggest influence in your life?” revealed that the answers were “God, disc jockeys, then parents” – in that order (Fong-Torres, 2001, p. 11). It is not difficult to picture a teenager, alone in their room, away from the rest of the family, listening intently to their favorite radio station on a transistor radio. That scene played out in millions of homes across the United States in the 1960s. The teenagers may likely have had more “one on one” time with the disc jockey than with anyone outside of their household. It would stand to reason that these people, who spoke glowingly about musicians and songs, would have had a profound influence in the changing of status of a record from just another recording to a hit composition that audiences felt compelled to buy. Savage and Spence (2014) studied the role of parasocial interaction with perception of credibility of radio hosts and found a correlation between the amount the hosts revealed about themselves (on social media, in this case) and the perception of credibility. In other words, the more the hosts talked about themselves and shared their lives with the listeners, the more connected the listeners felt to the radio hosts. While this is a modern study, the concept

of parasocial interaction goes back to the work of Horton and Wohl (1956), which described the phenomenon as “an illusion of intimacy that an individual may feel toward a media figure...that builds up as listeners tune in to the same program time after time” (in Savage and Spence, 2014). As we will see in the discussion on payola, these men (and, in the 1950s, they were almost exclusively men) did wield tremendous influence, but that influence was largely controlled by the purse strings of record companies and promoters. After the crackdown on payola, which group was more powerful when it came to selecting the music that became popular: the disc jockeys or their station management? This study seeks to find out specifically by posing that question to a number of disc jockeys who rose to prominence during this particular time period.

#### *Controversial Content: Community Standards Acting as Gatekeeper*

Community standards, practices, or beliefs in and of themselves possess no agency and as such do not function as traditional gatekeepers. However, the influence that a fear of angering or alienating potential listeners had on program directors and music directors certainly warrants consideration of these standards as a factor in the decision-making process of the radio station employee. In some instances controversies over content were the sole reason for songs not being selected for airplay, with race and/or gender not ever entering into the equation. Political concerns occasionally entered the discourse. The 1965 song “Eve of Destruction” by Barry McGuire, a virulently anti-war song, was left off of the playlists of many stations, including WLS in Chicago, who may not have wanted to appear unpatriotic in supporting the record. WLS, as a station affiliated with the American Broadcasting Company, who agreed to ban the record from its stations, had no choice but to leave the record off of its playlist (Denisoff, 1986, p. 382). Despite numerous stations banning the record, the controversy surrounding it drove sales and pushed the song to number one on the *Billboard* chart on September 25, 1965 (Whitburn, 2003,

p. 989). This popularity defied the predictions of some disc jockeys. Bob Eubanks of KRLA wondered “How do you think the enemy will feel with a tune like that number one in America?” (Denisoff, 1986, p. 382). An “answer” record called “Dawn of Correction” by a studio group called the Spokesmen, a right-wing response to the song, was similarly banned in some cities. Interestingly, WLAV in Grand Rapids played both records, presumably encouraging listeners to make their own choices about politics. Around the time that “Eve of Destruction” was ascending the chart, “Dawn of Correction” broke into the Top 100 chart, landing at number 36 (Whitburn, 2003, p. 667).

Concerns over overt sexual content were present since the earliest days of rock and roll. The Everly Brothers song “Wake Up Little Susie” was famously banned in Boston in 1957 for telling the story of a couple that stayed out too late because they fell asleep in a car. Again, the song reached the top of the Best Seller chart (and the Rhythm and Blues chart!), one of the precursors to the Hot 100, without the radio airplay component (Whitburn, 2003, p. 232). During the time frame of this study songs like Lou Christie’s “Rhapsody in the Rain” were rejected by WLS for having lyrics of a sexual nature. The song was re-recorded with tamer lyrics. Lines like “our love went much too far” were replaced with “love came like a falling star,” and after the adjustment was made, the song was added by many stations that had initially refused to play it. WCFL disc jockey Ron Britain confirmed that, based on the decision by WLS to play the “censored” lyric, WCFL opted instead to be sure to play the more “racy” version of the song in an effort to stand out (R. Britain, personal correspondence, March 4, 2016). The perception of local moral values was sometimes the sole determining factors in keeping “filthy” lyrics from the air. Tommy James and the Shondells’ “I Think We’re Alone Now” was played by neither WGRD nor WLAV in Grand Rapids for being allegedly too sexual (B. Stickroe and G.

McDaniel, personal communication, 2016), though repeated listening by the author has failed to discern this content. The song received a normal amount of airplay in Chicago.

At the conclusion of 1967, termed the “Summer of Love” by many music journalists, attention was paid in some circles to drug content in music. Musician Bob Larson released a book called *Rock and Roll: The Devil’s Diversion*, in which he detailed the “sinful” nature of the genre and, at the end of the book, included an “Anti-Rock Pledge” for readers to sign and return (Denisoff, 1986, pp. 386-388). This same tome that encouraged listeners to sign the pledge contained a racist overtone as well, inferring that Black music could lead to demonic possession.

The same coarse bodily motions which lead African dancers into a state of uncontrolled frenzy are present in modern dances. It is only logical, then, that there must also be a correlation in the potentiality of demons gaining a possessive control of a person through the medium of a beat (Denisoff, 1986, pp. 386-387).

While it is unlikely the Larson writing swayed the opinions of any program directors, it may have caught the attention of concerned parents in much the same way attention paid to Tipper Gore’s Parents Music Resource Coalition had the same effect in the 1980s.

For smaller market stations, the individual station owner may have also served as a gatekeeper with respect to offensive content. While program directors and music directors were left to do their jobs, ultimately they had to answer to the man who signed their paycheck, and that man often lived in the listening area. WLAV in Grand Rapids, for example, was owned by businessman John Shepard, who was a prominent figure in the Grand Rapids business community. When Shepard first purchased WLAV, the magazine of the Peninsular Club, a businessmen’s fraternal organization of which he was a member, included this message in its newsletter: “There is one more public service which Penclubber Shepard and WLAV render the public: No ‘rock and roll’ will blare forth from a receiving set tuned to this station. Only quality

music – mature music – is broadcast” (Anonymous, 1961). By 1963 the station had quite literally changed its tune, but not without being under the watchful eye of a local owner listening at all times to be sure that nothing that those in a place of standing in the community would deem offensive would grace the airwaves. Similar influence over the material aired was exerted by upper management at WOOD radio in Grand Rapids. WOOD was never known as a Top 40 station, preferring instead to stick with tried and true MOR standards. But when questions of taste came up, station manager Mike LaRue had the final say, as a former employee of the station explained.

The music library was right next to the control room. At the time I worked there, the music committee was LaRue (station manager), Bill Struyk (program director) and Tom Quain (music director). I was told by the secretary that worked in there, that TQ would put a song on, and play the first part, middle and last part, and say, ‘Hey, I like this.’ Bill would agree. Then La Rue would say, ‘I think we need to vote again,’ and on the second vote the song would fail. LaRue controlled every part of that operation (Anonymous, personal correspondence, March 10, 2016).

There have been anecdotal stories over the years about station owners catering programming to the tastes of family members and friends. While these are difficult to prove given the passing of so many of these station owners, it would be safe to say that the person signing the paychecks was likely not afraid of expressing their opinion when it came to what would be or not be played on the stations they owned.

### *Regulation and the FCC as Gatekeeper*

Radio stations are not permitted to operate in simply any manner they see fit. All stations are expected to conform to a set of standards set forth by the Federal Communications Commission (FCC) as condition for maintaining a station license. While much of what the FCC does pertains to regulating which frequency a station uses, where it is licensed, etc., it also serves as a rulemaking body in broadcasting.

But some of the policy the FCC has maintained over time deals directly with content. The blanket of the First Amendment does not necessarily apply to radio broadcasters, as there are certain things that may never be broadcast, and some speech that is required to be broadcast. From the period extending from the 1940s until its abandonment in 1987, the Fairness Doctrine essentially stated that broadcast stations would be “held responsible for a balanced presentation of diverse views” (Hilmes, 2014, p. 260). Editorials and rebuttals were required, and stations kept careful track of issues that were deemed important to the communities that they served. This was usually left up to individual stations to determine, but occasionally the regulatory body intervened. In 1967 the FCC applied the Fairness Doctrine to cigarette advertising, and stipulated that stations must carry anti-smoking messages in proportion to the smoking advertising they sold (Hilmes, 2014, p. 250).

Certain material was forbidden to be broadcast. Obscene and indecent material remains strongly regulated by the FCC. Obscenity, as defined in *Miller v. California* (1973), did not find its way into specific FCC regulation until after the Pacifica radio stations in California aired George Carlin’s famous “Seven Words You Can’t Say on Television” routine on-air (Albarran & Pitts, 2001, p. 56). But while the obscenity standard did not specifically exist in the 1960s, the fear of FCC action coupled with the aforementioned community standards likely had a chilling effect on the words and jokes disk jockeys chose to tell. Stations are also forbidden from broadcasting illegal lotteries (Albarran, 2013, p. 238), which can affect the way contests are conducted and prizes offered on radio stations.

The broadcasting of hoaxes, while not forbidden by FCC law until 1992, was met with considerable concern following the legendary *War of the Worlds* scare in 1938. For a brief time from the 1930s through the Cold War it was the policy of radio announcers to not impersonate

the President of the United States on the radio, for fear that a public who could not see a speaker would follow instructions given to them without questioning the source. In 1934, President Roosevelt publicly suspended this ban for a Columbia Broadcasting System retrospective (Steinhauser, 1934, p. 18), calling attention to its existence.

FCC rules required certain content. Station identifications were (and remain) required each hour, giving listeners the call sign of the station and the city that the station is licensed to (Albarran & Pitts, 2001, p. 58-59). Before the 1970s stations regularly gave this identification on the half-hour as well. Some regulation, however, has been dispensed with over time. It was common practice for stations to identify that some of the material broadcast had been pre-recorded for use at another time, a practice that all but disappeared by the end of the 1970s. While disk jockeys had quite a bit of latitude to present their shows in a manner they saw fit, the role of regulation and rules regarding what could and could not be said must also be considered for their gatekeeping effect.

#### *Payola/Plugola and the Record Label as Gatekeeper*

The record label itself must be considered as a gatekeeper as well. Not every performer who records a song has it released and distributed by a major label. The period of the 1960s is dominated by major record labels such as RCA Victor, Capitol, Columbia, Motown, Stax and Decca, and hundreds of smaller national and regional labels. In some cases a performer would originally be “discovered” by a smaller label, and when demand for product outpaced the capability of the label, the performer’s work would be “sold” to a major label. An example of this would be Tommy James: originally “Hanky Panky” was released on Pittsburgh, PA-based Snap Records, and then later on Roulette, who distributed the song nationally. The major labels had superior capabilities to disseminate product across the country. However, the expectation

for return on the investment was higher, and the major labels had the ability to be far more selective when it came to choosing a roster of artists to represent the company. None other than singer Kenny Rogers summed up the role of the record company succinctly:

At bottom, a record company serves as a big promoter. It subsidizes the making of a professional recording with an advance – a loan for which you pay no interest and which you repay only if the records sell...If these efforts pay off and a grass fire develops, with your record being bought and played on radio stations nationally, everyone stands to make a bundle. Everyone, that is, except you – the group (Rogers & Eppard, 1978, p. 114).

Some record labels famously made themselves unavailable to rock and roll performers. Columbia Records employed Mitch Miller, he of the television sing-a-long, as their artists and repertoire (A&R) man through the first part of the 1960s. Miller hated rock and roll, and went to great lengths to sign other forms of music to the label while keeping the pop sounds off the roster. Instead, Columbia relied on selling albums of soundtracks of Broadway shows, which accounted for 20 percent of the label's revenue in 1960 (Wilentz, 2012, p. 178). Miller himself managed eleven gold albums for his sing-a-long work aimed at an adult audience. Record companies also were careful to market certain types of music to certain types of audiences, and often that marketing had to do with race and income. Garofalo (2001, p. 114) argues that there were three main audiences for music into the late 1950s: pop was for the national White middle-class audience, country and western was for the regional White working-class audience in the South, and R&B was for the nationally dispersed African-American audience. Many of the R&B performers and some of the rock performers, shunned by the major labels, instead turned to independent labels.

Representing the record labels was another type of gatekeeper: the "rack jobber." The rack jobber's role was to provide music to sell in department stores, drug stores, and even some grocery stores. While local record shops featured employees who knew the music, department



stores often did not, and the rack jobber would make recommendations as to which records to keep in stock to sell more quickly. Rack jobbers made their own deals with record labels distributing product (and keeping a piece of the profits) until the early 1980s (Denisoff, pp. 212-213). Since their profit margin was based on sales, they wielded power in determining what records would make their way to the sales floor of a local Sears or Woolworth's store and may have served to deny some artists the exposure to the crowds wandering through those stores. In some cases the rack jobbers didn't have the public's best interest in mind at all. Denisoff quotes Jules Malamud of the National Association of Record Merchandisers as saying that the musical selections at stores that didn't specialize in records would be "left to a girl who made \$25 a week. A guy would go in and buy her a box of candy and say 'Hey, buy some records' and they were bad records" (Denisoff, 1986, p. 213).

The rack jobber was responsible for making the record company look good to the buying public and to the industry as well. Rogers and Epanand (1978, p. 119) explain that a musician looking for a record company should look at the way the record companies set up displays for their products in record stores. Those displays often were created with promotional material that was made available by the rack jobbers, and it is safe to assume that those who made more material available were able to create the more visually appealing displays and therefore convey the appearance of more solid promotion. Yet another way that the rack jobber may have influenced the performance of a particular record was through providing free material for record stores to sell. During Congressional hearings on payola on February 8, 1960, disc jockey Norman Prescott explained that it was common practice for record distributors to include free records in purchases made by record retailers in exchange "that when radio stations telephoned for best-seller data, the stores would include certain records on the list, whether or not they had

received any airplay at all.” As a result, Prescott called into question the validity of any such Top 40 list given the role that this sort of payola played in creating them (Segrave, 1994, p. 133).

Still another force working on behalf of the record labels was the promotions man. It was the job of the record label representative to travel and meet with radio station personnel to share new releases. Denisoff (1986, p. 201) quotes unnamed program directors who enjoyed speaking with promotions men who “shared what other stations were doing.” In a pre-Internet age, a recommendation from a respected radio station conveyed by a promotions man to a program director may have been all it took to seal the deal for a station to adopt a particular record. Record promotions men would also recommend records based on sound: a station that needed something up-tempo or down-tempo could get such a recommendation from the promotions man (Denisoff, 1986, p. 202).

Access in terms of financial capacity also may have hindered the promotions men at smaller record labels. Though payola was banned by 1961, influence through cash and/or product was likely still taking place in the record business. But a promotions man with a smaller label would not have had access to the same level of graft and therefore would not have been as able to influence the large-market radio gatekeeper. Instead, these promotions men would have been relegated to attempting to influence the decision makers in smaller markets, where they would have had to have pushed the product of lesser-known artists (and, as such, more unfamiliar music). By placing these songs on the playlist, the small-market station would have had fewer places to play the proven national hits and therefore would have seen a variation in the content of their playlist more pronounced than the variation seen on a large-market playlist. Savvy record execs knew that this promotion was more valuable in terms of records sold than

advertising. Frederic Dannen, in his book “Hit Men”, summed up the dependence on top 40 radio in moving product in this way:

People did not buy pop music that they had never heard...so promotion, the art and science of getting songs on the air, drove the record business. Not marketing, because no amount of advertising... (was) enough to sell millions of albums. Not sales, because record stores only reacted to demand and did not create it. Even the best (staff) in the world couldn't save you if radio gave you the cold shoulder (Dannen, 1991, p. 9).

Record companies could be large national corporations, small regional corporations, or even very small local corporations that dealt only with musicians located very close to them. One such record label was Fenton Records. Fenton was owned by Dave Kalmbach and Bruce Smith, who operated the Great Lakes Recording Studio in Grand Rapids, Michigan and later in Sparta, Michigan. Much of the business for the studio came in the form of local bands, often high-school or college-aged, that came to get records pressed to sell at local dances. But occasionally a record would catch enough attention and cross over to radio airplay. “Think Twice,” by Grand Rapids group The Pedestrians, ended up as the #1 record of the year at WLAV for 1966 (McAllister, 2012, p. 44). But most of the recordings were never popular outside of the families of the band members themselves. The role that radio did (or did not) play in helping these local musicians is also worth studying.

The role of the record promoter has not always been held in high esteem. In a 1984 speech to the Midwest Conclave written by Bill Gavin and delivered by WLS veteran Art Roberts (Gavin was too ill to attend), the sentiment is made clear:

Today, the record business is hiding behind the anonymity of a handful of powerful independent promoters. Promotion expenses go gracefully into the books as ‘independent promotion’... there is no public accounting required of those who exercise such vast influence on America’s radio playlists (Roberts, 2000, p. 51)

Many would argue that little was different from 1984 than the business had seen in 1964.

### *The Radio Advertiser as Gatekeeper*

Radio advertising in 2016 is primarily a demographic-based process. That is to say that advertisers select a particular age and sex demographic that they feel will be the best fit for their product, and then seek out (usually through advertising agencies) the radio stations that deliver the best ratings with that segment of the audience. In the 1960s, however, playlists were more likely to be “stratified” with respect to demographic appeal – they were described as “tight and horizontal” (Denisoff, 1986, p. 128). Top 40 stations strived to gather the largest cumulative audience possible in the hopes of having the advertisements heard by the largest possible number of people. The resulting tightening of playlists led to the exclusion of deeper album cuts and helped to pave the way for alternative programming in the form of “free form” radio on the FM band. AM radio was still the primary choice of advertisers, who were often given time on the sister FM stations of large top 40 stations for free in exchange for securing the advertising buy (Sterling & Keith, 2008, p. 122). Even with the growth of FM listenership, it was relegated to the role of “second service” by advertisers behind AM stations into the early 1980s (Sterling & Keith, 2008, p. 173).

Radio has long struggled with the perception of audience content possibly alienating potential advertisers. In the late 1930s and early 1940s WDIA, a legendary Black station in Memphis, Tennessee had to deal with “product identification” – the belief that radio shows appealing to a Black audience created an undesirable image that could lead to a sponsor’s product being “identified” as a Black product and, as such, leading to a lowered appeal with White consumers (Barlow, 1999, p. 110). In 1965 and 1966 station WERX-AM in Grand Rapids issued a completely separate survey for the top R&B songs on the station. The survey looked similar to the station’s regular survey, but featured a photo of Harry T. Lewis, an African-

American who hosted the station's R&B countdown on Sundays. The back of the survey identifies WERX as "Land of Soulville" and shows a map spotlighting the sponsors of the show (limited to record stores, a small newspaper, and lounges and restaurants). The population of "Soulville" is listed as 37,186 – assumed to be the African-American population of Grand Rapids at that time (WERX). Clearly this station went to great lengths to segregate its programming and its advertisers so as to leave no confusion as to who was on whose side. By 1967 it is worth noting that the programming of the station had integrated to some extent as WERX was the only station in town to add Aretha Franklin's version of "Respect" to its playlist – a song that both WGRD and WLAV elected not to feature for their audiences.

The advent of Top 40 radio was not initially well-received by advertisers. Ernest Hodges, an advertising executive, wrote in the April 14, 1958 issue of *Broadcasting* that "rock and roll, as an art form, is of no interest to our agency. We are not concerned in a corporate sense with the problems of a group of juveniles who require constant noise as a background to nearly every waking moment" (in Fisher, 2007, p. 26). It is worth reiterating, however, that the decision by WCFL in Chicago to change its format in 1965 – just seven years after the Hodges quote – from a mix of jazz music and talk programs to a Top 40 format was largely at the behest of the station's national advertising representative firm. While not succumbing to the pressure of any one advertiser, the advertising rep firm strongly suggested that it would be in a much better position to generate revenue if the station had a cohesive, sellable program that it could present to national clients in an attempt to lure their advertising dollars. It can be argued that, in WCFL, we have a case of a station whose entire format – and therefore all of the music in it – was determined by the advertising community.

This is not to say that advertisers did not benefit from rock and roll or Top 40 programming. Savvy advertisers knew that they could tap into the large audiences that these stations possessed for marketing opportunities. Seemingly simple surveys, like those conducted by Gillette razors, sought to find out who were the favorite radio personalities of teenage boys (Fong-Torres, 2001, p. 33). Since the company sought to sell razors to men, and wanted to get its name in front of a large population of very young men who would soon need to shave, it made sense to find out what stations and, specifically, what shows these potential consumers listened to. There was good reason to consider the teenager as a consumer as well. The age group under 20 had “more money to spend on clothes, cosmetics, cars, soft drinks, hamburgers, pizza, movies, and phonograph records than ever before” (Petersen, 1966, p. L37). This group would need to be reached by advertisers through programming that appealed specifically to it. The advertiser could no longer afford to simply appeal to the parent when the child had disposable income of their own.

#### *Industry and Trade Publications as Gatekeeper*

Radio is no different from any other industry in its reliance on publications germane to that business that discuss its inner workings. As a program director, the author came to rely on *Radio and Records* magazine, which each week printed an aggregate “most played” list for each radio format alongside the top songs played on selected stations deemed to be leaders in their individual formats. By mimicking the playlist of a well-respected station, a program director in a smaller market could appear to be more up-to-date on music releases and gain a more cosmopolitan, contemporary sound for his or her radio station. *Radio and Records*, however, came to be in the 1980s. What resources would have been available to program directors to use in the 1960s?

## *Billboard magazine*

The publication that has served as the “bible” of the recorded music industry began with no connection to music at all. The creation of *Billboard* magazine, in 1894, was to keep track of outdoor advertising. (Bronson, 2014). Eventually music was added to the publication, with tracking of jukebox sales. Bronson indicates that the first appearance of “record pluggers” – promoters, whose job it was to gain sales for recorded music, appeared in 1909, well before the advent of commercial radio in 1920 (2014).

The first weekly music chart appeared in 1940. Over time *Billboard* began to fragment into a variety of different charts. From 1955 until 1957 there were actually four separate popular music charts in the publication: Best Sellers in Stores, Most Played by Jockeys, Most Played in Juke Boxes, and a chart added at the end of 1955 called simply the Top 100 (Whitburn, 2003, p. xi). A program director in 1957 could have consulted any one of these charts, or any combination of them, in order to make determinations about what songs would receive airplay on their radio station. In 1958 the Top 100 evolved into the Hot 100, and the other charts ceased to be included. *Billboard*, however, printed separate charts for Pop, Rhythm and Blues (R&B), and Country formats, although there was frequent overlap on these charts. On June 2, 1958, “All I Have to Do is Dream” by the Everly Brothers reached number one on all three of those charts in the same week. While its presence on the Pop and Country charts is logical, the song’s popularity on the R&B chart is a bit puzzling. For that matter, the actual mathematical formula used to determine a song’s position on the chart was never revealed. As a result, this has led to some speculation over time that the relative positions on the chart were subject to manipulation. Radio stations simply reported their selections to the magazine with no means to determine how correct they were. In the post-payola days, however, it would stand to reason that radio stations did not want to be

caught in what appeared to be any sort of manipulation of data. Also, radio station playlists, like the ones analyzed in this study, could be obtained and playlists checked for accuracy. Whether the magazine went to this length is not known. Record stores filed their reports as well, and it could be argued that these reports might be subject to external forces through graft from record promoters.

It is also possible that the chart makers themselves were subject to external forces of manipulation. Scott Paton, a producer with the “American Top 40” countdown show hosted by Casey Kasem, recounted a story involving Andy Gibb threatening not to perform at a *Billboard* function if he was bumped from the #1 position on the chart. Paton explained that the chart that he received for the show, which listed Gerry Rafferty’s “Baker Street” as the number one record, was suddenly recalled and corrected by the publication. Paton indicated that “it probably was a frequent occurrence in the first four decades of the charts, throughout the various trade papers” (Paton, S., interview with Jim Bartlett, 2013).

The calculations for the *Billboard* chart changed in a dramatic way in 1991. On November 30 of that year, *Billboard* elected to move to a computerized scoring system for music to determine its position on the chart. That position would still be calculated by combining amounts of measured airplay and reported sales, but the means for gathering that data changed. Radio airplay would be determined by electronic monitoring of stations and the compilation of data received by Nielsen Audio’s Broadcast Data System (Whitburn, 2003, p. xii). For large market stations – the ones typically thought to hold the most influence over chart position – the human reporting element would be removed. Small market stations would still submit their lists on paper, and those lists would still reflect the opinions of music directors and program directors, but the stations wielding the most influence had a diminished opportunity to influence the charts.



At the same time possible manipulation by record retailers was removed. *Billboard* began to rely on actual reported sales provided by Nielsen Soundscan (Whitburn, 2003, p. xii). Soundscan compiled information at the point of sale by registering scanned barcodes. When a consumer purchased a piece of music, the barcode was read and the information sent to Nielsen. The possibility of false reporting by record store proprietors was now removed. The changes had clear effects. From 1956 to 1991 the record for most weeks at #1 on the pop chart belonged to Elvis Presley's "Don't Be Cruel" (Whitburn, 2003, p. 986). No other record managed to spend as much time at the top of the chart. In the post-Soundscan era, that record was broken eight times in the following seven years. Two songs in 1992 alone – "End of the Road" by Boyz II Men (13 weeks) and "I Will Always Love You" by Whitney Houston (14 weeks), both African-American artists, surpassed the Presley milestone (Whitburn, 2003, p. 997). The resulting change in the album chart was more dramatic. *Billboard* shifted to the Soundscan methodology for album sales on May 25, 1991, and before that year was over heavy metal band Metallica, despite an absence of radio airplay, spent four weeks atop the album chart while Garth Brooks' "Ropin' the Wind," a staple of country radio, managed 18 weeks in the number one position (Whitburn, 2010, p. 977). The change to the reporting of actual consumer purchases and its effect on the charted data indicated one of two things: either musical tastes had changed wildly in a very short time, or the previous reporting by record store proprietors had not accurately reflected what was really being purchased.

Despite possible compilation and computation problems, the *Billboard* Hot 100 was a common resource for program directors and music directors to gauge a song's relative popularity across the nation.

## *The Gavin Report*

Before there was *Radio and Records*, there was *The Gavin Report*. *The Gavin Report* was founded by Bill Gavin in 1958 and remained in publication until 2002, some seventeen years after Gavin's death. Gavin was a radio host in San Francisco who ran a Top 30 show on KNBC radio. Gavin began soliciting playlists from other radio stations, and started to circulate his assessment of those lists to stations willing to pay for the publication. *The Gavin Report* was different than *Billboard*, because it contained predictions rather than simply retelling the information reported by stations. It was widely believed that *The Gavin Report*, since it was separate from record companies, was free from any bias or manipulation (G. McDaniel, personal communication, March 11, 2016). Whether this is true or not is unknown. It is known that, while thought of as a "tip sheet," Gavin specifically avoided the term so as to distance his product from the type of tip sheet one would procure at a horseracing track (Simpson, 2011, p. 5). The July 3, 1964 edition of *The Gavin Report*, provided by Grand Rapids disc jockey George McDaniel, contains several predictions on its front page.

- The "Smash of the Week" is Dean Martin's "Everybody Loves Somebody," which "even though it hasn't hit hard as yet in a few cities, it is jumping high... Looks like a certainty for #1 honors." (This song went on to knock the Beatles from the #1 spot.)
- The "Sleeper of the Week" is "Better Watch Out Boy" by the Accents. "It is now starting to sell in Pittsburgh and is attracting favorable attention in several other cities." (The song failed to make the *Billboard* Hot 100.)
- The "Hot Shot" is the Beatles' "A Hard Day's Night," which is "logging huge request action for other Beatles songs."

- The “Top Tip” is “People Say” by the Dixie Cups. “Looks like a winner. Sounds like one, too.”
- And, the “Record to Watch” -- “And I Love Her (Instrumental)” from “A Hard Day’s Night.” Gavin suggests that this is “musically the best thing in the album” (Gavin, B., 1964).

Just from this one issue we can see the predictive power of the publication. A number of the disc jockeys interviewed for this project specifically cited *The Gavin Report* as an important resource for determining what to play or not play on their radio stations. For that reason Bill Gavin’s should be included as a potential gatekeeper with respect to popular music. The magazine lost its sway in the late 1990s when radio stations, in a post-consolidation world, began to slash their budgets for research into what music should be played. As corporations became larger, music directors within the corporations shared their own information with each other and had no reason to pay for a service that essentially accomplished the same thing. This author personally took part in such conference calls when working as a music director for CBS radio from 1996-1998, and over the same period of time saw budgets for auditorium music testing decimated. *The Gavin Report* was relegated to become a relic of a time when individual stations competed for audience with each other within a market rather than pooled their resources.

#### *The Broadcast Consultant as Gatekeeper*

The advent of Top 40 radio created a new position in the broadcast lexicon: consultant. The execution of Top 40 had become known as “formula radio,” and experts would often be hired by radio station management to assist with the proper execution of the formula. These consultants would work with multiple radio stations across the country, examining playlists and ensuring that stations operated in the same way. Bill Drake is perhaps best known as the first of

these consultants, and the “Drake Formula” became a standard method of Top 40 execution. The Drake formula was characterized by shortening the amount of time that personalities had to talk, often limiting them to the introductions and fade-outs of the records with no other patter permitted. This was in strong opposition to the personality-driven sound of early Top 40 as perfected by Todd Storz on his stations. Drake also often shortened his stations to Top 30 lists rather than Top 40 lists, further tightening the rotations on the stations (Simpson, 2011, p. 12). By the end of the 1960s WLAV and WGRD in Grand Rapids, which originally published lists of up to 50 selections, had tightened their lists down to a Top 30 presentation. By lowering the number of available selections to be heard on the station, the consultant narrowed the number of possible songs that could see airplay on a station. Program directors were limited in terms of whether they could or could not add a song to the station given two factors: 1) the decreased number of opportunities for adding to a playlist, and 2) the fact that, at most stations, the consultant answered only to the station general manager or owner, and any other employees were therefore subject to following the instruction of the consultant. Disobeying the consultant could easily lead to a disc jockey losing their job, so individual air personalities were reticent to change the list prepared for them by the broadcast consultant. Mike Joseph was the consultant for WLAV, and ran what station personality George McDaniel called a “very tight ship,” adding that Joseph controlled every detail of the station, right down to how closely the playlist must be followed (G. McDaniel, personal communication, March 11, 2016). By exerting supreme control over programming, it can be argued that the station’s consultant had a greater role in shaping the sound of the station than the program director did.

As many of the programmers and disc jockeys in question have since passed away, it may be impossible to know the specific motivations that led them to make the decisions that they did.

However, through interviewing those that are still able to tell the story of how songs were selected or rejected, it may be possible to draw assumptions and commonalities about the decisions and infer whether they were part of a specific plan to manipulate the audience preference or were simply a by-product of attempting to achieve success for the radio station based on audience rating and advertising pressures.

The content that that media delivers – including its popular music – would therefore be an important factor in shaping the lives and beliefs of those that consume the media (DeFleur, 2010, p. 288). It would stand to reason that a unification of the media’s efforts would best carried out through a concentration of ownership power, and that sort of concentration did not widely occur at this point in history. The particular period reflected in this study represents a crossroads in terms of media ownership. Stations like WLS in Chicago and WGRD in Grand Rapids were owned by corporations that owned multiple media outlets. On the other hand, WCFL in Chicago was owned by the Chicago Federation of Labor, and WLAV in Grand Rapids was owned by John Shepard, who maintained an office in the station. It would be very difficult to make the case today, in a world of concentrated corporate ownership, that such ownership leads to any significant control over the beliefs, attitudes, opinions, or meanings broadly shared by society (Defleur & Ball-Rokeach, 1989, p. 301). We can, however, consider the power that radio stations did (and do) have over shaping the tastes and preferences of their audiences. When viewed through the frame of the 1960s, it can be argued that an individual gatekeeper was able to shape the culture of the time. It can be further argued that, given the market for “nostalgia” programming today, these decisions made by gatekeepers fifty years ago still have the power to shape what audiences believe to have been popular then and therefore believe what is popular now.

## Chapter 4: Procedures and Method

This study serves as an analysis of the local radio station playlists over a period in AM radio history. It attempts to draw conclusions about the discrepancies between songs listed as nationally popular records, and the songs that were deemed to be popular in two Midwestern radio markets. It argues that race and gender preference played a role in the chart positions of records deemed to have played based on published playlists from the period. Also, through a series of interviews with former radio professionals, it seeks to understand the process by which radio stations made the decisions to add or not to add particular pieces of music to their playlists and who or what served as gatekeepers with respect to music selection.

### Research Questions

Considering the role of the gatekeeper in playlist selection paired with other factors at work, it is possible to formulate questions that may lead to answers about the decisions that were made in radio programming during this time period. An analysis of the radio playlists of past radio stations may yield answers to questions of why certain songs were played or not played.

For reference as to a baseline for songs that were popular in the past, national music charts will be considered. These charts were published weekly by *Billboard* magazine and were compiled by national reports of airplay and record sales. The *Billboard* Hot 100 chart was introduced on August 4, 1958 as a combination of charts that previously separated songs by radio airplay and record sales (Whitburn, 2003, p. xi). While the exact methodology used to determine the relative weight airplay in, say, Chicago or New York as compared to Grand Rapids, Michigan, or Peoria, Illinois, was not made available, it would stand to reason that radio stations in large cities – with more listeners and therefore more influence over record sales – would have playlists that match the national charts more closely than those of radio stations in smaller cities.

Likewise, disc jockeys typically seek to move from smaller radio stations to larger ones in an effort to gain a higher level of salary for their work. It can be assumed that the stations in larger cities would serve as influencers more than stations in smaller cities would.

For the purposes of this study, Chicago, Illinois, and Grand Rapids, Michigan, have been selected to represent large and small cities respectively. The cities are chosen for a number of reasons which will be detailed in the Methods section.

The following questions are presented:

- RQ1: How closely do the playlists of radio stations in a selected large city (Chicago) match the national charts?
- RQ2: How closely do the playlists of radio stations in a selected small city (Grand Rapids) match the national charts?

To answer these questions, analysis of weekly charts for *Billboard* were conducted. The results of those analyses were then compared with analysis of weekly charts in Chicago, and the closeness would be determined by both the percentage of songs matching and the median and mean positions of songs on the charts. For purposes of control, the same analysis would be conducted on stations in Grand Rapids. Special attention would be paid to the number of songs played on local playlists that failed to reach the national charts. Comparisons were also performed for the number of songs by non-White artists that made it onto each chart.

- RQ3: Did songs make their debut in Chicago first, or in Grand Rapids?

This can be determined by analyzing the debut dates of songs that were heard in both cities and comparing when the songs were first reported on weekly playlist charts. The stations that took the lead on debuting new material should become apparent. A song will be deemed to have premiered earlier if it appears on the playlist of one station at least seven days before appearing

on another station's playlist. The seven-day difference is necessary because it was common practice for stations to pick the publication date of their survey to "scoop" a station by a day or two on new releases. Ensuring a week's difference guarantees that the time difference is not a mere printing convenience. Even within a market, it typically takes some time for information to spread.

In the 1960s the dominant format for popular music was AM radio. AM stations in large cities typically carried for hundreds or thousands of miles propelled by powerful transmitters. These signals overlapped into smaller cities located nearby. In some cases – as was the case with Chicago and Grand Rapids – the stations in the smaller cities signed off at night. It is entirely possible that radio listeners left with no option but to consume out of town broadcasts may have heard songs on those stations (or had friends who did) and reported the music to stations in their own town, requesting them for airplay. Likewise, those in charge of programming the stations in the smaller cities likely heard the songs played on the larger stations and considered them for airplay on their own station. Experiments done by Deutschmann and Danielson (1960, p. 350) showed news stories were by far diffused to more of the population through media than through word of mouth, and it would be expected that news of new music would be diffused in much the same fashion. It would make sense that those in charge of determining what songs made it to the air in Grand Rapids would be influenced by what was happening in Chicago because of hearing them (or hearing of them) in this manner, and as such the larger market stations would have served as a gatekeeper. The first hypothesis suggests that the programming in smaller cities was influenced in this way.



- H1: Daytime-only radio stations in Grand Rapids were more likely to add songs to their playlist after the songs were added by more powerful stations from Chicago heard in Grand Rapids.

Likewise, these huge, 50,000-watt stations who were the influencers would have had their playlist heard by programmers across the country, and those program directors would have taken note of the addition of the music and followed suit. As a result, national trade publications such as *Billboard* would have taken note of the content. It therefore stands to reason that the large market stations would have been ahead of the national charts in adding the songs as well. For this analysis the same seven-day difference will be sufficient to count as leading the market.

- H2: Songs on playlists in Chicago would likely be added to those lists before the same songs appeared on national playlists.

It is important to consider the idea that a fear of losing advertising revenue forced the program directors and music directors to “play it safe” and stick to music that was more likely to be a hit. This was especially true in larger markets with increased competition and higher stakes in terms of advertising budgets. A smaller record label would have fewer resources available to them in terms of being able to influence a gatekeeper (i.e. cash, prizes, product for contests etc.) and would have had more success getting the attention of a smaller-market program director, who in turn would be more likely to add a song that had a less-proven track record and/or was recorded by an artist with less national support.

- H3: The playlists of stations in Chicago more closely matched the national charts than the playlists in Grand Rapids.

In order to attract a portion of a competitor's audience, a station may have been "forced" to play a song that a competitor put on their chart. In essence, that competing station thus becomes a gatekeeper in a sense, controlling the playlist for the other station in town. This is interesting to consider in the case of a "non-hit" record. As the Top 40 only has forty places for songs, a station playing a record that is not receiving national attention is keeping itself from reporting another record deemed to be a hit. While it is safe to assume that a record that is clearly a hit would be played by all stations in a market, this could be tested by looking at the occurrence of multiple stations in a market playing the same "non-hit" record.

- RQ4: Did one station in a market have the ability to influence changes in the playlist of another station in a market?
- H4: Within a given city, one station would add a non-hit record several days after another station in the same city had already added it.

Likewise, the charts may yield telling results when it comes to race and gender. By its definition the Top 40 format was supposed to be comprised of, quite simply, the 40 most popular songs each week among a particular city or region's audience. While certainly local tastes may have dictated the relative popularity of a selection (was it a #1 song or did it only make #5?), it would stand to reason that the same artists, driven by marketing efforts of large record companies, would appear with some consistency on all charts, both local and national. Yet there are marked variations in the number of songs by both African-American artists and female artists (and more so when both minority conditions are present) on these charts and the positions songs by those

artists reached on the charts. The puzzle is especially interesting in Chicago, the home to Chess Records, a top R&B label, and Vee-Jay Records, the most well-known black-owned record label of the time. How is it that songs produced in Chicago did not find their way down the street to local radio stations? Is it possible that a market leader set the pace in keeping certain songs from audiences?

A quick example comes in the form of “Respect” by Aretha Franklin. This widely-known cover of an Otis Redding song first debuted on the *Billboard* Hot 100 chart on April 29, 1967, and spent two weeks in the number one position (Whitburn, 2003, p. 263). Yet the Chicago chart data tells a different story: on WLS the song debuted a week later and peaked at number ten (Smith, 2001, p. 48) while WCFL advanced the song to #7 (Smith, 2007, p. 41). A quick look at the weekly charts from both Grand Rapids stations indicates that the song did not chart at all. Only WERX, a small-wattage station in Wyoming, Michigan, a Grand Rapids suburb, reported playing the song with any frequency. One Grand Rapids program director at the time rejected the record on the basis that it was “uppity” (B. Stickroe, personal communication, March 8, 2016).

- RQ5a: Was there a discrepancy in the chart placement in songs by African-American artists in the 1960s when comparing local and national charts?
- RQ5b: Was there a discrepancy in the chart placement of songs deemed to have a “soul” sound versus those deemed to have a more popular (“Motown” sound)?
- RQ5c: Was there a discrepancy in the chart placement in songs by female artists in the 1960s when comparing local and national charts?

By performing a careful analysis of the charted songs by both the chart position and by the race of the performer it can be determined to what degree the national and local charts disagree on the popularity of certain records.

This comparison may yield an interesting look at both the culture of the cities studied and of the time of the study itself. The sample frame looks at the 1960s on both sides of the Civil Rights Act of 1964. Racial tensions ebbed and flowed throughout the decade, and those preferences on race may have transferred over to popular music airplay as well. This raises an interesting question, however: did these stations merely reflect the attitudes their listeners had about race, or was it a specific mission of the station to display a preference for one type of music over another? A detailed mathematical comparison between national and local charts would be needed here to fully explore this notion. The theory of gatekeeping suggest that news organizations strive to reflect reality (Shoemaker & Reese, 2014, p. 173), and, were this to be strictly followed, the charts would show no difference from the national charts. But if we consider the role of the local radio station and its associated component forces as gatekeepers, we can see how these factors may serve to, or have reason to serve to, alter that reality and present the music in a way that the gatekeepers prefer to believe to be reality. The components of Hypothesis 5 will test if, in fact, what appears to the eye – that the songs by African-American and female performers receive less favorable chart positions than national data would reflect – is in fact valid.

- H5a: Songs by African-American artists overall fared poorer in terms of chart position on Chicago local radio station charts than they did on national charts.
- H5b: Of the songs by African-American artists, songs with more of a “soul” feel fared poorer in terms of chart position on Chicago local radio station charts than songs with a “pop” feel.
- H5c: Songs by female artists fared poorer in terms of chart position on Chicago local radio station charts than they did on national charts.

An outlying factor to be considered here could be local records – songs by bands from the cities where the radio stations were located. The practice of playing songs of a local interest has long since been abandoned by radio stations, but was much more prevalent from the early days of top 40 radio through the 1980s. Coding these records can determine if they are the cause of discrepancies between local playlists and national ones. As a source of local pride, influential large radio stations could theoretically have tried to advance a local group (defined as being geographically located in or formed in the coverage area of the station) on their charts in order to convince other stations influenced by them to seek out the same record. An example of this took place in 1967. The Chicago-area band The Cryan Shames recorded a song called “It Could Be We’re In Love.” WLS-AM reported the song at the #1 position for three weeks (Smith, 2001, p. 30) while rival WCFL-AM reported the song in the top spot for nine weeks (Smith, 2007, p. 26). The song generated enough notice to reach #97 on the *Billboard* national chart in 1967 (Whitburn, 2003, p. 164). Based on these types of anecdotes it might be useful to consider whether or not stations tried to build a sort of civic pride by giving a nod to local performers. Also, the role of program director as gatekeeper would be most easy to determine here. A program director could act as an individual, as in Shoemaker and Vos (2009), by selecting these songs that had no national marketing push or external incentive for addition to the playlist. Given that both Chicago and Grand Rapids had vibrant local music scenes, and both cities saw examples of local performers’ work being reported on playlists, both cities may be considered in this study.

- RQ6: How often did radio stations play bands from the same city or nearby city as the radio station itself?

Since there were a limited number of spots on a radio station playlist, such a local hit would either suppress or eliminate the chart position of a nationally-reported record. This zero-sum approach to playlist creation would result in certain songs receiving reduced airplay or no airplay at all. We can test this phenomenon in this way:

- H6: Radio stations with a higher degree of variance from the national playlist were more likely to play records from bands located within the coverage area of the radio station itself.

While the analysis of the data is important, it may be at least as informative (if not more so) to sit down with some of the surviving disk jockeys of the period and ask them for their first-hand recollection of the role that gatekeeping played in the selection of music for the station.

What were the reasons that particular records were (or were not) selected?

- RQ7: What was the process by which songs were moved up and down the playlist?

It is assumed that an individual, such as a program director or music director, will have had the ultimate say over whether songs move up or down the playlist chart. In that sense the person in charge of that decision will act as content manipulator, controlling both the message and the channel (Shoemaker & Vos, 2009, p. 20). By interviewing the radio personalities, it may also be possible to learn of other secondary forces that provided the information that the program directors and music directors used.

It will be of crucial importance to determine the lists that are being studied are valid. To that end, Research Question 8 will seek to identify, as much as possible, the level of accuracy contained in the weekly playlists that were released by the radio stations.

- RQ8: How closely, in your estimation, did the printed playlist reflect the actual airplay on the station?

Research Question 9 will specifically attempt to ascertain the role of two forces of influence outside of the radio station that may have played a role in the decision to play or not play music: the record companies (through their representatives) that provided the music to the stations, and the advertisers that sponsored the programs on the stations. Record company executives and representatives had one agenda in mind: to sell records to young radio listeners. In order to do so, they needed to get the product heard by listeners, and would approach music directors with new product in order to gain interest in the music. In a sense the record companies fulfilled the function of agents of power in the Propaganda Model developed by Herman and Chomsky (1988, p. 2: in Shoemaker & Reese, 2014, p. 86). In that model the media is reliant on the information that they receive. Were the record companies able to successfully apply pressure and get certain songs on the playlist, they would certainly assume a gatekeeping role with respect to broadcast content.

- RQ9a: Do you recall any pressure from record companies to add songs to the playlist that the disk jockeys did not feel would be right for the audience?

Advertising revenue is important to the success of a radio station. Stations generate their profits by delivering audiences for advertisers, and advertisers are drawn to stations that feature content that they feel is attractive to the types of customers that they want to reach (Shoemaker & Reese, 2014, p. 142). Modern media managers analyze the effect that programming will have on ratings, and, as such, that similar effect on revenue (Shoemaker & Reese, 2014, p. 140). It would be safe to assume that the same rules were followed in the period of this study as well. But in the 1960s ownership was less about corporations and more about individuals, who were more directly approachable by individual business owners. Research Question 9b will seek to

determine if the individual businessperson had an ability to affect the content of the radio station and, as such, serve as a gatekeeper in their own way.

- RQ9b: Do you recall any pressure from advertisers to remove songs from the playlist that the disk jockeys did feel were appropriate for the audience?

## **Method**

For this study surveys from Top 40 radio stations in both Chicago, Illinois, and Grand Rapids, Michigan, between 1960 and through 1970 were analyzed. These cities were chosen for several reasons. The first is convenience and availability of information. Much attention has been paid to WLS-AM in Chicago, and its history (including playlists) is well-preserved and available. The playlists of other stations in Chicago have been sought after by collectors for years, and compilations of the data contained on those lists are readily available. With respect to Grand Rapids, the author was fortunate enough to find a complete collection of radio surveys for that city as well, and the data on these surveys have, as best as can be determined, never been worked with in any meaningful fashion. The second compelling reason to choose these cities, however, is one of proximity. Grand Rapids falls within easy reach of each of the signal patterns of the three Top 40 radio stations serving Chicago in the 1960s: WLS, WCFL, and WJJD. Each of those AM stations broadcast with 50,000 watt signals covering hundreds of miles. A unique reason to use Grand Rapids is the fact that its primary Top 40 stations, WGRD and WLAV, had either daytime-only signals or weak night signals for some or part of their existence in the format. The listening public in Grand Rapids, once the local stations signed off for the night, would likely have listened to the programming coming from Chicago. It would stand to reason that radio listeners, hearing songs on Chicago stations, would have asked to hear similar songs on stations in Grand Rapids, and therefore the playlists should contain a degree of similarity.



Grand Rapids is also ideally located given popular music of the time frame in question. It is situated about a three hour drive from Chicago and a two hour drive from Detroit. Both of those larger cities produced a number of hit records in the 1960s. Detroit was the home to Motown Records, which is widely known, but also to a variety of smaller labels willing to take chances on local performers. Chicago did not have the same level of prominence as it lacked a label the size of Motown, but several aforementioned medium-sized labels (Vee Jay, Chess) and numerous smaller labels (USA, Destination) released a good amount of product through the 1960s. Bands from those cities, and perhaps more importantly record salesmen from those labels, would have had easy access to the town to aid in the distribution of music. Grand Rapids also had its own record label – Fenton – and a number of vanity imprint labels that handled distribution of bands from that city.

The date range is also chosen for specific reasons. 1960 represents the date that Chicago saw its second Top 40 station take to the airwaves in WLS. The station abandoned its Country music format in that year to take on WJJD in a competition for Top 40 listeners. The range begins in May of 1960 to coincide with competition in the format to study the commonality of playlists across competing stations. Likewise, the analysis concludes in 1970 to coincide with the decline of Top 40 as a dominant AM radio format. The number of commercial FM radio stations tripled between 1960 and 1970 to 2,126 (Carter et al., 2006, p. 4-1028), and, as previously mentioned, Grand Rapids saw an FM station rise to the top spot in the ratings that same year.

Multiple stations from each market were selected to ensure a continuity of format over the decade of the 1960s. Radio stations periodically change format, and only one of the five stations listed – WLS from Chicago – consistently played Top 40 music through the period, although they did not report playlists until late in 1960. The other stations were chosen for two

purposes: one, to achieve a record of format continuity, and two, as competitors in the Top 40 format, their programming decisions would have been more likely impacted by other stations in their respective markets.

Analysis of the content was done by creating a data table. The table consists of individual song titles and artists, the station that played the song, and the date that the song first appeared on the station. In addition, the national chart debut date and position are also noted for each individual song. That information comes from charts published in *Billboard* magazine, long regarded as the respected index of popular music in the United States. *Billboard* charts are also easily available for analysis as they are reprinted and published by author Joel Whitburn. Songs that charted higher (i.e. reached a higher position, or lower number) would be expected to receive more airplay than those charting lower.

From the data contained in the table it is possible to perform a variety of analyses on the information contained in them. The peak positions of songs at both the national and local level were compared to check for discrepancy. Since each title was also coded by the race and the gender of the performer, this allowed a calculation to be done to see if there was a local or regional bias against a performer's body of work based upon the race or gender of the performer.

To create the table, the playlists were analyzed for their content. Each song listed on a chart from one of the corresponding radio stations was given an entry in the table. That song was cross-referenced on the *Billboard* chart for its debut dates on both the Hot 100 and Top 40 charts published by the magazine. If the song failed to make the chart, a value of "xx" was assigned to the chart position. The date and peak position for the song on each station was also listed for each song. If a station was not in the Top 40 format at the time of the song's release, a value of "nc" (no chart) was assigned. If a station elected not to play a long that was played on

another station, a value of “dnp” (did not play) was assigned. After all of the station playlists were analyzed, a double check was performed for any songs that made the *Billboard* Top 40 chart but were not reported on any station. While rare, these cases do exist, and the entire field of radio station data is coded “dnp” except for stations outside of the format at that time. The analysis of the charts yielded 5,747 individual song titles from the period from 1960 through 1970. As every song to make the chart was considered in the analysis, a probability sample was not used.

Variables were operationalized as follows:

Debut date: indicates the date of the first printed chart where a song title is referenced by either a radio station or by *Billboard*.

Peak position: the highest position a song attained on either a radio station playlist or on the *Billboard* chart.

Additionally, each song title was coded with information pertaining to the performer of the title. For Race, a code of 0=White, 1= Black, and 2=Hispanic was used. An additional coding to separate styles of music coded as being performed by Black artists has also been done for further separation of the styles of songs based on the sound of the song. Songs by White artists retain a code of 0. This code also applies to songs by Black artists with a strong rock feel such as by Jimi Hendrix or Love. Songs with a pop/Motown feel were coded 1 while songs with a more soulful, or “Stax Records” feel were coded 2. Songs by Black artists that are instrumental records were coded 3. Note that it is possible for the same artist to have multiple codes for their work: an artist like Jerry Butler or Marvin Gaye, for example, changed their singing style from the beginning of the decade to the end of the decade, and that change is reflected in the coding of individual song titles by those artists. For Gender, a code of 0=male and 1=female was used.

The Gender code is based on the lead or prominent singer of the track; a group consisting of men and women may have songs with different codes depending on the individual title. For Local, a code of 0=national, 1=Chicago area, and 2=Grand Rapids area is used. A full explanation of the coding used, along with specific examples, is included in Appendix A.

In addition to the quantitative analysis of playlist data, qualitative interviews were conducted with several disk jockeys, music directors, and program directors who worked at these radio stations during the 1960s and early 1970s. Questions were asked of the radio talent to assess specifics about the decisions to play (or not play) songs on the radio station. While the discussion was open-ended and allowed for follow-up questioning if necessary, the basic framework of each interview was identical. The basic interview questions that were used are found in Appendix B. Participants in the interviews were briefed that their responses would be quoted in this work, and they were reminded that their participation was voluntary.

The participants in the interviews included:

- John Leader Alfenito, music director for both WGRD and WLAV in Grand Rapids, Michigan. John later went on to work for WQXI/Atlanta, GA, and KHJ/Los Angeles, CA. After leaving radio John hosted syndicated shows such as “Countdown America” and is a nationally-recognized voice talent.
- Bob Becker, radio personality with WGRD and WLAV in Grand Rapids among other stations. Bob began his air career in 1965 as a high school student, and continues to make a part-time career of radio today.
- Ron Britain, radio personality with WCFL and WIND in Chicago, among others. Ron was the host of the *Subterranean Circus* radio program on WCFL. Before coming to

Chicago Ron worked for WSAI in Cincinnati, Ohio, where his nightly program earned a 72 share of the audience in the Pulse ratings.

- Ken Draper, program director with WCFL in Chicago from 1965 until 1968. Ken came to the station from KYW in Cleveland, Ohio, and was responsible for retooling WCFL as a Top 40 station when it entered the format in 1965.
- Bob Hale, radio personality with WLS in Chicago from 1960 to 1964. Before coming to Chicago Bob was a personality with KRIB in Mason City, Iowa. He is perhaps best known for emceeding the “Winter Dance Party” concert on February 2, 1959 – the last appearance of Buddy Holly on stage. In order to settle the disagreement over who got the last seat on the plane, Bob flipped the coin that ultimately earned Richie Valens his place in immortality.
- Herb Kent, radio personality for WVON in Chicago. Known as “The Cool Gent,” Herb is one of the most recognizable figures in Black radio. Herb has been working continuously somewhere on the dial since 1947, which earned him recognition in the Guinness Book of World Records for Longest Radio Career.
- John Records Landecker, music director at WERX in Grand Rapids but best known for his stint at WLS in Chicago. Landecker won the *Billboard* Air Personality of the Year award three times in the 1970s.
- George McDaniel, music director and personality for WLAV in the 1960s. Known on air as George “The Fine Baby” Arthur, he was the undisputed leader in nighttime radio in Grand Rapids for the latter half of the 1960s.
- Ron Smith, author of numerous books on the history of charted music in Chicago. Ron also served as music director for Oldies station WJMK and adult-contemporary

WKQX, both in Chicago. Ron also worked as an air personality in the 1970s at WCCQ in Joliet, Illinois, a suburb of Chicago.

- Bob Stickroe, air personality (and later music director) at WZZM-FM in Grand Rapids. Bob also worked for WGRD and many other stations over a forty-year career.

Interviews with the radio personalities were conducted in March and April of 2016. The interviews were recorded and transcribed for use in this work.

## Chapter 5: Presentation and Analysis of Data

A variety of analyses were performed on the chart data in an effort to determine whether or not gatekeeping theory could be successfully applied to the selection of music on these radio stations. Additionally, through analysis of the responses given by interview subjects, identification of the gatekeepers – and the amount of influence that they had in shaping popular music culture during the time period – shed some fresh light on the numerical data. From these analyses we see that there were multiple possible gatekeepers controlling the music in radio in the 1960s.

### Research Questions

The first research questions sought to identify how closely the playlists of radio stations in both Chicago and in Grand Rapids matched the national popularity charts as printed in *Billboard* magazine. In order to answer these questions, numerical analysis was conducted on each station's playlists to determine how closely the titles on the stations matched the titles on the national chart. As this study deals with a census rather than a sample, predictive statistical measures were not used. Since the *Billboard* chart features 100 titles each week, the analyses were conducted on two levels – how closely the stations matched the national top 100 list, and then how closely they followed the famous “Top 40” chart that *Billboard* is known for. The results of these analyses are depicted in Figures 1 and 2. In each case, a clear pattern emerges for stations that were in the Top 40 format before 1966: there is a greater amount of divergence from the national chart “norms” before 1966 than after that time period. In the case of WCFL, which only began in the format at the end of 1965, its selections match the magazine chart very closely. What factors may have gone into the change in Top 40 after 1966?

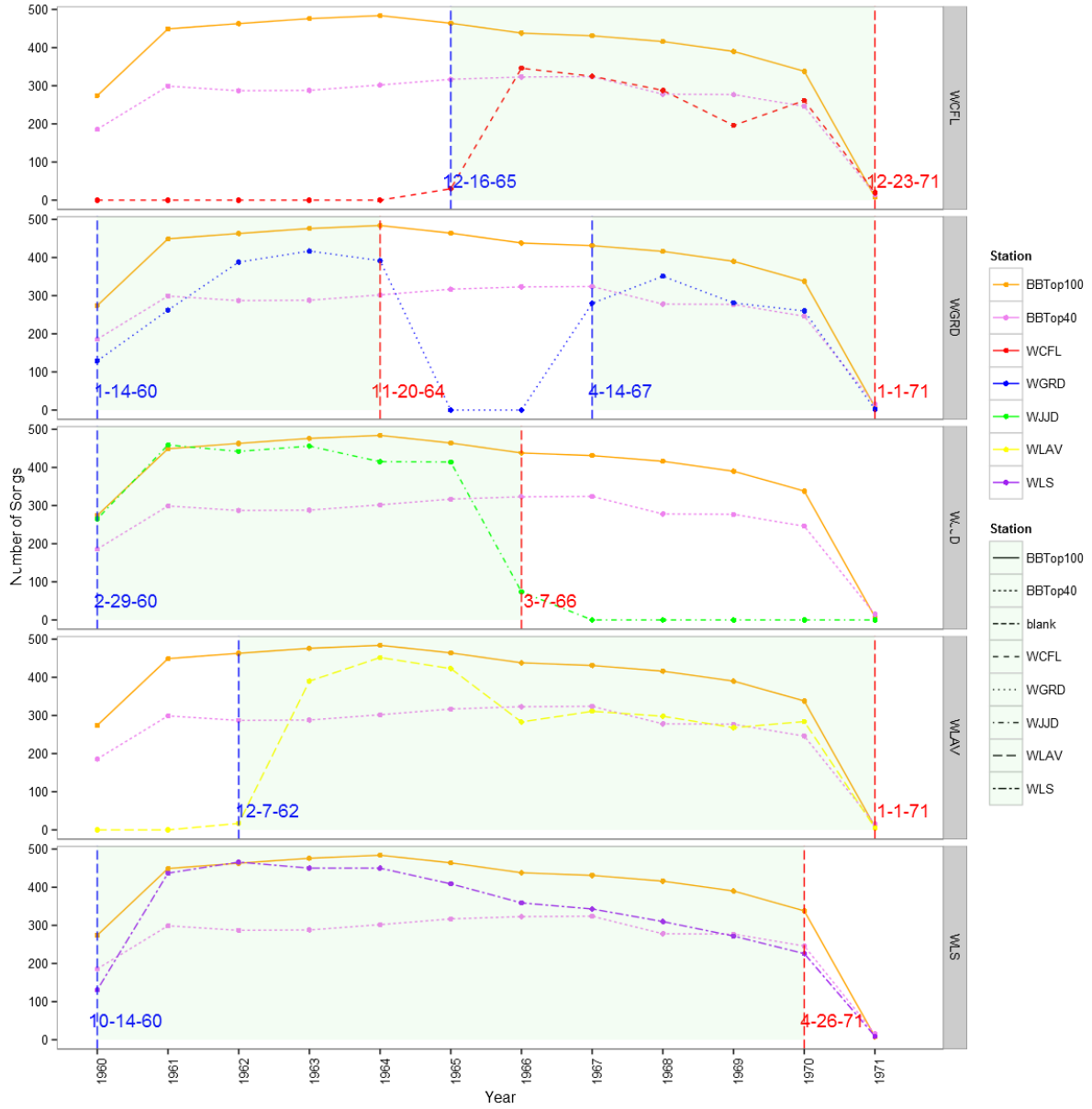


Figure 1. Individual station playlist data compared to *Billboard* Hot 100 chart.



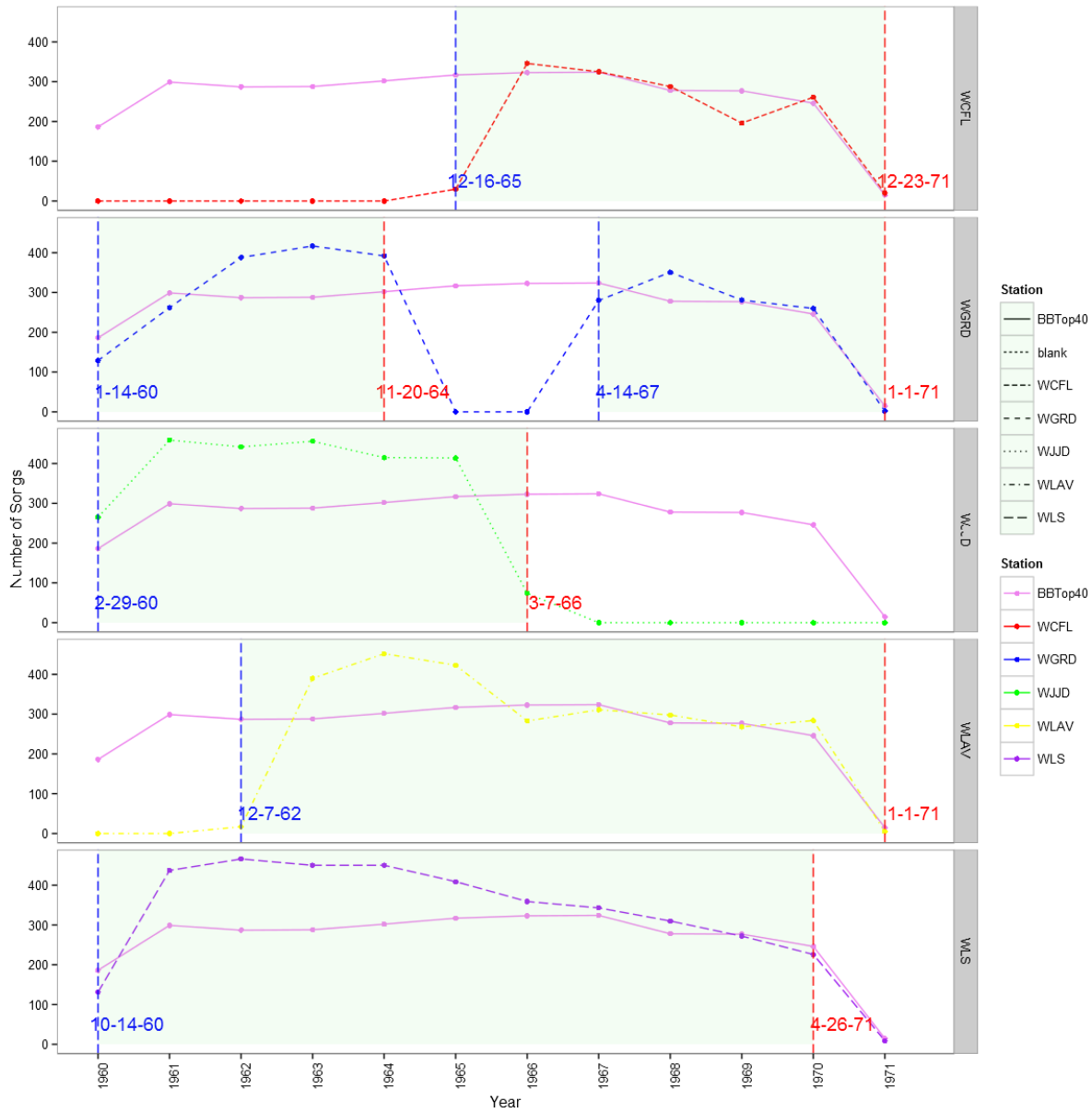


Figure 2. Individual station playlist data compared only to *Billboard* Top 40 chart.

A few separate factors may have played a gatekeeping role after 1966 that led to the stations' playlists more closely mirroring the national charts. The first is, of course, the charts themselves. Radio stations had access to *Billboard* and could use the charts as a tool to determine what songs should be played. But interviews with those working at the stations at the time

downplay the role that the publication had in the actual selection of the music. Ken Draper, the program director of WCFL, suggested that *Billboard* was only one tool that the station used.

If I'm remembering correctly, I believe that we used Bill Gavin and *Billboard* and everything else. All of that information was available. None of it specifically determined (our decision) ... We didn't play a record just because it, it had entered the chart on *Billboard*, or Bill Gavin was recommending it, or someone else. What I was interested in was knowing as much as I could about what was available to us and what was happening to records (K. Draper, personal communication, March 11, 2016).

Draper went on to suggest that his counterpart at WLS in the late 1960s, John Rook, "had a hard line system and numerically these 30 or 40 records fit John's list and that was the end of it" (K. Draper, personal communication, March 11, 2016). John Landecker, whose first music director role was at WERX/Grand Rapids as a 19-year-old, stated that the magazine's chart didn't factor into his decision making process at all.

We didn't do any research or focus groups or compare the national charts or anything else, as far as I was concerned... if it's selling, then we should play it. If I like it, we should play it. That's allegedly my job. I remember taking a bunch of new 45's home and (John) Alfenito would come over and we'd listen to them, and go, what do you think of that? (J. Landecker, personal communication, March 9, 2016).

Often the opinion of the program director was sufficient to keep a song off of the air, even when popularity said otherwise. The resulting delay would have kept the song from being heard by radio audiences. Bob Stickroe summed that up this way:

You know, and, you've been at this business long enough, I've been at this business long enough; when you first hear a song, usually, you make an opinion of whether you like it or not and sometimes, I'd have to admit, there have been songs in the past that I'd hear and I'd say "I don't like that one", so I wouldn't add it, but after maybe 3 or 4 weeks, you see the song moving up the charts and say "Well ... " ... and it wouldn't be anything, you know, it's, like, if it was Number 10 on *Billboard*, whether I liked it or not, I was playing it (B. Stickroe, personal communication, March 8, 2016).

John Alfenito explained that even with the various tools at his disposal, often the music director just went by gut instinct.

Honestly, most of the new music by untried artists was selected for airplay based upon our subjective judgment of how it sounded. Did it sound like a hit? Was there a strong hook (recurring lyric or tune people could easily remember)? As we were often the very first radio stations to play these records, we were just trying to put songs on the air that we thought our audience would like. It didn't always work, but our track record was decent. The more I picked songs, the better I got at it, by the way (J. Alfenito, personal communication, April 5, 2016).

If *Billboard* did not fulfill the role of the gatekeeper, then perhaps the broadcast consultant and *The Gavin Report* filled that role instead. Both George McDaniel of WLAV and Bob Becker of WLAV and WGRD specifically indicated consulting *The Gavin Report* to watch for up and coming songs. (Ken Draper indicated it was used but not relied on exclusively.) If enough stations were looking to this outside source for guidance, and following its advice, it would stand to reason that the playlists would become more uniform over time. But the emergence of the broadcast consultant may be the more powerful factor to consider, and the consultant should be considered a gatekeeper. McDaniel indicated that WLAV's consultant, Mike Joseph, ruled the stations that hired him with an iron fist when it came to musical decisions.

(Joseph) was tighter than tight. And people would cheat, and he'd come and talk to them, and they would be in trouble. I asked him if I could occasionally play an oldie, since other stations were doing it. He indicated that those stations weren't following his advice. But he let me play one a night. One. So that meant anything that wasn't in the top, what was on the list then at that point, didn't get played (G. McDaniel, personal communication, March 11, 2016).

McDaniel added that the consultant didn't just control the music but also the words that the disk jockeys used in their regular speech pattern.

One of the rules was you never say “us.” You never say “we,” like “we’re giving away a car.” Always WLAV. You always mention the call letters, whenever you are talking about yourself, or whatever you are doing. And he would count how many times you did it every half hour, and if you did it a couple more that was too many. If you did it under, that was wrong too (G. McDaniel, personal communication, March 11, 2016).

Stealth was the key weapon in controlling the personalities. Often they did not know that they were being listened to. In a pre-Internet world, that either meant the use of a “listen line,” a telephone number the consultant could call to hear the station, or it meant the consultant physically traveling to town.

You know what he would do? He would sneak into town, stay at the Penn Hotel, log everybody, and then walk over and introduce himself. And come in and say “Here I am. And George, you only said the call letters 23 times, you know.” And if you did something like play a song out of order, he’d catch you. “That’s number 9, that’s not number 10.” All on these yellow legal pads (G. McDaniel, personal communication, March 11, 2016).

To answer the first two research questions, it is safe to say that the decade of the 1960s needs to be split into two halves: one where stations took more chances musically with respect to the national measures of popularity, and a later half where stations were much more in lockstep with what the nation followed overall. The role of the consultant as gatekeeper appears to be much stronger in the second half of the decade.

Radio programmers also relied on what other stations were playing. Radio programmers, to some degree, looked at what was going on in other markets to determine whether or not to add a song. While *The Gavin Report* served as a sort of summary list of new songs to add, it did not always provide information as to relative popularity in a city. Programmers who could see the other playlists would turn to established stations as gatekeepers. During WLS’s entry into the Top 40 world, they relied on such information, but Bob Hale suggested that over time the station went from researcher to gatekeeper.

Sam Holman, program director, would talk to the PD that replaced him in Pittsburgh and had some Top 40 lists charts that were sent to us. We had to know what were the top stations playing. What were so-and-so playing in stations, in markets, that already had Top 40 type radio stations? What were they playing in Kansas City, and St. Louis and then we would listen to those and Sam or Gene Taylor later, would put them on the list as a Top 40 extra, Silver Dollar Survey Extra and see if they would play in Chicago as well. However, what happened I would say after the first year or so, the other markets were looking at our Top 40. What's WLS playing? What's in their Top 10 and what are they playing as a new tune or an extra? Maybe we should be playing it. Rather than looking at, we were looked at (B. Hale, personal communication, March 9, 2016).

This phenomenon of WLS-as-gatekeeper, however, went in two directions and changed over time. John Landecker indicated that by the time he got to the station in 1972, the station was more likely to let others serve as the decision makers.

...there was a lot of, at least in Chicago, I did know this was a fact, we're not going to play it until it's a hit somewhere else. It has to prove itself. It has to have a proven track record before it goes on the air, because we're too big a radio station ... to move along with songs that don't work. And that's why we took forever to play Styx, because they were a local band and hadn't had any hits outside of the market. I think that process was used pretty much by every big major radio station in the country. And I'm talking about big ones in the major market(s) (J. Landecker, personal communication, March 9, 2016).

Landecker indicated that at WLS the position of songs on other stations – and in *Billboard* – was important in the decision to add a record.

I think the record company people, the record label people would bring in statistics. You know, “look, uh, Mike, it's number three in Chattanooga, number four over here in Ames, Iowa. It's number one in Pittsburgh, it's number seven in Orlando.” And you had *Billboard* magazine, you had some music sheets that were out at the time that catalogued that info (J. Landecker, personal communication, March 9, 2016).

The chart positions of the songs that were *Billboard* hits that radio stations did not choose to play are important. A mere numerical “play/did not play” comparison fails to consider the difference between a song that peaks at 40 versus a song that peaks at 41. From a record sales perspective, that is a minimal distinction, and penalizing a station in the analysis for such an omission seems foolish. Instead, we can break out each station's playlists by the relative

position of songs that they chose not to play and see how many “big hits” were missed, and also to see how many songs made the national charts.

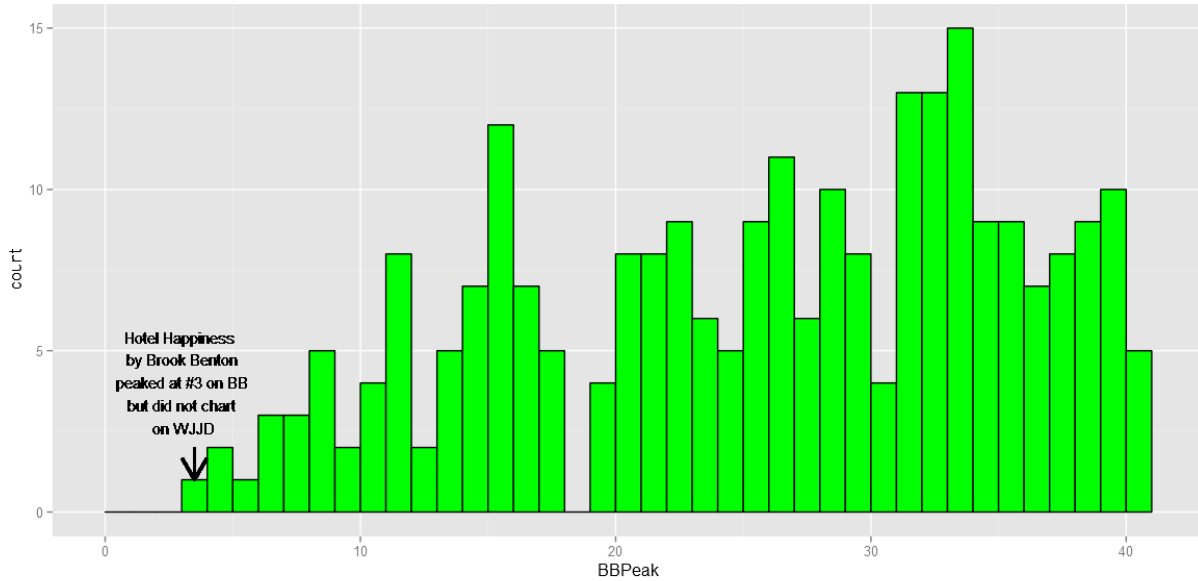


Figure 3. Frequency of songs that WJJD chose not to play by *Billboard* peak.

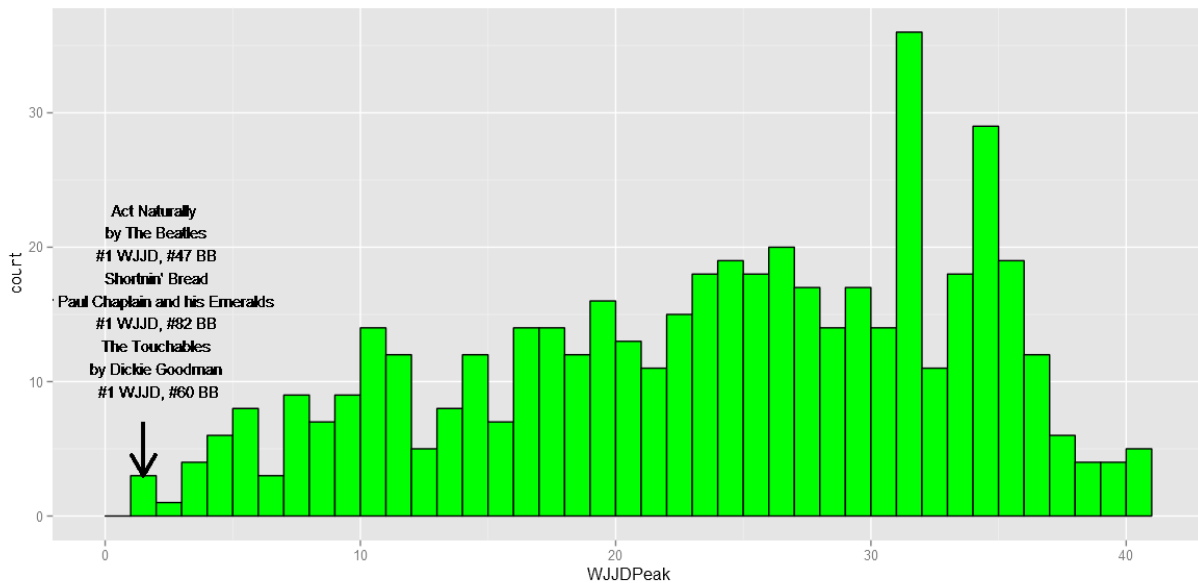


Figure 4. Frequency of songs that WJJD played that did not make the *Billboard* top 40.

Figures 3 and 4 show the frequency of songs that WJJD did not add to its playlist that charted as well as songs the station that did play that missed the *Billboard* Top 40. There were no

songs that charted at #1 or #2 nationally that the station failed to play. But in the reverse direction, there were three titles that made the top of the WJJD charts that saw no addition to *Billboard*: “Act Naturally,” a Beatles B-side, a Dickie Goodman novelty record, and Paul Chaplain and His Emeralds, a rockabilly group. In total, while there were 21 songs that made the *Billboard* top 10 that WJJD failed to play, there were 66 titles that WJJD put into its top 10 that *Billboard* failed to report in its Top 40. Given that the station operated in the earlier half of the decade – the time when, we have argued, that stations were more likely to diverge from the national norm – this discrepancy seems to make sense.

For each station in this study, a scatter plot of songs played by chart position was created. The x axis represents the *Billboard* chart position while the y axis represents the peak position for a song on an individual station survey. A regression line is overlaid on each plot. Figure 5 shows the scatter plot for WJJD, and indicates that the station did not always follow suit with respect to placing songs in the “correct” positions. The correlation between *Billboard* peak and WJJD peak returns a value of 0.483.

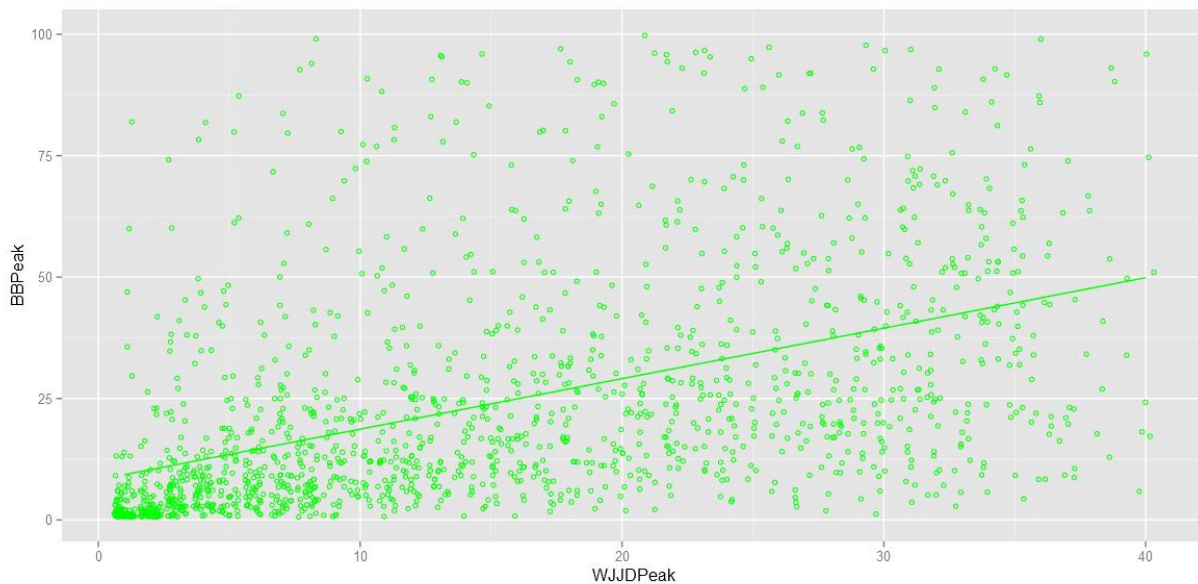


Figure 5. Scatter plot of correlation between *Billboard* peak and WJJD peak.

The graph for WLS more clearly indicates a distinction between records that were big hits, and records that were not. WLS is the only station in this study that remained in the Top 40 format for the entire period from 1960-1970, and reflects both halves of the decade with respect to music selection.

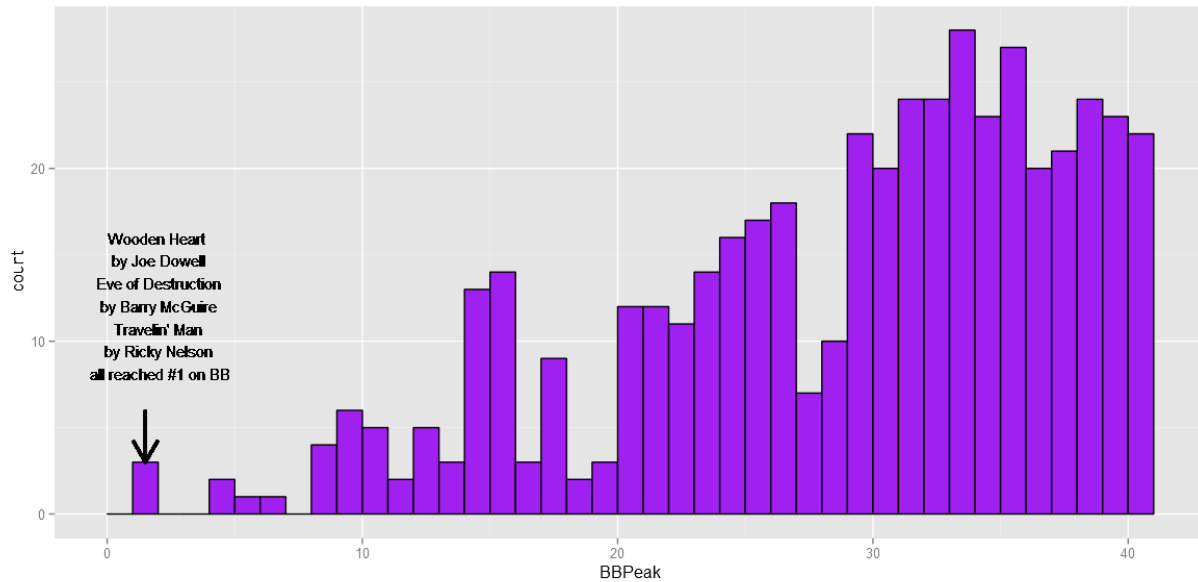


Figure 6. Frequency of songs that WLS chose not to play by *Billboard* peak.

WLS only missed three #1 songs in eleven years: “Wooden Heart,” by Joe Dowell, “Travelin’ Man” by Ricky Nelson (opting instead to give full attention to the B-side, “Hello Mary Lou”), and “Eve of Destruction” by Barry McGuire, which it opted not to play for political reasons. It missed no songs that peaked at #2 or #3 on the *Billboard* chart and a total of only 22 songs in 11 years that *Billboard* reported in the Top 10. On the other side of the equation, there were 105 titles – less than ten a year, on average – that made their way to the top ten of the WLS chart. Four of those reached #1 – again, a Beatles B-side in “I Should Have Known Better,” a Dickie Goodman novelty record, a local hit by the Cryan Shames, and “Sing a Simple Song,” a B-side by Sly and the Family Stone. The scatter plot of WLS’s played records shows a much closer



correlation with *Billboard*'s representation of hits than WJJD, and is represented in Figure 8. The correlation between *Billboard* peak and WLS peak is in fact stronger, at 0.551.

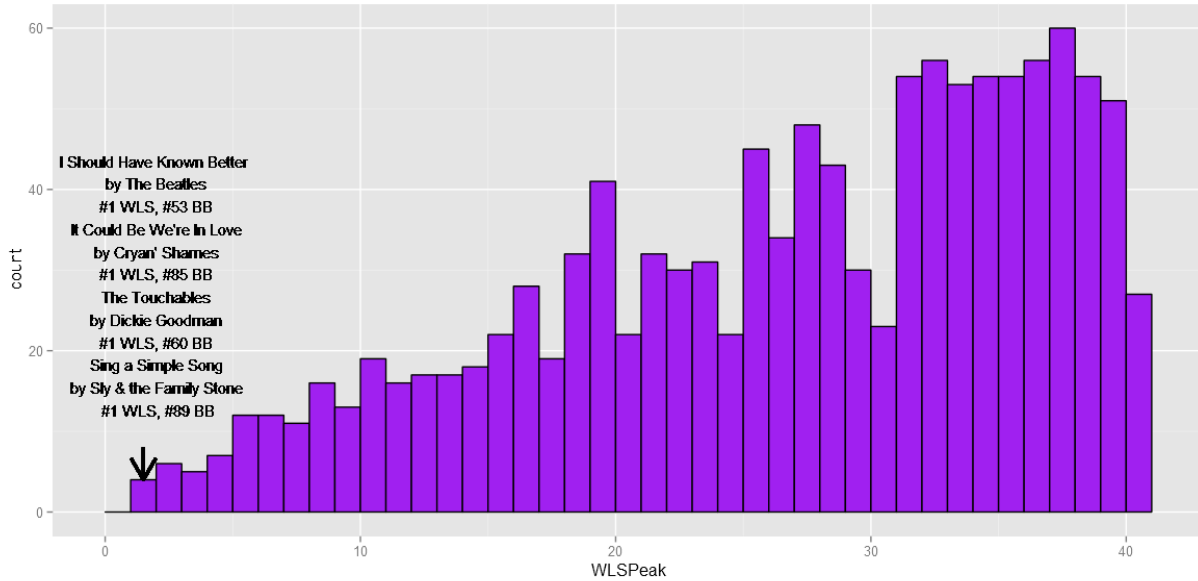


Figure 7. Frequency of songs that WLS played that did not make the *Billboard* top 40.

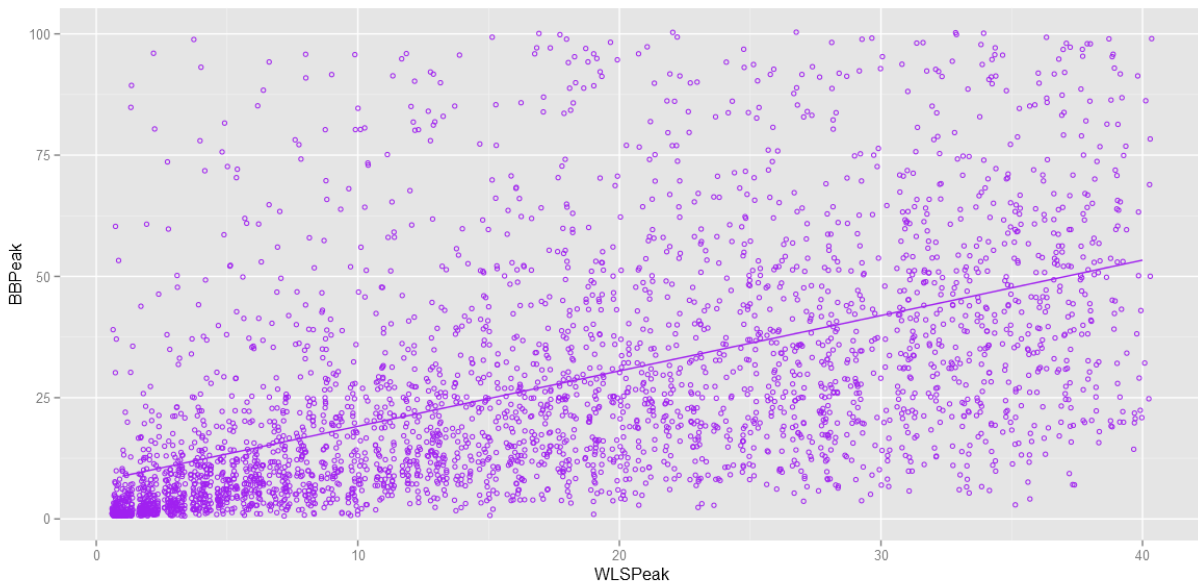


Figure 8. Scatter plot of correlation between *Billboard* peak and WLS peak.

WCFL may have followed the charts most closely of all. As it only existed as a Top 40 station after 1965, in the heart of the more consultant-driven era, there are fewer outliers on its frequency charts of peak position than any other station. Figure 9 shows the songs that made the national chart that WCFL missed. Only fourteen titles that made the national top ten were missed by the station, and only one was a number one song – “Come Together” by the Beatles. (The station opted in that case to play the B-side, “Something,” instead.)

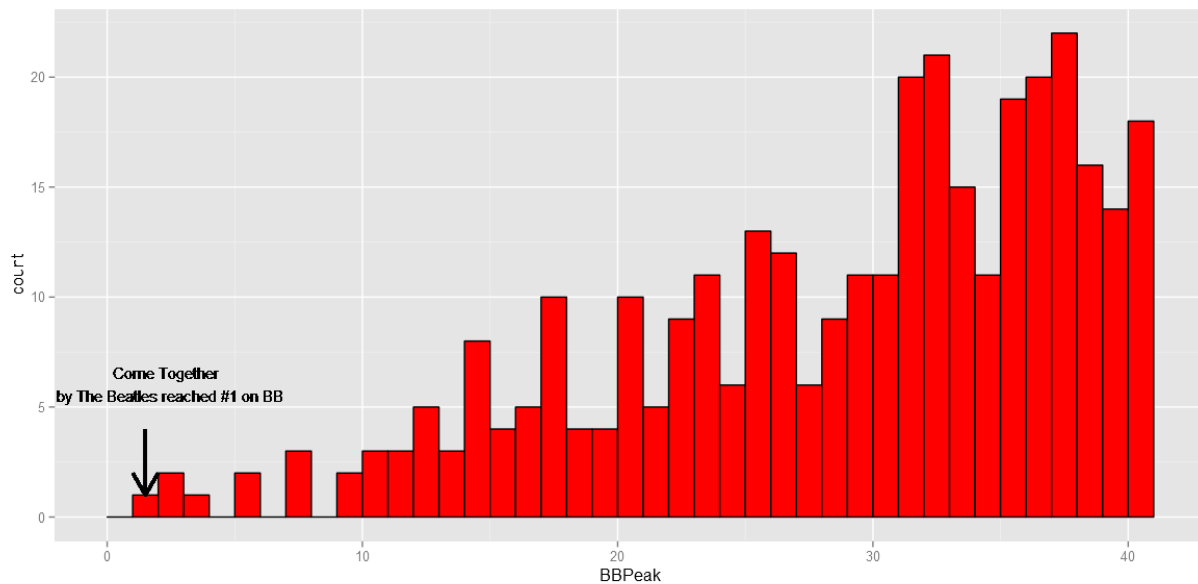


Figure 9. Frequency of songs that WCFL chose not to play by *Billboard* peak.

At the other end of the chart, there were a total of 36 songs that WCFL added to its Top 10 that saw no action in *Billboard*. Four of these were #1 songs, and local music did play a role here as was the case with WLS in that “It Could Be We’re In Love” by the Cryan Shames, a band from Chicago, spent nine weeks at number one.

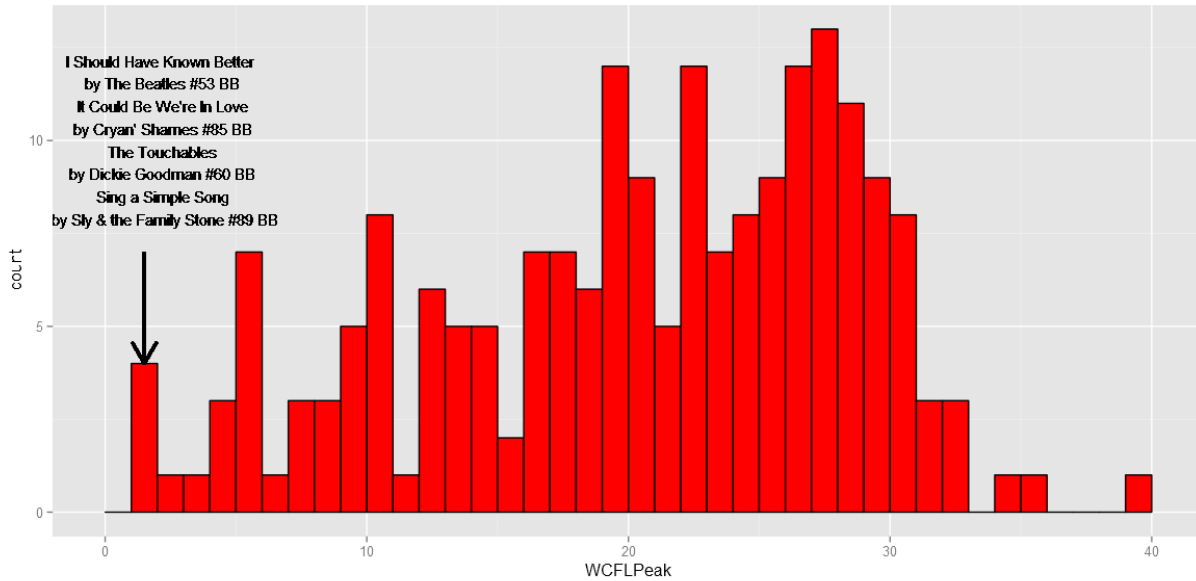


Figure 10. Frequency of songs that WCFL played that did not make the *Billboard* top 40.

The resulting scatter plot for WCFL is a little tighter than the other two stations, given that WCFL did not report a 40-song playlist for much of the time that fell in this study. Songs, if played at all on the station, would necessarily have charted higher due to fewer chart positions, and that is represented in Figure 11. The resulting correlation between *Billboard* peak position and WCFL peak position is the strongest of all at 0.535.

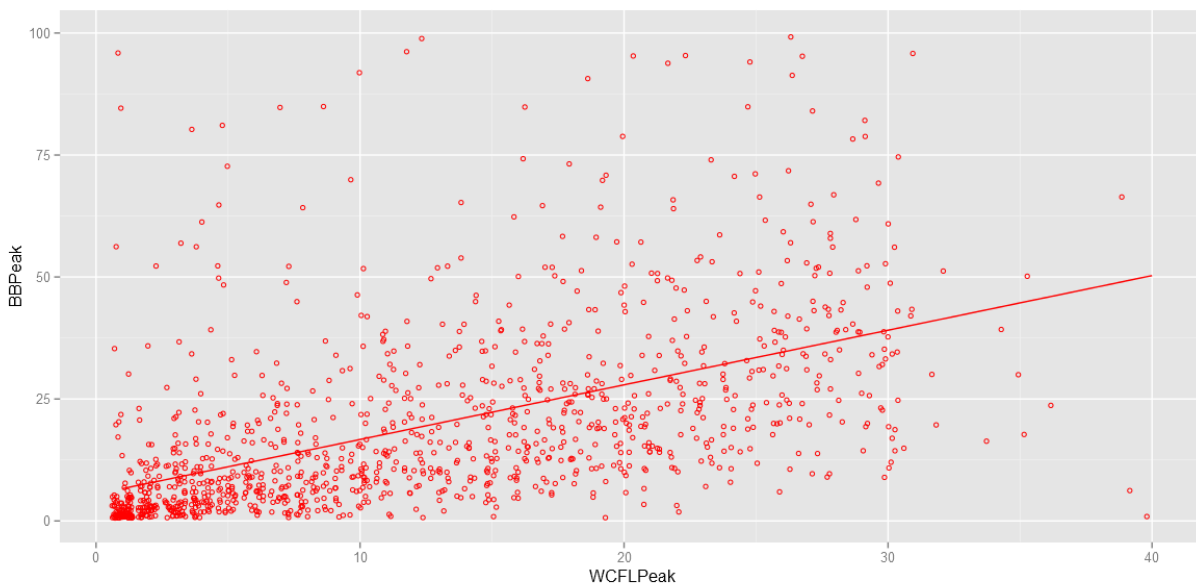


Figure 11. Scatter plot of correlation between *Billboard* peak and WCFL peak.

In addition to playing a shorter list for a while, WCFL also, depending on the time of day, simply played fewer songs than other stations. Ron Britain, who hosted the nighttime program, did a show heavy on pre-produced comedy, and, to his recollection, only played maybe five or six records an hour. Britain suggested that at least on his show, the music was merely a component rather than the focus.

And, when I was at CFL, I was writing like three hours a night for that show. I would do a major bit and a minor bit every hour... A minor bit was like Rex King, and protesting the weather, where Fatman and Robin Birdlegs would be a major one... Mike King was the recording engineer at CFL. He paid me a really a nice compliment. He said, "You know, Ron, the records are just curtain closers for your bits" (R. Britain, personal communication, March 4, 2016).

The analysis for the Grand Rapids stations is a little more complicated. Of the two stations, WLAV was a latecomer to the Top 40 format but stayed in the format for the duration of its existence in the period. WGRD started as a Top 40 station, but took time off in the middle of the decade. By the time it returned to the format in 1967, its list much more closely matched the national charts, as WLAV had also done. Figure 12 shows the discrepancy in songs that made the *Billboard* charts but were not played on WGRD. There were twelve number one songs, and five of those were by Black artists. Despite missing three years in the format, there were 106 songs that made *Billboard's* Top 10 that WGRD did not play at all.

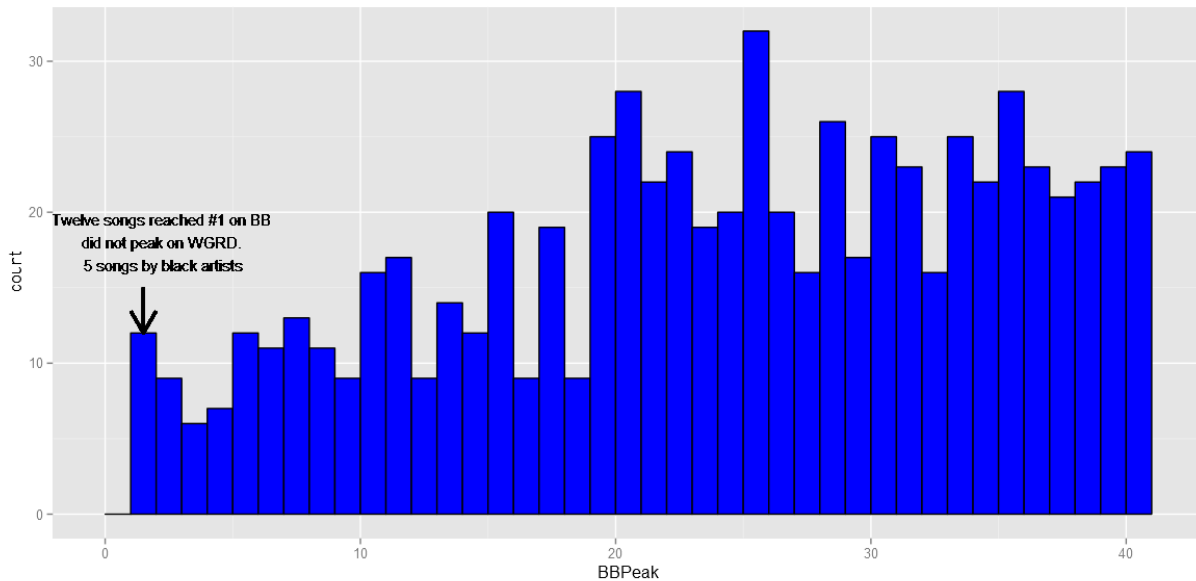


Figure 12. Frequency of songs that WGRD chose not to play by *Billboard* peak.

Conversely there were 103 songs that managed to make it into the WGRD top 10 that failed to get the attention of the *Billboard* Top 40. Former WGRD disk jockey Bob Becker suggested that local music may have played a role in that, due to the station’s connections to Dave Kalmbach, the owner of Fenton Records, a local label that produced songs by Grand Rapids bands (B. Becker, personal communication, March 10, 2016). This will be explored more fully in Hypothesis 6. On the other side of the issue of race, there were eight songs that made #1 on WGRD that *Billboard* neglected to play, and seven of those were by White artists. Figure 13 represents the frequency distribution of these songs.

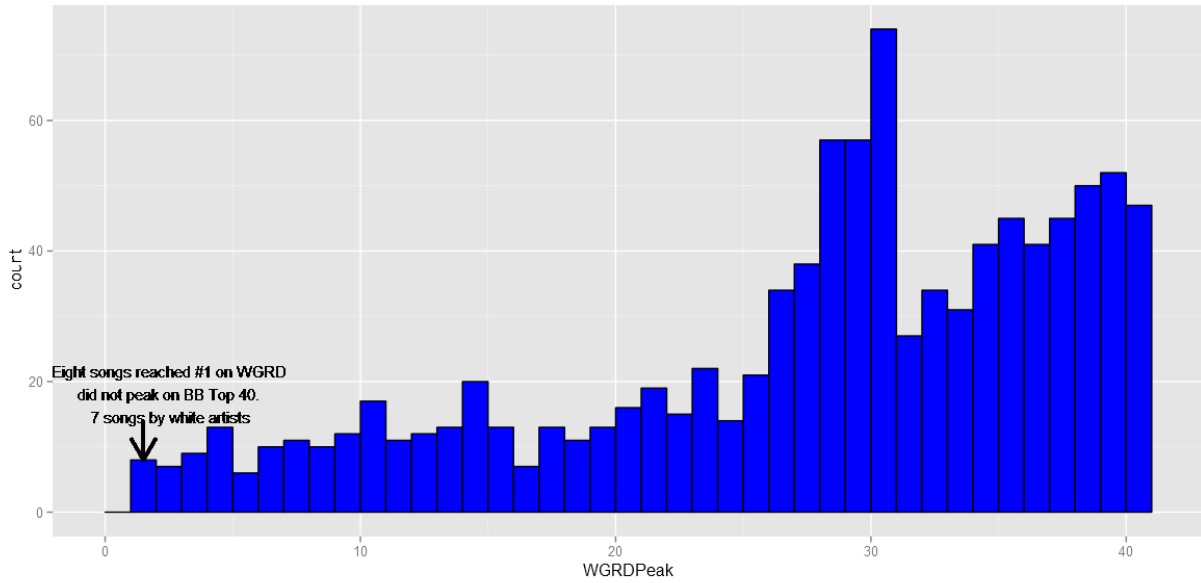


Figure 13. Frequency of songs that WGRD played that did not make the *Billboard* top 40.

By the end of the 1960s WGRD had also shortened its weekly playlist to 30 songs, so the scatter plot of comparative chart data in Figure 14 will necessarily chart fewer songs at the right side of the graph. The correlation value between *Billboard* peak and WGRD peak is 0.412.

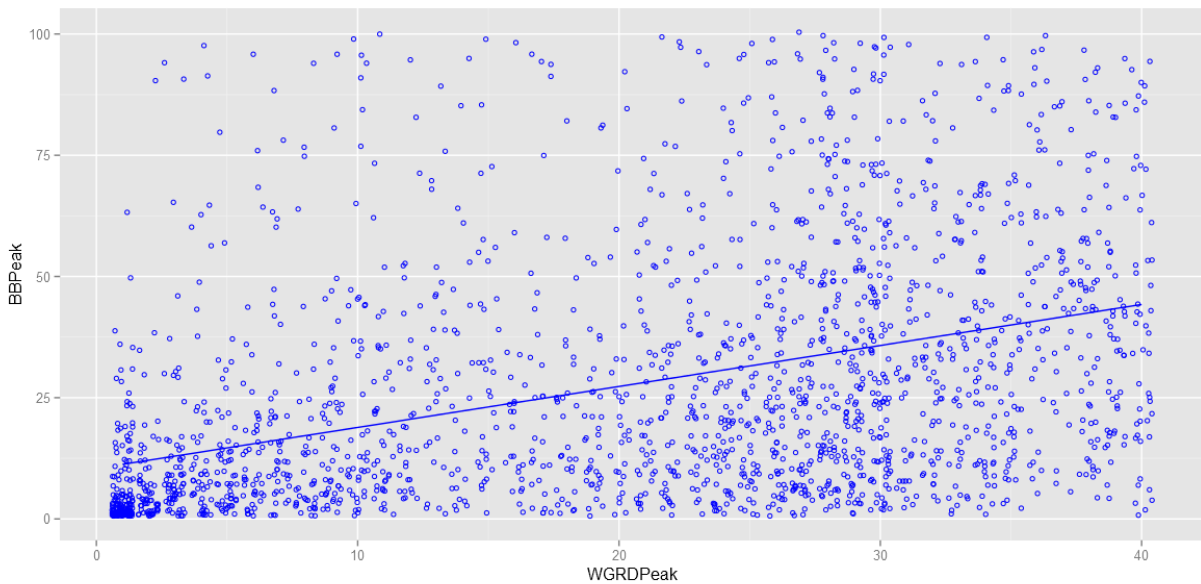


Figure 14. Scatter plot of correlation between *Billboard* peak and WGRD peak.

WLAV had the weakest correlation of all stations with respect to overall chart position, but a much closer following of the chart when it came to songs being added at all. What differed with WLAV were the relative positions that songs achieved on the charts. Figure 15 shows the frequency distribution of songs that charted nationally but did not receive airplay on WLAV. Four number one songs made the list, including the famous omissions of “Respect” by Aretha Franklin and “When a Man Loves a Woman” by Percy Sledge. In total only 65 songs that made the *Billboard* top 10 failed to get any airplay on WLAV.

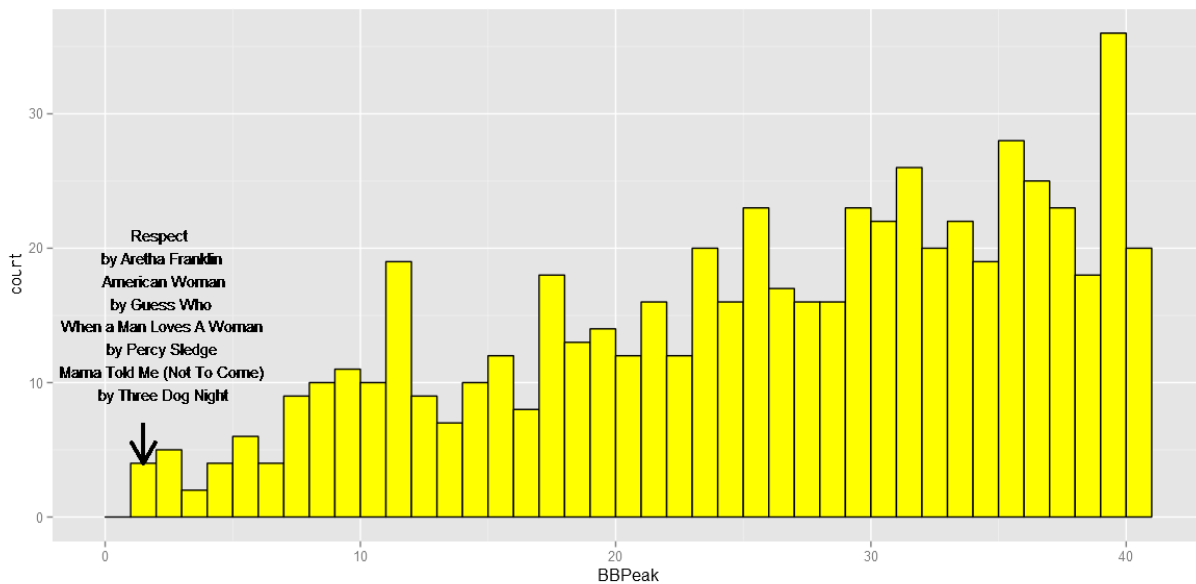


Figure 15. Frequency of songs that WLAV chose not to play by *Billboard* peak.

At the other end of the chart there were only 72 songs that made the top 10 on WLAV’s chart that gained no national attention from *Billboard*. Interestingly from the standpoint of race, there were eleven songs that made #1 on WLAV that failed to make the *Billboard* charts, and, as was the case with WGRD, none of these were by Black artists. The frequency of these songs is reflected in Figure 16.

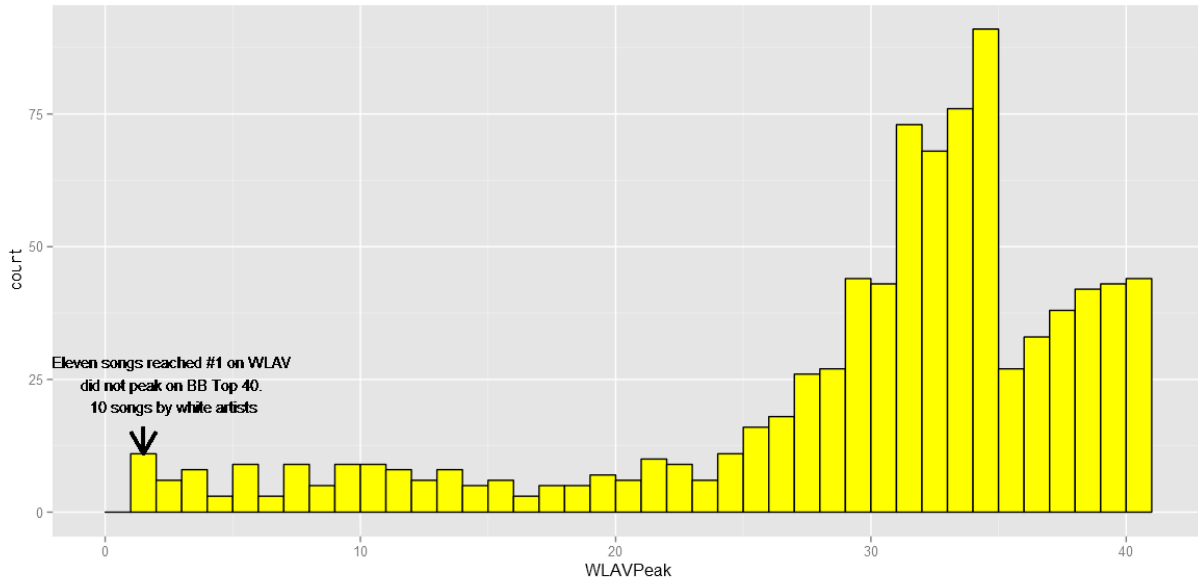


Figure 16. Frequency of songs that WLAV played that did not make the *Billboard* top 40.

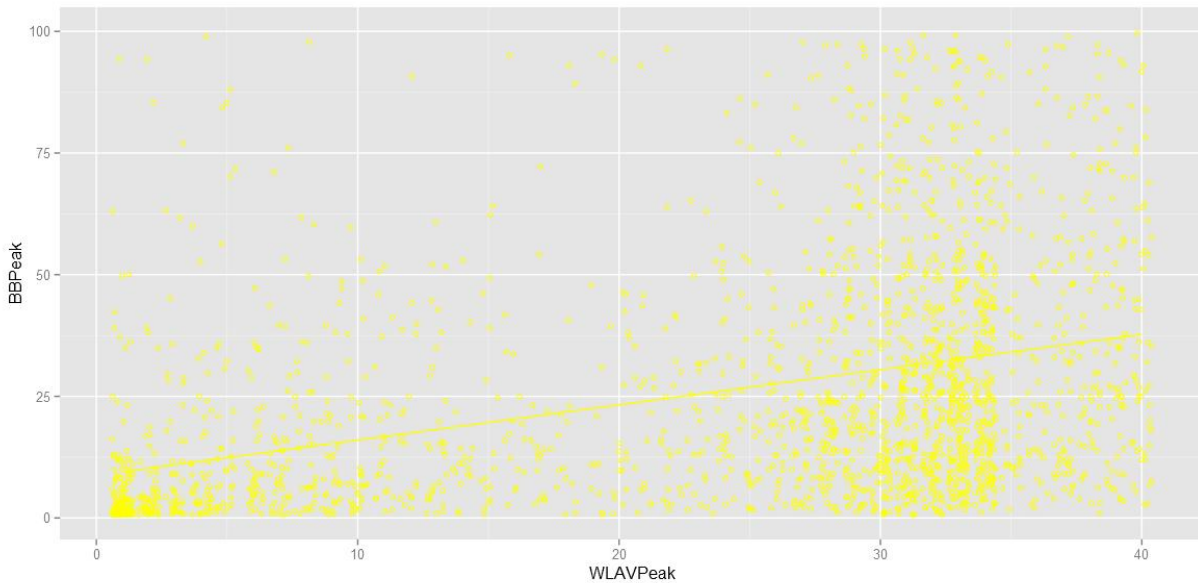


Figure 17. Scatter plot of correlation between *Billboard* peak and WLAV peak.

As was the case with WGRD, WLAV reported a shorter playlist by the end of the decade, and tended to move songs through the bottom third of the playlist faster than their Chicago counterparts. This accounts for the secondary band of heavy correlation on the scatter plot



occurring in the peak positions after 30 reflected in Figure 17. The correlation between *Billboard* peak and WLAV peak is the lowest of the five stations at 0.376.

Overall the analyses of these stations showed reasonable correlation with the *Billboard* survey of national popularity of music. The key finding in this study is the closer correlation by song title that appears after 1966. This will be detailed further in the recommendation for future research at the end of this study.

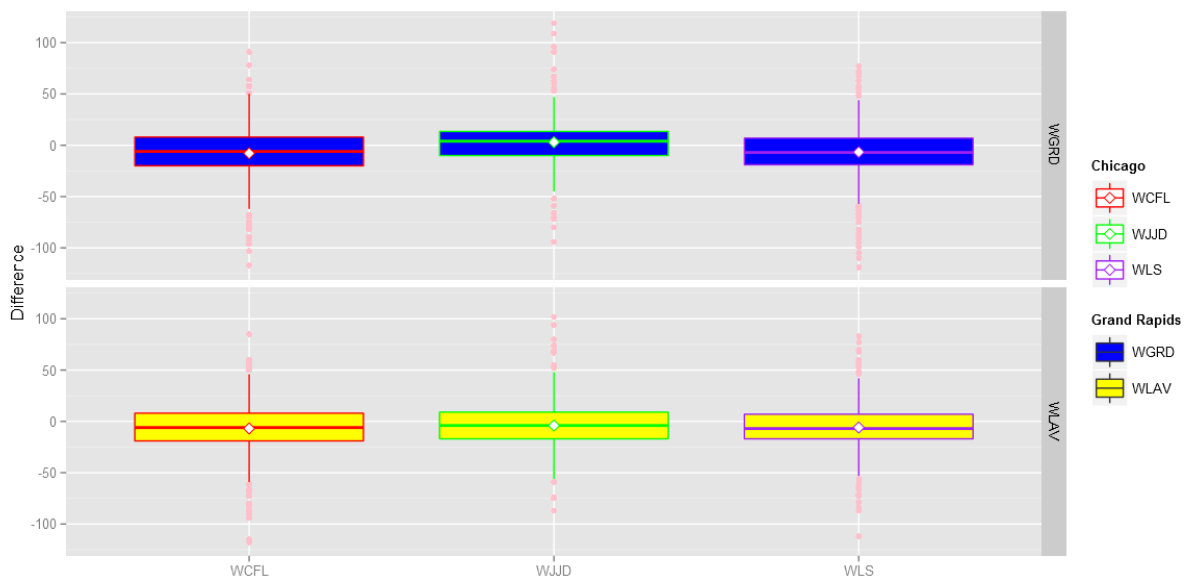
The third research question seeks to answer whether or not songs made their debut in Chicago first, or in Grand Rapids, and leads to the first true hypothesis of the study. Given the dominant AM signals that crossed the lake from Chicago, and given that WGRD signed off the air at night, leaving its listeners to either switch to WLAV or listen to Chicago radio, it was hypothesized that songs received airplay in Chicago before airing in Grand Rapids. It would also stand to reason that record promoters, wanting to reap the benefit of a large market sharing their record with a potential audience of millions of listeners, would make getting the record airplay in the big city a priority. To determine which station in which market was the leader, the debut dates of all songs in the study were compared. Table 1 shows the results of this analysis.

GR	Chicago	Min	Median	Max	Mean	Std Dev	n
WGRD	WJJD	-142	4	119	2.82	24.14	808
WGRD	WCFL	-647	-6	352	-8.36	38.21	721
WGRD	WLS	-661	-7	326	-6.63	29.95	1691
WLAV	WJJD	-294	-4	102	-4.42	24.65	667
WLAV	WCFL	-468	-6	361	-7.50	33.24	968
WLAV	WLS	-486	-7	125	-6.58	26.17	1802

*Table 1.* Comparison of debut dates of all records by station.

The comparison was conducted by subtracting the Chicago debut date from the Grand Rapids debut date. A negative value denotes an instance where the Grand Rapids station was first, while

a positive value would indicate that the Chicago station was earlier on the record. Comparing the median and mean values for debut date difference show negative values for the Grand Rapids station in every case but one: the comparison between WGRD and WJJD. Grand Rapids stations were consistently ahead of Chicago stations in debut date, with median values up to a week (7 days) in some cases. If this data is represented more graphically, and songs with more than a 120-day gap are eliminated as outliers, a clear picture emerges that shows that the smaller “test market” was, in fact, ahead of the larger city. This is represented in Figure 18. (Debut dates within 120 days are analyzed, while outliers are excluded. )



*Figure 18.* Difference in debut dates for songs on Chicago and Grand Rapids stations.

In every case but one – WJJD leading WGRD – the smaller market stations were ahead of the curve when it came to the release date of new music. Looking specifically at the end of the decade, during the more heavily-consulted era, Grand Rapids has the clear lead. Therefore H1, which posited that Grand Rapids stations would take their playlist cues from the larger Chicago stations, is disproven.

Chicago did lead the way, however, when it came to representing music on the national chart. Performing the same analysis of debut dates between Chicago stations and *Billboard* charts indicates that the influential stations did carry some amount of weight where the national chart position dates were concerned. Table 2 represents the same analysis as Table 1, but between the Chicago stations and *Billboard*.

Chicago	Min	Median	Max	Mean	Std Dev	n
WJJD	-70	19	1466	21.03	41.96	1506
WCFL	-93	9	348	8.72	21.70	1145
WLS	-97	8	1476	10.36	33.37	2554

*Table 2. Debut date comparison between Chicago stations and Billboard.*

In every case here the Chicago station was ahead of *Billboard* by at least a week or more. The computation pattern here is subtracting the Chicago debut date from the *Billboard* debut date. All values returned as positive, indicating that Chicago stations were ahead of the national charts, with median values in excess of a week to ten days. H2 suggested that the Chicago stations would be first on music ahead of its being reported in *Billboard*. Since Chicago stations did, in fact, appear to wield some influence on the national numbers, H2 is supported.

To further consider the role of the broadcast consultant or *The Gavin Report* as gatekeeper, and in light of the clear pattern of station playlists more closely matching chart data after 1966, the same analysis was run with respect to Chicago stations and *Billboard* magazine, but with a split at 1966. Figure 19 shows the results of that data, which indicated no real change with respect to debut time after 1966. The Chicago stations still led the way for the national charts with an approximately equal amount of influence throughout the decade, and tended at

that time to rely less on outside consulting. It can be suggested that while the role of external resources may have been to narrow the scope of music played, it neither hurried nor delayed the debut of songs on the station on an averaged basis.

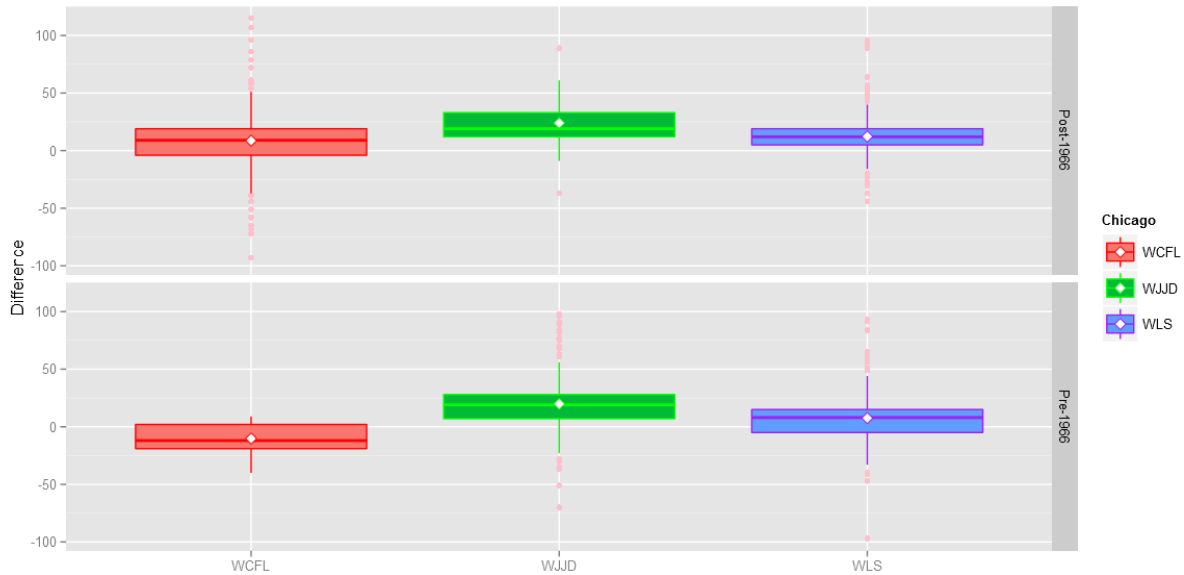


Figure 19. Comparison of debut dates in Chicago to *Billboard*, pre- and post-1966.

To test the third hypothesis, which suggested that Chicago charts more closely matched the *Billboard* charts than the Grand Rapids charts did, the same debut date analysis was conducted on the Grand Rapids stations as compared to *Billboard*. Were the charts to match more closely, the debut dates of songs on the national charts would be more similar. Table 3 shows that the earlier debut dates in Grand Rapids, which disproved the first hypothesis, also serve to reinforce this hypothesis.

GR	Min	Median	Max	Mean	Std Dev	n
WGRD	-53	8	1448	18.39	49.67	1678
WLAV	-54	8	1434	19.10	43.23	1794

Table 3. Debut date comparison between Grand Rapids stations and *Billboard*.

Since Grand Rapids stations premiered music before Chicago stations did, and Chicago stations debuted songs before their appearance in *Billboard*, it stands to reason that Grand Rapids stations were further ahead of the *Billboard* charts in reporting songs, and therefore less similar. Positive mean values indicate that both WGRD and WLAV were, on average, almost three weeks ahead of the *Billboard* charts when it came to reporting new music. As such H3 is proven.

The same pre-and-post 1966 test performed on Grand Rapids data, however, yields some interesting results. In the latter half of the decade the window for adding music on WLAV with respect to *Billboard* was much, much tighter than it was before 1966, and songs debuted just a bit later. The effect that consultant Mike Joseph had as a gatekeeper could, in theory, be attributed to this. If, as George McDaniel indicated, air talent would be “in trouble” for not following orders, they would be less likely to try and add songs to the playlist before given the go-ahead to do so. WGRD, operating without such constraint, appears to be much “riskier” when it comes to adding new music, widening the window ahead of *Billboard* even further. This is illustrated graphically in Figure 20.

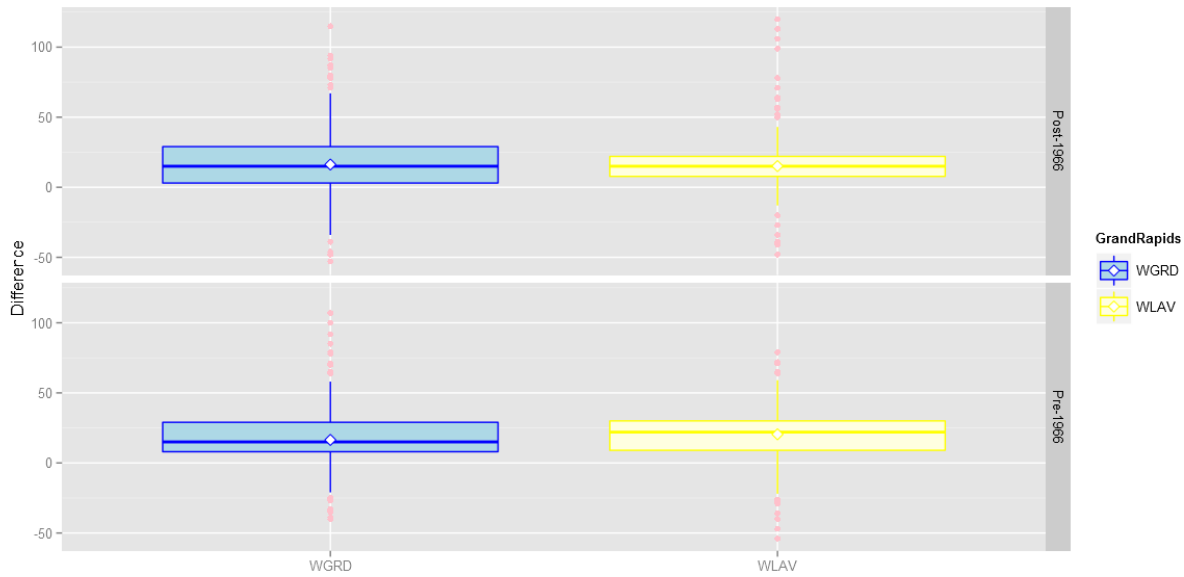


Figure 20. Comparison of debut dates in Grand Rapids to *Billboard*, pre- and post-1966.

The fourth research question and hypothesis seek to determine the role that one radio station performed as gatekeeper over another when it came to debuting new music. In each market, there was a clear ratings leader. Chicago saw WLS soundly defeat WJJD to the point of scaring it out of the Top 40 format. Later, WLS similarly dominated WCFL for audience. In Grand Rapids the competition depended on the portion of the decade studied. At first WLAV so quickly defeated WGRD that WGRD left the Top 40 format from 1964-1967. After their return to the format, WLAV's lead was less pronounced. In order to test whether or not a station could influence another station's playlist, an analysis of "non-hit" records was performed. For this study a non-hit record is defined as one that did not appear on the *Billboard* Top 40 chart, but may have made the Hot 100 list. If one station in a market added one of these non-hit records, and their competitor followed suit, it could be argued that the leader exerted an influence on the playlist of the also-ran and served as a gatekeeper. Stations frequently competed with each other to be "first" with music, and that competition could have served as its own motivating factor to

make a playlist decision. Ron Britain of WCFL remembers a particular example when an actual footrace through the streets of Chicago would occur any time the Beatles released a new single.

...when there was a new Beatles record, a record guy would stand out in the middle of the street, half-way between WLS and WCFL, and they'd call and say that they have a new Beatles record, and somebody would run down there, get the record, come back, and we'd play it on the air to see if we would beat LS or LS would beat us, whatever (R. Britain, personal communication, March 4, 2016).

George McDaniel recalls the top 40 battle between his station, WLAV, and WGRD. “We didn’t bother to have that reputation of breaking stuff and getting it on really fast. We wanted to play the hits. But it was important to beat GRD, man. But that wasn’t hard to do (Laughs)” (G. McDaniel, personal communication, March 11, 2016).

For Research Question 4, analyzing the similarity of station playlists indicates a fair amount of parity when it comes to what was played if all records (including Top 40 selections) are considered. Table 4 shows that WJJD and WLS matched 75.5% of the titles on their playlists, while WLS and WCFL matched 74.2%. (The four-month overlap of WJJD and WCFL netted a similarity of 73.9 %.)

Chicago 1	Chicago 2	Total Songs	Both Played	Chicago 1 Only	Chicago 2 Only
WJJD	WLS	2670	2016	361	293
WJJD	WCFL	111	82	21	8
WLS	WCFL	1717	1274	268	175

*Table 4.* Comparison of Chicago stations playlist similarity.

In Grand Rapids, analysis of the songs that were played when both WGRD and WLAV were in the Top 40 format shows a lesser degree of similarity. (The period of songs from November of 1964 thru April 1967, when WGRD did not publish Top 40 lists, is excluded from this

comparison.) The stations matched playlists on only 61.1% of titles. This data is expressed in Table 5.

GR 1	GR 2	Total Songs	Both Played	GR 1 Only	GR 2 Only
WGRD	WLAV	2420	1478	514	428

*Table 5.* Comparison of Grand Rapids stations playlist similarity.

Taking into account the time that songs were added, however, paints an interesting picture as well. For the Chicago stations, the market leader does not necessarily emerge as the first one to play songs. Table 6 shows the playlist comparison for Chicago stations’ like songs as an analysis of debut dates.

Chicago 1	Chicago 2	Min	Median	Max	Mean	Std Dev	N
WJJD	WLS	-130	-11	87	-11.70	16.05	2016
WJJD	WCFL	-115	-17	39	-15.65	22.85	82
WLS	WCFL	-91	-6	343	-3.85	19.11	1274

*Table 6.* Lead time of song debuts for common titles on Chicago stations.

In the first instance, WLS tended to add songs about eleven days later than WJJD played them. Yet WLS was the clear market leader. The station took a more measured “wait and see” approach before jumping onto a hit record. However, when the competition shifted to WLS and WCFL, it was the upstart WCFL that waited to add songs later. Given that the median values are under seven days, it’s likely that the differences in playlist time could be attributed to the dates that charts were published, since both stations were playing songs within the same week and their playlists would reflect this similarity. But it appears that WLS was consistently first with



titles despite holding the lead. If Grand Rapids radio were an election, however, it would be deemed “too close to call.” Table 7 shows that the difference in time for all songs is under a day.

GR 1	GR 2	Min	Median	Max	Mean	Std Dev	N
WGRD	WLAV	-658	0	363	-0.31	26.49	1478

Table 7. Lead time of song debuts for common titles on Grand Rapids stations.

Here, no clear market leader emerges, with a mean value of less than one day.

The fourth hypothesis dealt exclusively with the non-hit records. If the *Billboard* Top 40 selections are subtracted out, there are 385 instances where WJJD and WLS both played the same non-hit selections, and 145 cases of the same happening between WCFL and WLS. In Grand Rapids 356 titles that failed to make the Top 40 were played on both stations. While in Chicago a clear pattern of “follow the leader” emerges, the same is not true for Grand Rapids. Tables 8 and 9 show this data for Chicago and Grand Rapids, respectively.

Chicago 1	Chicago 2	Min	Median	Max	Mean	Std Dev	N
WJJD	WLS	-88	-5	24	-9.30	15.90	385
WJJD	WCFL						5
WLS	WCFL	-41	-10	63	-5.48	17.45	145

Table 8. Analysis of debut dates of non-hit records in Chicago.

Here the same patterns of leadership emerge. WJJD played non-hit records about five days before WLS did, and, later in the decade, WLS consistently added non-hit records about a week and a half before WCFL reported playing them. While the gap time between WJJD and WLS is a bit smaller than for hit records, the gap is larger for non-hit records between WLS and WCFL.

(Since the comparison for WJJD vs. WCFL yielded n=5, no calculation was performed, and the data is intentionally left blank.)

GR 1	GR 2	Min	Median	Max	Mean	Std Dev	N
WGRD	WLAV	-69	0	145	-1.59	18.56	356

Table 9. Analysis of debut dates of non-hit records in Grand Rapids.

As was the case with hit records, the lead for WLAV is a slight one over WGRD, with mean increasing by only a day. However, this difference may simply be due to differences in the release date of charts, and does not paint as strong a picture of intermedia gatekeeping as in Chicago. Representing this data graphically, though, we can see that outliers may tell the real story.

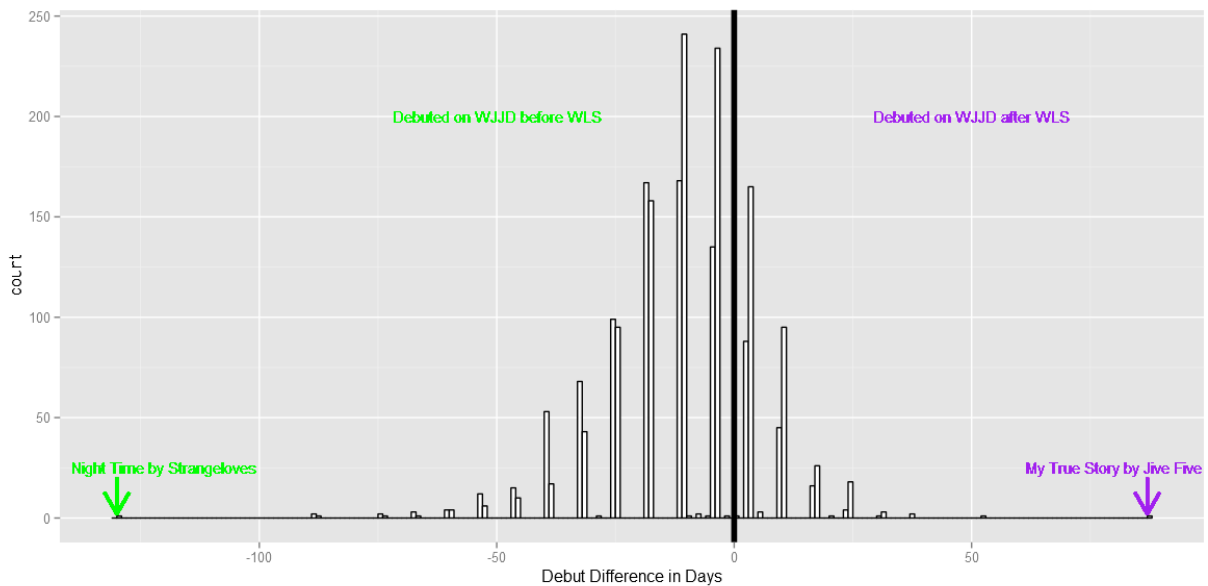


Figure 21. Debut date difference of non-hit records, WJJD vs. WLS.

Figure 21 shows that while the number of songs debuting on a particular number of days was lower on WJJD, the debut dates tended to be earlier. Here it would stand to reason that those non-hit records needed to linger for a while on WJJD before WLS decided to add them. However, the addition of a non-hit record on WLS yielded a much quicker reciprocal addition for WJJD. The market leader exerted influence and served as a gatekeeper, in a sense. Figure 22 tells a similar story between WLS and WCFL. Mean data indicates less of a difference, but the addition of a non-hit record by WLS took less time to see WCFL follow suit than the other way around. In this instance both the number of songs added first by WLS combined with the shorter lapse in time suggest that the addition of a record on WLS was sometimes sufficient to see the same non-hit song added on WCFL.

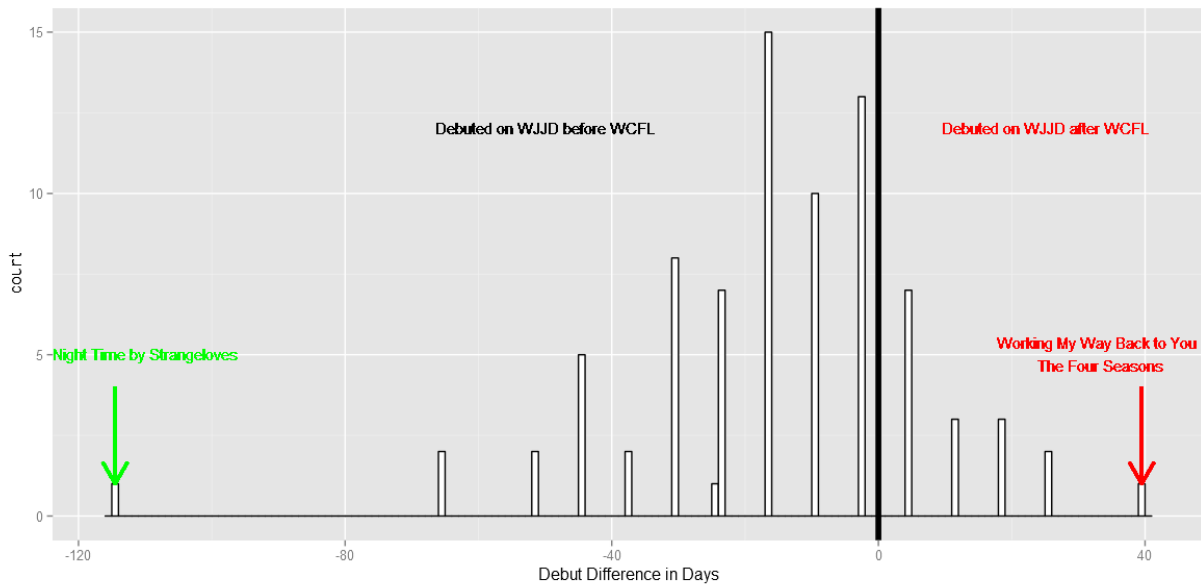


Figure 22. Debut date difference of non-hit records, WLS vs. WCFL.

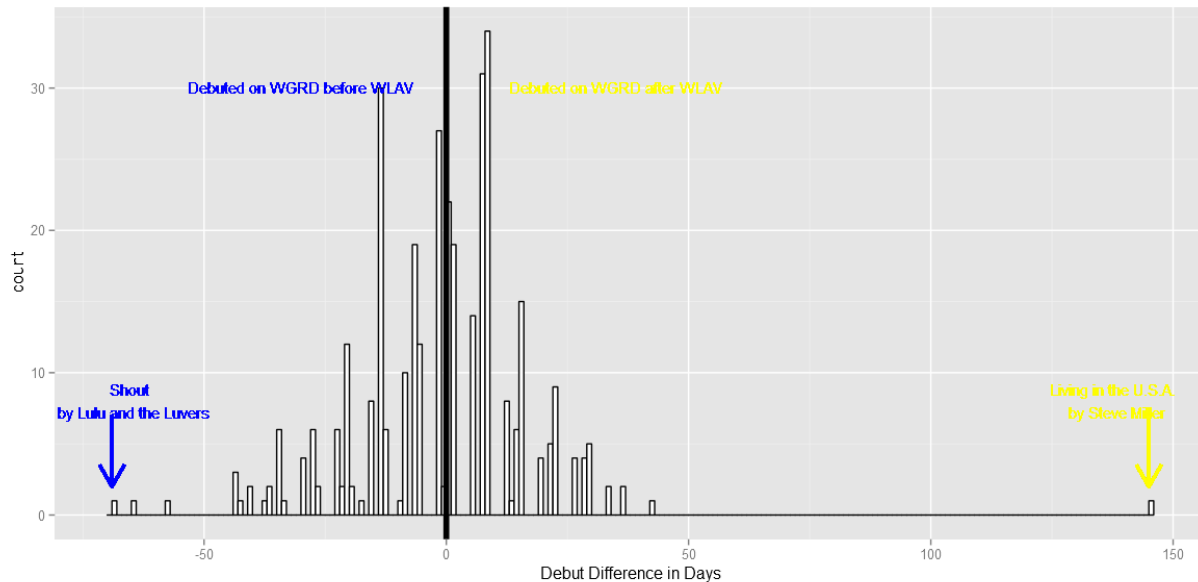


Figure 23. Debut difference of non-hit records, WGRD vs. WLAV.

Figure 23 shows the same comparison for WGRD and WLAV in Grand Rapids. Here, with the exception of an outlier on WLAV, the data looks much more evenly distributed than in Chicago. The pattern is less clear to identify in Grand Rapids, where each station seems to have taken turns acting as the respective leader when it came to adding new music. The difference in time for debut, under seven days, suggests that the decisions to add non-hit records may well have been decided independently of each other and that the discrepancy in playlist date may well be the only clue that we have about any sort of gatekeeping. Given that there exists a strong pattern of intermedia gatekeeping influence in Chicago, and despite the lack of as clear a pattern in Grand Rapids, the fourth hypothesis is said to be supported.

The fifth research questions and hypotheses attempt to get at the issue of preference in the selection of music by race and gender. RQ5a specifically sought to determine if the chart placement of songs by African-American artists on the stations in the study were, in fact, lower

as an aggregate than where the national charts indicated that they should be. Were the study focused on stations in the South, this would be expected, but stations in Chicago – home to prominent Black record labels and the adopted city of many African-Americans who migrated from the South - would be expected to feature these songs on their playlist. But a cursory view of the charts seems to indicate songs missing that should be charted highly (“Mustang Sally” by Wilson Pickett in Chicago and “Respect” by Aretha Franklin in Grand Rapids, for example). Thus H5a suggests that songs by African-American performers were given short shrift in these markets compared to the national charts of popularity.

Coding all of the songs by race and gender allowed for a comparison of both the *Billboard* charts and the local charts for content. Table 10 shows the relative number of songs that each station listed in their Top 40 lists, and the number of songs by Black artists to make the national Top 40.

Station	Total Songs	Both Played	BB Top 40 Only	Station Only
WJJD	637	284	284	69
WLS	1252	737	252	263
WCFL	502	278	202	22

*Table 10.* Number of Black records on Chicago radio and in *Billboard*.

Of a possible 637 songs by Black artists, WJJD featured only 353 of them, or about 55.4%, making its playlist the least inclusive of the three stations in this study. Of those songs, 69 were titles that did not make the *Billboard* Top 40. WLS fared better in this analysis. Out of a possible 1,252 songs, WLS reported airplay for exactly 1,000 titles, or 79.9 percent of the available total. But 263 of those titles did not make their way onto the *Billboard* charts, so it appears that WLS

sought to obtain its musical diversity from the inclusion of songs that did not necessarily possess national appeal. WCFL's list was slightly more inclusive than WJJD's list. Out of 502 possible records, the station played 300 titles, or 59.8%. The selections matched *Billboard's* titles much more closely than any of the other stations in the market. All three stations, therefore, appear to have missed playing songs by Black artists in favor of other material. Since a playlist has a fixed number of positions, the exclusion of a Black artist necessitates the inclusion of a White one in order to fill out the list. Given this discrepancy, there is support for hypothesis 5a.

Were there fewer opportunities for stations to play these records? While it was never a spoken practice, a sort of quota system may have been responsible for the exclusion of Black product on radio stations. Rules pertaining to segues – what songs may be played next to each other – were common. In many stations the “no two in a row” was an unwritten rule, but in Grand Rapids, Bob Stickroe knew of a station where it was, in fact, written down and posted.

When I was at WZZM ... and I was shocked when I walked into the studio the first time because I had been a guy who always liked the black, the Motown music, there was a sign right up in front of the rack that said “2, maximum 3, R&B records per hour. Never back-to-back.” And that was the station policy; that you never played more than 3 black or soul records in an hour, and never, ever, ever back-to-back (B. Stickroe, personal communication, March 8, 2016).

Stickroe added that the rules at WZZM-FM did extend to the number of places in the chart that could be occupied by Black artists.

Basically, there were six places on the ZZM Hot 40 list for black or R&B records. Once in a while, depending upon what was going on and what was hot, it might be 7 or 8, but if you were ever to go through the old ZZM lists, you would see that there were seldom more than 5 or 6 black records on the station at the same time (B. Stickroe, personal communication, March 8, 2016).

John Landecker suggested that these sort of segue rules were common in Top 40 in order to keep listeners interested in the on-air presentation.

...we wouldn't play ... you know, I didn't want two female songs back to back. I didn't want two slow songs back to back. I probably wouldn't want two R&B songs back to back. Not if the format is pure Top 40, which is supposedly you play everything, including, you know, ridiculous songs, as long as they're hits. That was just done for ... at least as far as I was concerned, as a music balance. That wasn't intended to be racially motivated. That was more genre ... So that you wouldn't tune in and hear ... if somebody was only going to tune in for two records and hear two slow females back to back, and perhaps they didn't like that, they were gone (J. Landecker, personal communication, March 9, 2016)

The effect of these segue rules lasted long after the 1960s. Programmers of oldies stations long after this time period still used the same rules, largely to achieve the same sort of balance that listeners would recognize from their younger days. There was also a practical reason to limit the types of music that could be played together, as Ron Smith explained.

(At WJMK) we were only allowed to play one song in a row by a Black artist... This was done primarily to spread out the Black music so we wouldn't bunch them up in one quarter-hour and then go two or three more without any. 40% of our library was black. Yet only 3% of our audience was. The Country station had more African-American listeners (R. Smith, personal communication, March 14, 2016)

Whatever the motivation was, however, the process appears to have had a chilling effect on the amount of Black product that stations could accommodate on their playlists. These segue rules may be responsible for some of the discrepancy in the expected proportion of music by race.

A more true measure of whether or not the stations suppressed the product, however, may be to see just where the songs actually charted on the lists. Did the stations simply include these songs on their surveys in an effort to appear inclusive, or did they play the songs with the expected frequency that national charts would indicate that they would have? And if a station avoided playing certain songs by Black artists, were they nationally popular records, or was it simply a case of missing a song at the lower end of the Top 40 chart, a common practice among music directors? Figures 24 through 26 represent where the songs that made the *Billboard* Top 40 by Black artists but were missed for airplay by the Chicago stations fell on the charts. As

expected, the majority of the songs that were not chosen for airplay tended to peak in the bottom quartile (positions 31-40) on the *Billboard* chart. There are, however, a number of songs that were missed by each station that were bona fide national smashes.

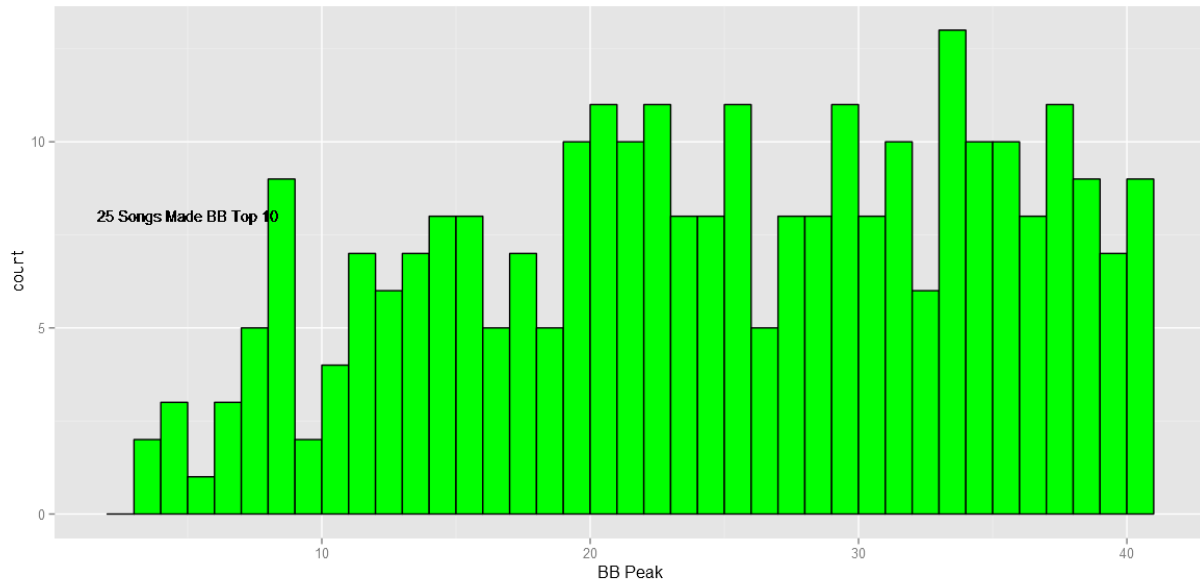


Figure 24. Songs by Black artists that did not chart on WJJD in *Billboard* Top 40.



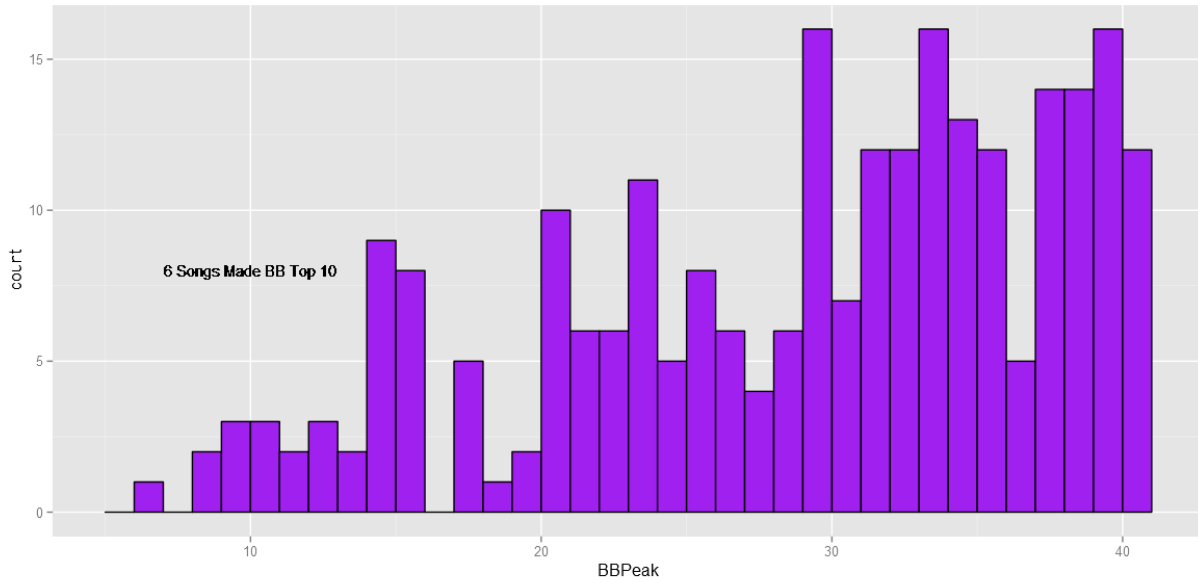


Figure 25. Songs by Black artists that did not chart on WLS in *Billboard* Top 40.

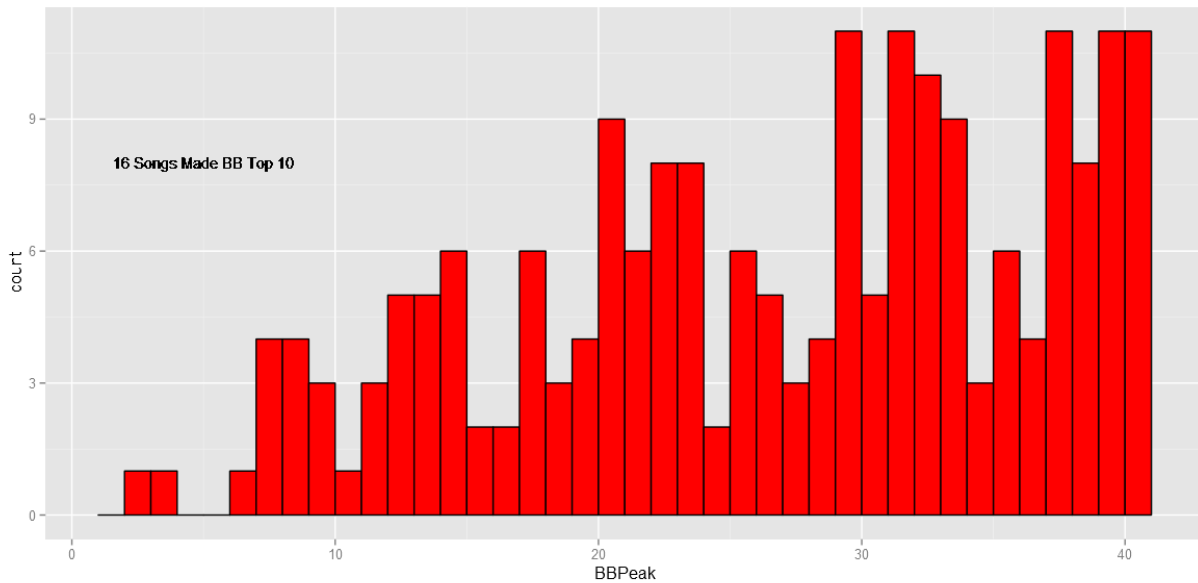


Figure 26. Songs by Black artists that did not chart on WCFL in *Billboard* Top 40.

While the exclusion of a song that charts with a ranking in the 30s is almost understandable, missing a Top 10 song for any reason other than controversial political content or salacious lyrics

is harder to understand. There was clearly some preference being given to songs by other performers, which further supports the hypothesis of exclusion.

An analysis of the actual chart positions may be the best test that we can perform to see what the aggregate difference in the airplay given to Black artists was. Table 11 shows the difference in actual reported chart position for songs by African-American performers on the Chicago stations. This analysis is limited to songs that were reported on both the station charts and on the *Billboard* charts. A positive difference indicates that the station charted the songs in a lower position than the national charts would predict, while a negative value would suggest that the song was given extra airplay than its national popularity would have warranted.

Station	Min	Median	Max	Mean	Std Dev	N (songs on both)
WJJD	-27	3	31	4.22	11.14	284
WLS	-31	2	32	3.47	10.14	737
WCFL	-28	1	21	0.74	7.38	278

Table 11. Difference in chart position for Black artists' recordings in Chicago.

Perhaps not surprisingly, WJJD tended to underplay the Black records that it did feature on its airwaves. The typical Black recording on WJJD was charted over four positions lower than its *Billboard* ranking would forecast. WLS, while playing more titles overall, tended to chart them lower as well. The typical song on WLS by a Black artist peaked about three and a half positions lower than would have been expected by national popularity. Interestingly WCFL was closer to the mark. The mean discrepancy in its charts was less than one position, but still reflected slightly less airplay for these national hit records. While position discrepancies of three or four positions may not seem like much, they would mean the difference between a Number One song

and a number five record, which could influence decisions by stations in other markets watching that particular station for guidance. Since WLS tended not to miss songs in the top 10, however, it was more likely that a song that should have been in the 11-20 range was left lower, leading to a more marked reduction in airplay.

Figures 27 through 29 show the relative discrepancies in chart peaks between the Chicago radio stations and *Billboard*. Both WJJD and WLS demonstrate a clear pattern of songs by Black artists charting higher on *Billboard*. For WLS, however, the peak differences tend to be lower.

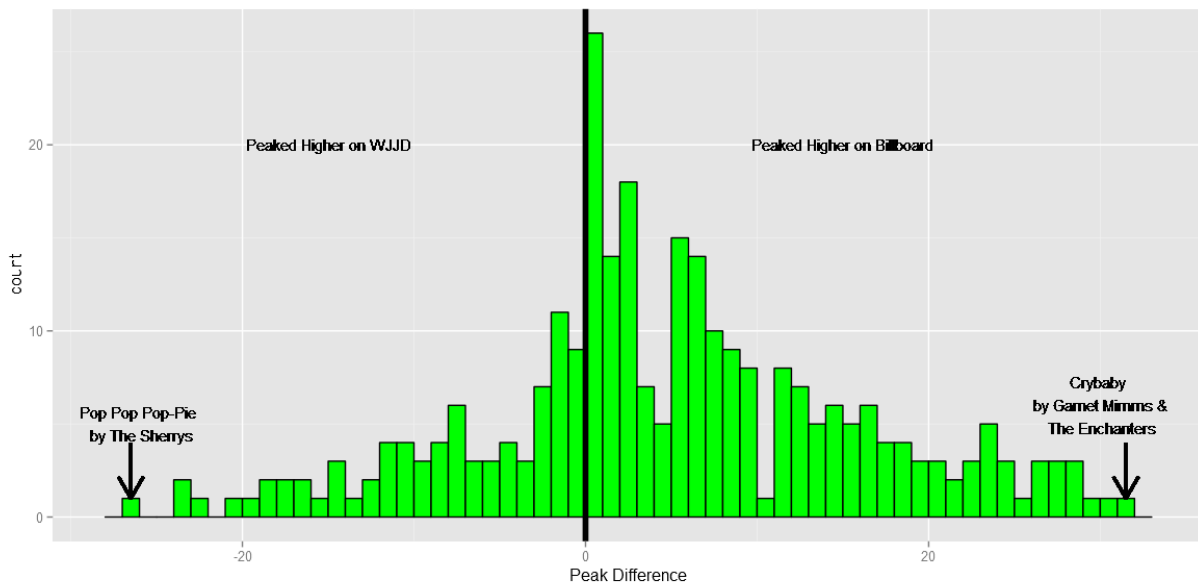


Figure 27. Peak chart differences for Black records between WJJD and *Billboard*.

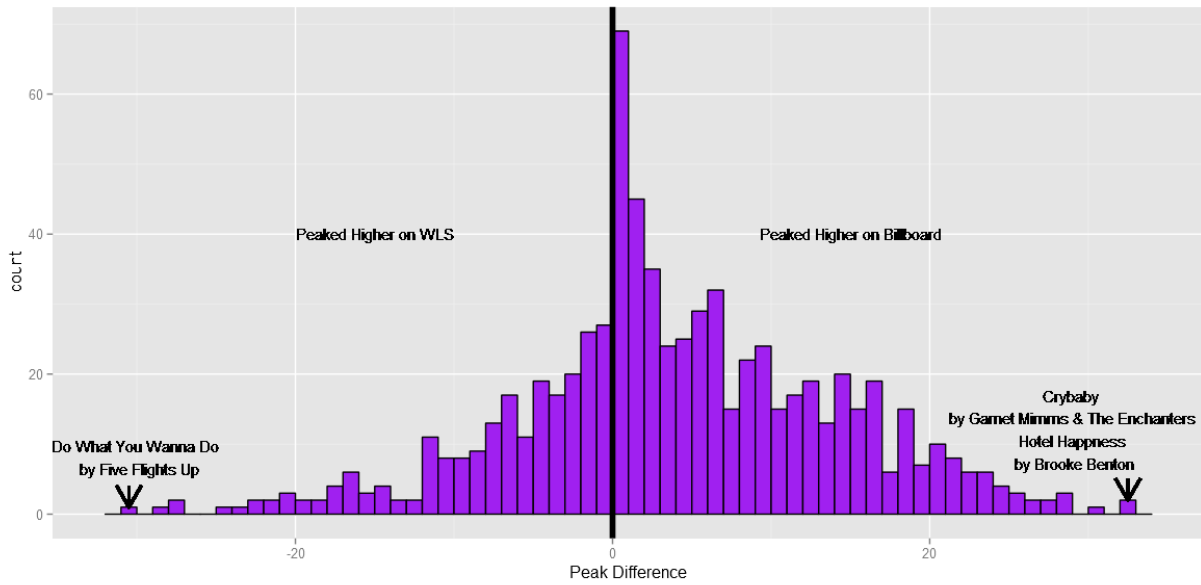


Figure 28. Peak chart differences for Black records between WLS and *Billboard*.

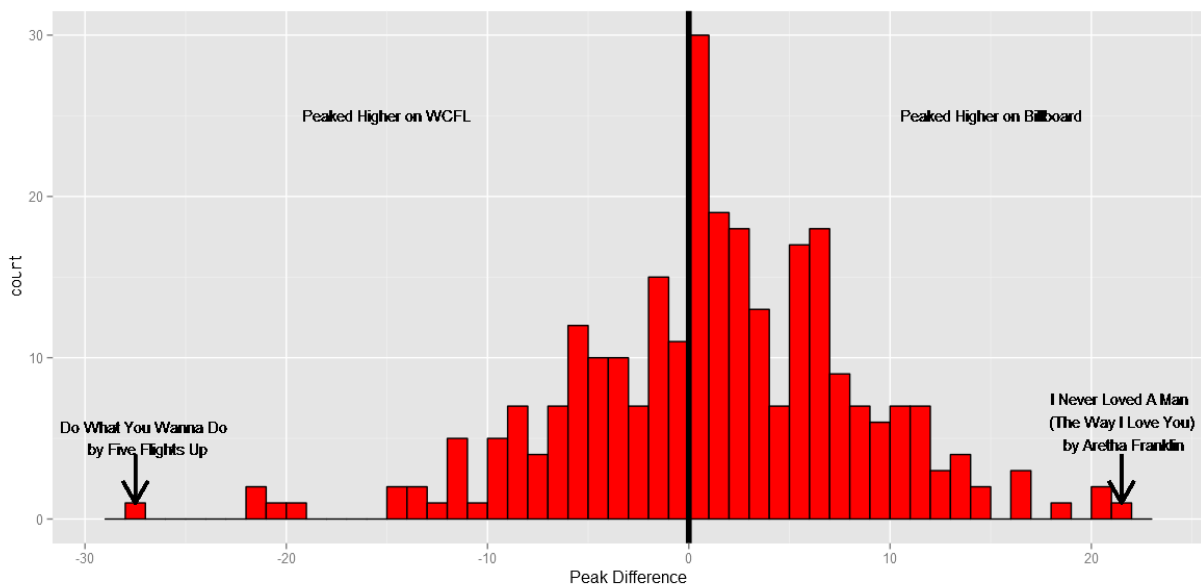


Figure 29. Peak chart differences for Black records between WCFL and *Billboard*.

The relative positions for Black records on WCFL show fewer outliers, but still a visual presentation of the data indicates that songs on the station by Black artists charted a bit lower than expected. Given this third test for discrepancy in the relative amount of airplay for songs by Black artists, we can say that hypothesis 5a is supported for Chicago stations.

Looking at hypothesis 5a for the Grand Rapids stations in the study, a similar pattern emerges. Table 12 shows the composition of the local charts in Grand Rapids when only looking at songs by African-American performers that made the *Billboard* Top 40.

Station	Total Songs	Both Played	BB Top 40 Only	Station Only
WGRD	980	462	375	143
WLAV	889	448	320	121

*Table 12.* Number of Black records on Grand Rapids radio and in *Billboard*.

Out of 980 possible records, WGRD did not add 375 of them to the list – a play percentage of only 47% of the charted hits. WLAV came in with a lower number of songs but with a higher percentage of hit records played at 50.4%. A higher number of songs in the top quartile of the pop chart were missed as well. Figure 30 shows the distribution on the charts of songs that did not receive airplay in Grand Rapids but were solid *Billboard* Top 40 hits.

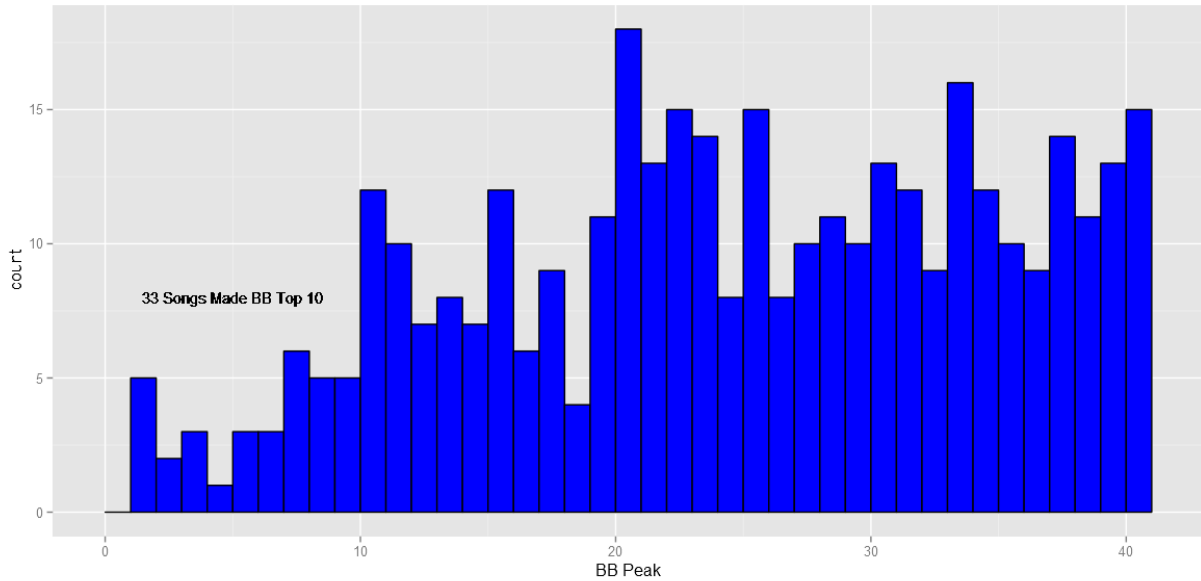


Figure 30. Songs by Black artists that did not chart on WGRD in *Billboard* Top 40.

There are 33 selections that were national Top 10 hits but were not reported by WGRD as having received any airplay. That figure is only slightly better for WLAV, which missed 28 songs that made the national Top 10. Figure 31 shows the distribution of chart hits for WLAV.

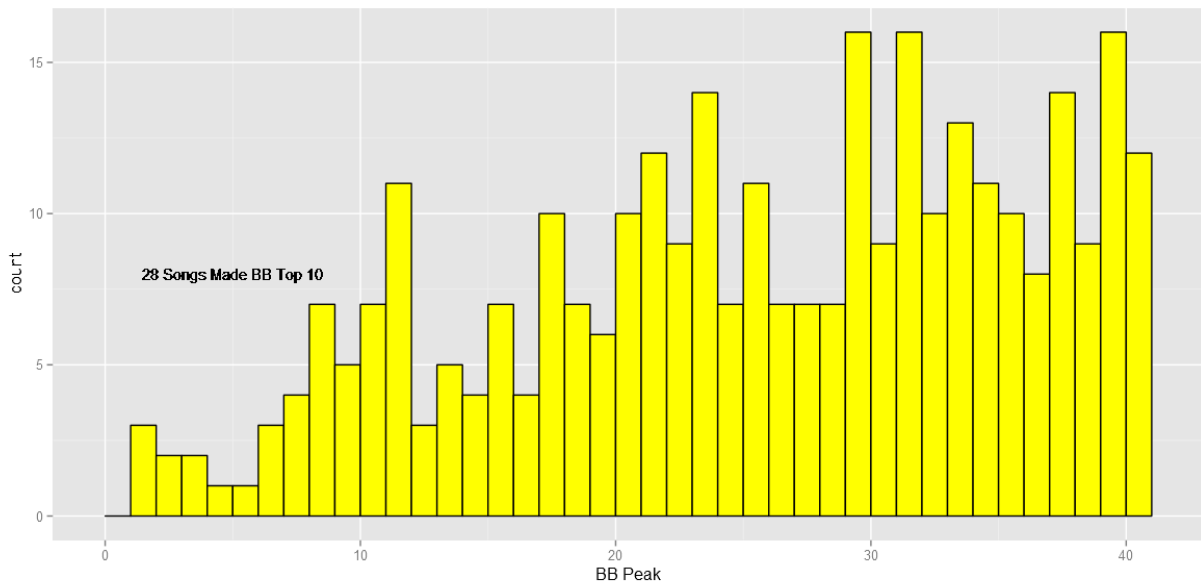


Figure 31. Songs by Black artists that did not chart on WLAV in *Billboard* top 40.

A graphic representation of the airplay of Black songs on both WGRD and WLAV paints a pretty clear picture. In both cases songs tended to chart in much lower positions on these stations than the national picture would have suggested. Figure 32 shows the distribution of songs on WGRD and Figure 33 the distribution for WLAV.

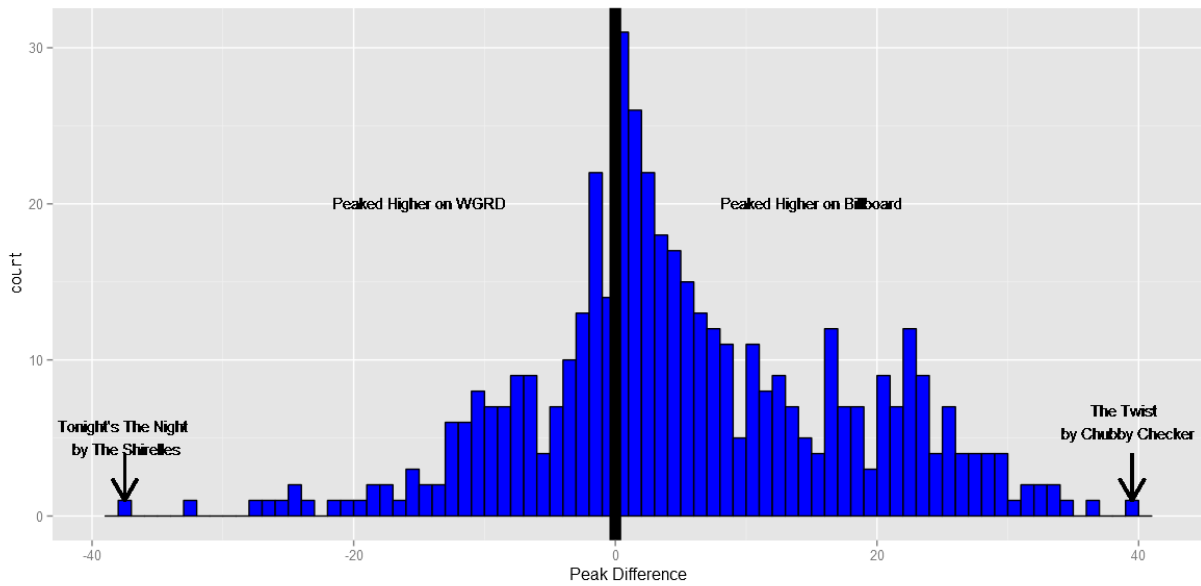


Figure 32. Peak chart differences for Black records between WGRD and Billboard.

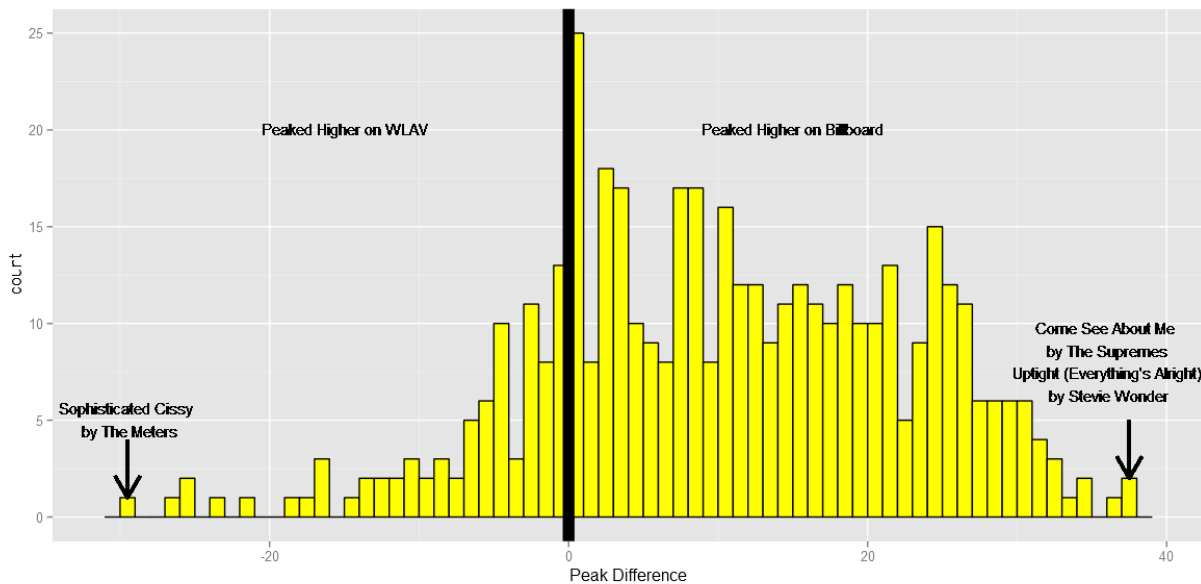


Figure 33. Peak chart differences for Black records between WLAV and Billboard.

WGRD seems to have missed on the re-release of Chubby Checker’s “The Twist,” the only song in the study period to chart in the #1 position on two separate occasions. WLAV was less kind to hits by the Supremes and Stevie Wonder, which are found at the extreme end of the chart. In the case of the Grand Rapids stations, this may have been done by design due to the presence of a smaller competitor in WERX. Bob Stickroe was an avid listener of radio in Grand Rapids as a youth and noticed certain patterns between the stations in town.

Actually, one of the things that made WERX a little bit different than everybody else is that they played lots of black music ... and they played black music that LAV and GRD would not play, such as "Respect" by Aretha or "When A Man Loves A Woman" by Percy Sledge or Motown ... LAV ignored a lot of Motown back in the day, particularly Temptations and anything that they thought was real heavy black. WERX would play all of that and also had a Sunday afternoon soul show, which the other stations never did. When WERX was running the soul show, GRD was running the polka show (B. Stickroe, personal communication, March 8, 2016).

John Alfenito, who was music director at WERX, had an explanation for this inclusion that makes sense given the data for WGRD and WLAV: it was simply a good programming decision and a question of knowing your market. “Grand Rapids was a very diverse town ethnically. We were certainly aware of that and probably played a bit more R&B-style top 40 than a station in Iowa or Utah might have, but that was just the smart thing to do” (J. Alfenito, personal communication, April 5, 2016).

Table 13 underscores the greater difference in chart position for Black records in Grand Rapids, ranging from four to nine (!) positions on the chart.

Station	Min	Median	Max	Mean	Std Dev	N (songs on both)
WGRD	-38	3	39	4.84	12.43	462
WLAV	-30	10	37	9.87	12.27	448

*Table 13.* Difference in chart position for Black artists’ recordings in Grand Rapids.



It appears that a clear pattern emerges with respect to Black records in Grand Rapids as it did with the stations in Chicago. Therefore hypothesis 5a is also supported for Grand Rapids.

The treatment thus far has considered all recordings by African-American artists to be equal in terms of sonic texture. There is no one genre of music that can be described as “Black,” just as there is no one genre of music that can be described as “White.” To further investigate a possible discrepancy, songs by African-American artists were re-coded into one of two categories – Black Pop and Black Soul as defined in the Methods chapter. Hypothesis 5b suggests that the songs in the Black Soul category would be the ones less likely to see airplay in Chicago, a market that featured a strong Black radio station in WVON. Were the stations playing Black Pop songs with crossover appeal, like Motown artists, at the expense of Black Soul recordings, like the aforementioned Wilson Pickett and Aretha Franklin?

Similar tests as were done for Hypothesis 5a were conducted on the sample to test Hypothesis 5b. The first test is one of inclusion. Were the songs passed over for airplay more or less likely to be Black Soul selections? In Table 14, the airplay data for songs coded by Black artists is broken down for all three Chicago stations, separating the selections in to their respective Pop and Soul designations.

Station	Soul			Pop		
	Both Played	BB Top 40 Only	Station Only	Both Played	BB Top 40 Only	Station Only
WJJD	6	34	1	269	247	65
WLS	187	110	63	523	141	217
WCFL	156	108	11	112	87	10

*Table 14.* Number of Soul and Pop songs on Chicago stations.

The results here are mixed. WJJD, which existed only in the earlier half of the 1960s, when the Black sound was more Pop than Soul, did not have as many Soul records to choose from. Given that the station was reticent to play any Black material, it is not surprising to see that most of the selections that were played fell into the Pop category. WJJD played only 15% of the charting Soul titles as opposed to 52% of the Pop titles. The more inclusive WLS also leaned more Pop, playing 78.8% of available Pop titles versus 63% of available Soul selections. Interestingly, WCFL played more Soul titles than Pop titles, but this may have been a function of it existing in the post-Civil Rights era following 1965. WCFL played 59% of the available Soul selections, and only 56.2% of the Pop titles. Both WCFL and WLS did augment their playlists with titles that missed the *Billboard* Top 40, but with respect to charted material, the preference was clearly for Pop titles. This lends preliminary support to the hypothesis.

In terms of actual chart position, the analysis conducted was to see where the typical Pop and Soul songs placed on the charts. Table 15 shows this breakdown for the Chicago market. The analysis looks at where songs typically landed on the Chicago charts and once again only considers titles that made both the individual station charts as well as the *Billboard* Top 40 chart.

Station	Min	Median	Max	Mean	Std Dev	N (songs on both)
WJJD – Pop	1	17.5	40	17.96	10.96	247
WJJD - Soul	6	30	35	24.57	10.83	34
WLS – Pop	1	24	40	22.35	11.61	740
WLS - Soul	1	19	40	19.05	10.97	223
WCFL – Pop	1	15	34	14.55	9.49	122
WCFL - Soul	1	15	36	15.20	8.55	167

Table 15. Aggregate chart positions for Black Pop and Black Soul titles in Chicago.

Each station played a title from each category in the Number One position with the exception of WJJD, which managed to avoid playing any Black Soul in the top spot on its chart. On WJJD, Black Pop songs charted almost seven positions lower on average than Black Soul selections. WLS presents an interesting find. Despite playing fewer Soul titles, it tended to play them in higher chart positions, on average, by about three chart positions. WCFL gave an advantage to Pop songs, but that advantage was slight – less than one chart position difference. What the data tells us is that, while Black Soul songs were more likely to be passed over than Black Pop songs, they were not necessarily treated differently as a group. To the programmers of the radio stations, Black product was Black product, regardless of the feel of the music. While we have concentrated on the analysis of the Chicago stations, the results for Grand Rapids are similar. The exclusion of the titles lends support to Hypothesis 5b, but the lack of chart difference suggests that that support is slight.

Hypothesis 5c deals with the question of gender. Songs were coded based on the lead singer of the selection (in the case of groups with men and women, individual recordings were considered rather than simply the name of the performer). The hypothesis suggests that a preference was given to songs by male performers in the same way that preference was given to White performers. In order to test this hypothesis, the same analysis as was performed for Hypotheses 5a and 5b were conducted. Table 16 shows the results of the analysis of the station playlists by gender.

Station	Total Songs	Both Played	BB Top 40 Only	Station Only
WJJD	445	258	117	70
WLS	783	493	88	202
WCFL	261	155	84	22

Table 16. Number of female artists on Chicago radio and in *Billboard*.

Of the 375 songs by female artists that made the *Billboard* Top 40 during WJJD’s run, 258 received airplay, with another 70 titles being added that missed the national chart. The “hit percentage” of 68.8% is higher than the station’s percentage for including Black product. WLS only missed 88 songs by women out of 581 for a play rate of 84.9%. In addition, the station added 202 additional titles that missed the Top 40. Added to the number of songs that were played, WLS played 695 titles by female artists, which represents a reasonably high percentage of its playlist. WCFL played 155 of the 239 nationally charting records by female artists for a percentage of 64.9%, making it the least female leaning station of the three. Considering its debut in 1965, after the “girl group” phenomenon of 1962-63, it may not be surprising that its lean tends to be more male. But, the percentage is of the available product, so it seems that the station did select against female vocals. As was the case with Black records, the exclusion of one type of music requires the inclusion of another. Since we see both WJJD and WCFL appearing to exclude female vocals in favor of male vocals on their charts, there is preliminary support for hypothesis 5c. As was done with Black records, it is useful to see which songs were excluded from playlists. Figures 34-36 show the chart positions of songs that made the *Billboard* charts but were missed by the respective Chicago stations.

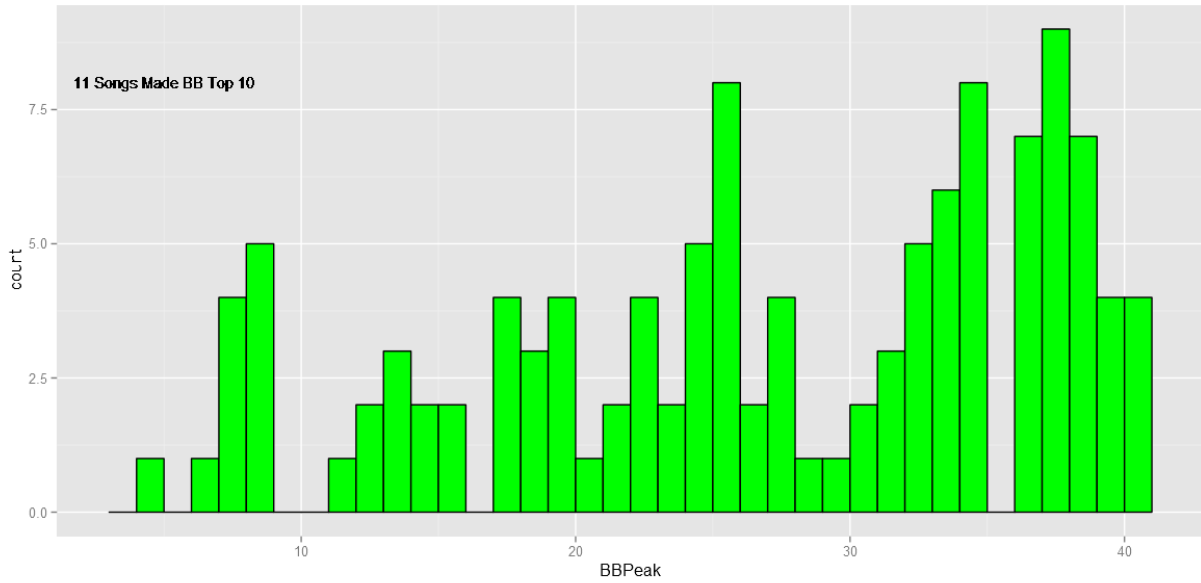


Figure 34. Songs by female artists that did not chart on WJJD in *Billboard* Top 40.

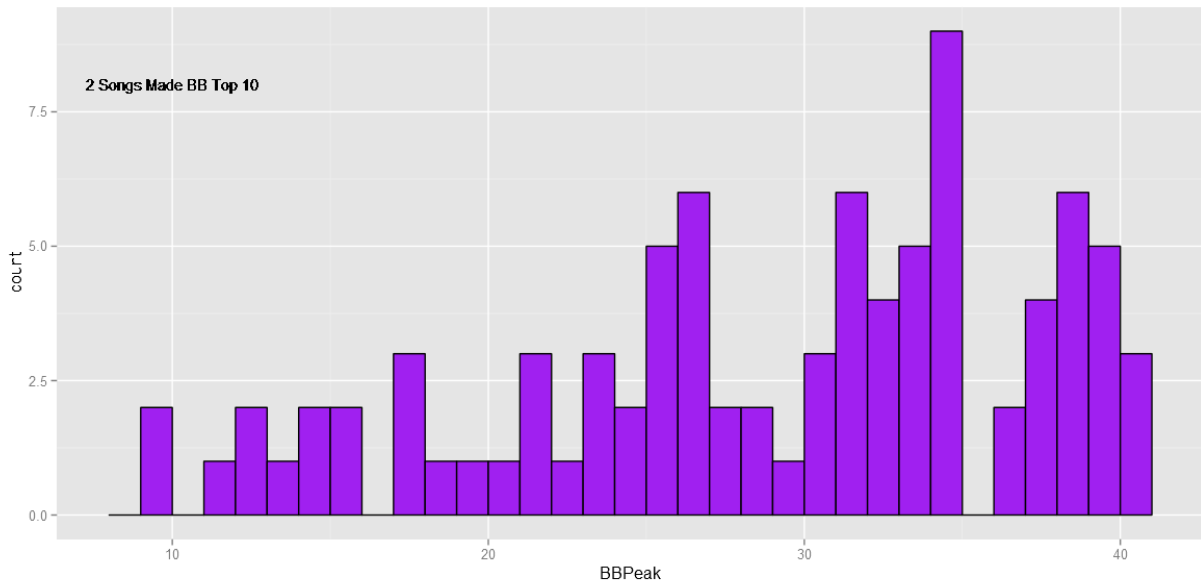


Figure 35. Songs by female artists that did not chart on WLS in *Billboard* Top 40.

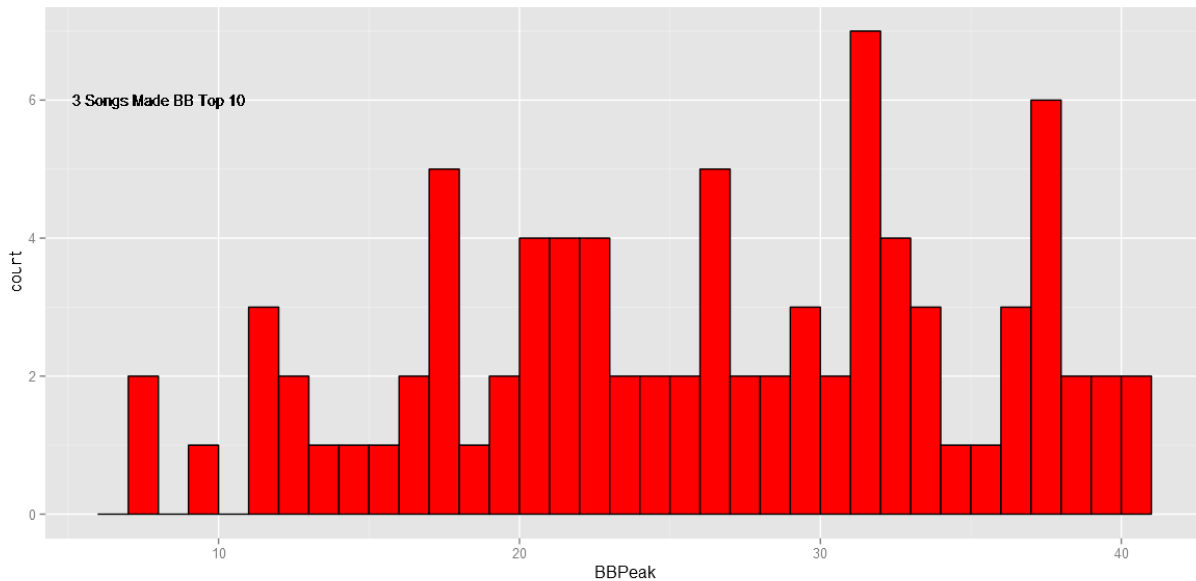


Figure 36. Songs by female artists that did not chart on WCFL in *Billboard* Top 40.

As was the case with Black records, the majority of the songs that were not added to the station playlists tend to be found at the lower end of the *Billboard* charts. But the distribution is not as clear as it was with the Black records. There appear to be more mid-charting records that were avoided by the stations, and a lower number of Top 10 records. WJJD missed 11 songs that made the Top 10 sung by women, while WCFL missed only three and WLS only two. While again there is a pattern of missing hit records, there is less evidence of the biggest hits being passed over due to a characteristic of the performer. This does not fare well for the support of the hypothesis.

The final test of the data for this question looked at the aggregate chart position for the selections. As was done with Black songs, analysis was conducted to see where the female vocals tended to chart on their respective stations. Table 17 details the discrepancy by chart position for songs that both received airplay and made the *Billboard* chart.

Station	Min	Median	Max	Mean	Std Dev	N (songs on both)
WJJD	-32	0	34	1.22	10.51	258
WLS	-33	0	28	0.48	9.85	493
WCFL	-21	0	21	0.21	7.63	155

Table 17. Aggregate chart position for female vocals on Chicago stations.

As was the case in testing Hypothesis 5a, positive values suggest that the station played songs in lower chart positions than the national charts would have predicted. In the case of all three stations, the chart positions were, in fact, lower – but not by enough of a factor to make a difference. WJJD showed the most divergence from the national norm with a mean chart discrepancy of 1.2 positions – about one rank in the playlist order. Both WLS and WCFL showed a difference of less than one half of a chart position. The discrepancy is not enough to have an effect on the amount of airplay that the songs received. (Interestingly, the two biggest outliers for WLS – songs that played most differently from where *Billboard* predicted – were “The Nitty Gritty by Shirley Ellis and “Gravy” by Dee Dee Sharp – both African-American women. For WCFL the greatest discrepancy was for Aretha Franklin’s “I Never Loved a Man.”) While the stations may have chosen not to play songs by women, they did not necessarily treat them any differently than songs by men once they did decide to add them to their respective rotations. The data for Grand Rapids stations yielded similar results to the Chicago stations. Thus Hypothesis 5c is supported due to the exclusion of titles but not supported due to any sort of suppression of the material once it was selected for airplay.

Hypothesis 6 suggests that discrepancies in playlists with respect to *Billboard* may have had to do with radio stations spotlighting local acts. While this is rarely the case today, it was not uncommon in the 1960s for a radio station to give airplay to a group that hailed from the station’s coverage area. Local teens would flock to concerts to support bands that they enjoyed,

and a radio station would have done well to feature music by these performers. In most (but not all) cases the performers of these songs tended to be young, White, and male. But the addition of a local band to a fixed number of spots on a playlist would keep a charting national act from receiving the expected level of airplay. Does this phenomenon explain the differences in reported chart information? Analysis of playlist content shows that the local factor was, in effect, very small. Tables 18 and 19 detail this numerically. Table 18 looks at all selections regardless of chart position, while Table 19 looks only at songs that made the individual station charts.

Station	City	National	Chicago	Grand Rapids
Overall		5497 (95.7%)	154 (2.7%)	95 (1.7%)
WJJD	Chicago	2710 (97.3%)	58 (2.1%)	17 (0.6%)
WLS	Chicago	4065 (96.3%)	138 (3.3%)	16 (0.4%)
WCFL	Chicago	1706 (95.3%)	82 (4.6%)	3 (0.2%)
WGRD	Grand Rapids	3340 (96.3%)	72 (2.1%)	55 (1.6%)
WLAV	Grand Rapids	3189 (95.4%)	79 (2.4%)	75 (2.2%)

*Table 18.* Percentage of songs in study by city of origin of performer.

Station	City	National	Chicago	Grand Rapids
WJJD	Chicago	1688 (97.7%)	28 (1.6%)	12 (0.7%)
WLS	Chicago	3610 (96.3%)	122 (3.3%)	16 (0.4%)
WCFL	Chicago	1182 (94.6%)	65 (5.2%)	2 (0.2%)
WGRD	Grand Rapids	2499 (96.0%)	53 (2.0%)	52 (2.0%)
WLAV	Grand Rapids	2488 (95.0%)	56 (2.1%)	75 (2.9%)

*Table 19.* Percentage of songs included on local station charts by city of origin of performer.

For each station, we saw discrepancies by race and gender of between 25 and 50 per cent of the playlist titles. Yet the local composition numbers on playlists come nowhere near these numbers. The most “local” radio station surveys belonged to WCFL, and yet 94.6% of the songs



reported by that station were national acts. WCFL program Ken Draper did not assess how “local” the station was solely by the location of the acts.

...when you're in a market the size of Chicago and the Dave Clark Five is visiting your station and going out on the WCFL yacht with your jocks, that becomes pretty local, because they're playing the city and so on. So it wasn't a thing where we felt somehow that we needed to promote local artists. But on the other hand, if there was a local artist and, and, they had a record and we liked it, and would have put it on, we can relate to that artist differently. That artist will show up at the VIP room with the jocks more often and other kinds of things, because we're a Chicago station. And, that was true (K. Draper, personal communication, March 11, 2016).

The stations in Grand Rapids, which you would expect to be more accessible to local teens with rock bands, were actually less open to reporting songs by neighborhood performers than their Chicago counterparts. WLAV was the friendlier of the two Grand Rapids stations to local product, and less than three per cent of the titles reported on its surveys were from bands hailing from that city. Grand Rapids was, however, influenced on at least some level by the local Chicago bands that got airplay on the stations there. Bob Stickroe recalls songs that weren't hits nationally but were popular with Chicago stations getting airplay in Grand Rapids.

...there were things like The New Colony Six or The Buckingham or The Cryan Shames ... a lot of that stuff did break in Chicago first, and their signals were so dominant over here that, you know, people hear them over here and then the local stations start adding them ... or, like, Third Booth - I Need Love, which was, you know, what, Number 2 for several weeks on LS and played over here in Grand Rapids, but you look on *Billboard*; that never even made the Hot 100 (B. Stickroe, personal communication, March 8, 2016).

George McDaniel again cited the role of the consultant as a roadblock to local bands gaining access to the airwaves.

Man, they had to bang us over the head to get on... What the kids thought was that if it was played once, we'd be inundated with calls and have to play it. They didn't realize what resistance there was to that... (Mike) Joseph was hammering it into us, “that's not a hit, you can't play that”... We did a disservice to them, when I look back at it. I think we should have done more. You know, this might have been another Seattle at that time (G. McDaniel, personal communication, March 11, 2016)

But McDaniel did shed light on an interesting practice that came up as a form of controversy in the 2000s: the idea of buying time to get a record on the air. This was done with some local bands on WLAV. While the songs were never officially added to the station playlist, they did get played on the radio station at least once or twice.

When it was so hard to get a local record on LAV, Dave Kalmbach owned this recording studio that did most of (the local bands). He would tell these bands, if you come and record here, I can get your record played on LAV. What he did was he bought, on Saturday nights, a 15-minute block of time. And we'd play those records that he sent in that time, of the people who had recorded with him. So that record got on the air (G. McDaniel, personal communication, March 11, 2016).

Despite these attempts to add songs from local groups, there is simply not enough local music product represented on the local station charts to account for the missing songs by Black artists and female singers. Therefore Hypothesis 6 is not supported.

### **Additional Results: Interview Data**

While the mathematical analysis of the data is important, it may be at least as informative (if not more so) to sit down with some of the surviving disk jockeys of the period and ask them for their first-hand recollection of the role that gatekeeping played in the selection of music for the station. What were the reasons that particular records were (or were not) selected?

Some of the questions this study sought to answer could not be satisfied by data alone, or even in part. To get to some of these issues it was necessary to find disk jockeys, music directors, and program directors who were involved in radio in some tangible way during the time frame of the chart analysis. The responses to a series of questions given to these radio veterans further informed the numerical data but also yielded a look into the role of the gatekeeper in terms of shaping popular culture.

Each of the respondents was asked, to the best of their memory, who they thought was most responsible for the music decisions at their respective radio stations. The purpose of the question was to assess which individual (or individuals) assumed the role of gatekeeper when it came to popular music. Once a determination could be made as to the role in question, it would then be possible to assess the process of music selection and identify other influences – external gatekeepers – that had agency over the musical decisions. The most common answer given was that the music director had at least some control over the playlist. If the music director was not in sole control, it was then either the program director or a joint decision of the two. The person who generally did not have control, and could not make decisions into what was played on the station, was the individual disk jockey. Even a prominent disk jockey like Herb Kent at WVON largely had to follow the list that he was given at his station.

The records showed up and we played them. I think we had a list, and our music director or program director approved it. I had no more influence than any of the other jocks... We had no freedom to go off that list. You had to play the records off of that. (H. Kent, personal communication, March 16, 2016).

Ken Draper explained that as program director at WCFL he enforced the list this to protect his announcers from any charges of payola or conspiracy – a controversy that rocked the industry in the early 1960s and still had its repercussions felt through the decade.

When I came to Chicago I was very sensitive about (payola). And I wanted a system where I didn't care what my disc jockeys did; they didn't have control over the music that we were going to play; only what they wanted to play on their program. They could play off of my list but they couldn't control what went on or went off the list. And therefore they were relatively protected in that sense. They could do what they want to; nobody could buy them because they didn't have any control over anything. And, so we had a kind of unique system at CFL (K. Draper, personal communication, March 11, 2016).

John Landecker affirmed that WLS, in the 1970s, still made sure that the air personalities were not influenced in any way by external financial factors.

...when I went to WLS, that's a whole different ball game. WLS was owned by ABC. And, the only people involved in picking the music were the music director and the program director. And, you had to sign an affidavit. I think it was every month, stating that you would not receive any gifts or whatever in exchange for airplay (J. Landecker, personal communication, March 9, 2016).

Many radio listeners believed that it was the disk jockeys that made the decisions as to whether or not a song received airplay, and that helped to make some disk jockeys more popular because their music was thought to be better. Ron Britain, while still in Cincinnati, once used this perception to his advantage at a live show:

... one of the guys that was coming in was Barrett Strong. Now, I never had anybody stiff me. I mean they'd all always show up. Well, Barrett Strong didn't show up, and I had a huge crowd there, and I thought, "My God, they're going to kill me." And so I went out, and I said, "Barrett Strong is not coming to perform for you." And I said, "If Barrett Strong doesn't think enough of you," and I have his record in my hand, "I will never play his record again on the air," and I broke it, and they cheered ... But the thing was the record was off the charts. I mean I had no control over that. I just knew that the record wasn't going to be played anymore (R. Britain, personal communication, March 4, 2016).

But later Britain did have a little control. He was able to adjust the selections on his specialty show on Sunday nights, the "Subterranean Circus."

(After a trip to London) I came back to Chicago, and I said, "You know, there's a lot of music... that's being purchased that's not played on the radio, and I'd like to do a show on Sunday that I record, and I want to call it the *Ron Britain Subterranean Circus*", and I said, "There was one guy that I met over there that's not being played on the air. His name is Jimi Hendrix" ... That was my show. I programmed that music. It was music that was given to me, and that was it. I didn't have to go through anybody. I'd program three hours of music, and they were not on the playlist or anything (R. Britain, personal communication, March 4, 2016).

A powerful person at a station – one working in the music department, for example – could have some extra influence as to what got on their show every so often. George McDaniel explained:

You cannot say that you don't have personal preference. Like when we'd do those oldies weekends, I'd always cheat and play the hottest stuff that I could find, like "Light My Fire," and "Louie Louie" and stuff. I'd play it, you know, no matter who played it last, I'd play it again. But outside of those oldies weekends, you stuck to the list. (Mike

Joseph, the consultant) wouldn't tolerate any deviation from that at all (G. McDaniel, personal communication, March 11, 2016).

The role that record stores and jukebox companies played was also cited by a number of the radio personalities. Calls would be made to record stores to ask what the stores were selling, and that information would be used in a variety of ways to configure the local charts. George McDaniel said that WLAV in Grand Rapids relied on these calls, "even though it was questionable, now that I think back about it... (the calls) were more to see what to take off (the list)" than to determine what to add (G. McDaniel, personal communication, March 11, 2016). Ken Draper at WCFL was saddled with a number of union laborers and members of the musicians' union who were on the station's payroll, and those people were often given the task of calling record stores and tallying the results "primarily to give them something to do" (K. Draper, personal communication, March 11, 2016). Given the earlier assertion by Denisoff (1986) that record stores were sometimes given incentives in the form of free records for shelf placement, these numbers may rightfully be called into question.

Sometimes the program director exerted control for a different reason: just to see if he could. Bob Stickroe recalled WZZM program director Bill Holen falling back on his psychology degree to talk his staff out of playing certain selections that he did not agree with.

(Holen) always used to try to use psychology on all his jocks, including me. I remember one time, going into 1971, ... we were doing music and Bill said "Well, I gotta go on the air and we're adding five songs this week and I only got four spots, so it's going to come down to (this): You decide whether we're going to add 'She's Not Just Another Woman' by The Eighth Day, or 'Don't Say You Don't Remember' by Beverly Bremers." And I knew it was a setup because Eighth Day was Black and Beverly Bremers was White. So I listened ... I already heard the Eighth Day record 'cause it was being played several places; I had never heard the Beverly Bremers record before and I kind of liked it right out. So I said "We're going to add Beverly Bremers this week" and he was shocked because he knew I was going to add the Black record because he knew I liked Black records, but I said to myself, you know, 'He's setting me up for this, and we're going to have to add The Eighth Day next week anyhow...' and, well, Beverly Bremers became a

hit in Grand Rapids many months before it became a hit nationally (B.Stickroe, personal communication, March 8, 2016).

There were also instances where the program director acted as a gatekeeper, specifically keeping the gates closed to particular artists. In one case, it was because of a poor relationship with the record label. John Landecker recalls being saddled with a song he hated at WLS while the program director passed over hit records:

When I came to WLS, Mike McCormick had some sort of hard-on against Warner Brothers Records. One night (McCormick) is out in a bar in Arlington Heights and hears "Happiest Girl in the USA" by Donna Fargo. And as far as I know, it was not being played anywhere. So he decides we're going to break it. And I go insane, because this is horrible. And at the same time, he has a hard-on against Warner Brothers Records and we are not playing "Layla" and we're not playing "School's Out," by Alice Cooper. Mike and the general manager are dismissed and new people come in. And the day that happened, I was downstairs in the music library, got "Layla" and "School's Out," and went back on the air that night and played them back to back, probably at least twice. Now I don't know why he had a problem with Warner Brothers Records, but somebody must have pissed him off about something. And his way of being able to retaliate was withholding their songs from a big radio station (J. Landecker, personal communication, March 9, 2016).

While the personalities were not asked directly if they thought that the process of music selection was racially biased, one of the purposes of the discussion was to get at the notion of what role, if any, that race played in the formation of the station playlist. Asking a question such as "Was race a factor?" would not likely yield a direct answer, since (it is assumed) that very few people would admit to such a practice. But through conversation, it was possible to tease out this answer a bit. Bob Becker, formerly of WGRD and WLAV in Grand Rapids, suggested that race may have subconsciously played a role in the selection of the music on his stations:

The music director ... would ask me, you know. I'm a teen, so I'm 16, 17, getting into this business. But I would have to sit down with a session every week with the music director to listen to songs. And I wasn't shown what (the *Gavin Report*) was saying about them. He gave like five or six songs that he wanted me to hear and ask my opinion. So, there was a white bias going here. Music director's white. I'm white. And I'm not the only one

who's in that interview process. We had other teens working. So you're going to get a white bias (B. Becker, personal communication, March 10, 2016).

Ron Britain went to work at Chicago's WIND after his stint at WCFL. There, he said, race definitely played a role in the formation of the playlist, especially when the corporate managers from Westinghouse came for a visit. "When the bigwigs would come in ... there was no black music. (Laughing) It was all, uh, Tom Jones and, uh, who was the other guy? Frank Sinatra. All that kind of music. As I recall, that, that was one thing that they did say... 'Take that stuff off'" (R. Britain, personal communication, March 4, 2016). Others interviewed seemed to indicate that they were blazing the trail in the other direction, even in a losing battle. John Landecker explained that his exposure to Detroit sounds growing up shaped his musical taste.

I grew up in Ann Arbor, outside of Detroit, right when Motown started. And I was always big into Motown and R&B and Stax Records and Atlantic when I was in high school. So I played those without any regard to whether or not anybody was black or not. I just played them because I liked them... Honestly, I don't believe I had any racial bias. In fact, if I did, it might have been the opposite way, because I personally liked the heavier, harder edge sound... In fact, I remember going to Michigan State and being in the Communication Arts class and arguing for the purpose of a paper that establishing radio stations that only played black records was contributing to segregation in society. Some urban stations were owned by white people. So it was like all broadcasting, regardless of whether or not ... the only color that mattered was money, was green (J. Landecker, personal communication, March 9, 2016).

George McDaniel suggested that there was never a discussion about whether to add a record at WLAV due to race, largely due to what he perceived to be a lack of interest. "I don't think that ever happened about Black records, because those people were not listening. The people who would like those apparently were not listening to us at all" (G. McDaniel, personal communication, March 11, 2016). While the responses unanimously indicated a lack of preference by race, the chart data from the stations tells a different story. It seems possible that individual disk jockeys, despite their preference for an integrated Top 40 playlist, were unable to overcome other gatekeeping forces at their respective stations.

Research Question 7 sought to determine the process by which songs were moved up and down the playlist. This turned out to be an “it depends” type question, for each station employed a different methodology and different process to get to, ultimately, the same result: a list of songs said to be representative of where the titles ranked in terms of popularity. The overwhelming response to this question had to do with local record stores. Radio stations were in constant communication with record stores, getting reports as to what songs were selling better than others, and the songs that sold were given more consideration for higher spots on the playlist. John Alfenito explained that during his tenure as a music director in Grand Rapids, there was a numerical process applied to the record store data:

Songs were ranked on the playlist according to a survey of retail sales from local record stores. We called the stores weekly and they would report a ranking (from 1-25, or so) of their best selling singles for that specific week. We’d tally all the results, weighing larger volume stores more than small shops, and compile our numbered playlist from 1-30 or 1-40 (J. Alfenito, personal communication, April 5, 2016).

Bob Hale at WLS in Chicago, pointed to the local “record hops” – dances held by the station for listeners to attend – as a way to get feedback on music selections.

I’d come back from a record hop and say, you know, this one by so-and-so or this one by so-and-so. I got a lot of request for that night and, and I would ask, when I was out doing a record hop, I’d ask the kids. What do you like? What’s new? What are you playing at home? And what do you like listening to? And then, go back to the station and say take a look at this, take a look at that (B. Hale, personal communication, March 9, 2016).

Hale specifically pointed to the record hops as a sign that the station was perhaps better integrated than Chicago was overall in terms of social and racial harmony.

(In making the playlists, race) never came up. I’ll tell you, the only time race came up was, uh, just don’t forget guys, that you’re gonna go out to a record hop and the so-and-so group’s going to be there. The Black artists had probably never appeared at that school or that dance, and ABC’s policy was we have no discrimination on age or on gender. If it’s a good piece of dance music, we play it. I had a weekly record hop in the Loop at what was called the Chicago Music Hall... on Sundays and a lot of sailors from Great Lakes came to this to meet the gals. A lot of gals were there to meet the sailors. College kids, high school kids were there and race was never a problem. That was an ABC dictate,



where there was going to be no discrimination of saying no to a tune because they're Black or whatever. So if it looks like it's dance-able it's dance-able, and then at our record hops, if we had an artist that was available, we made sure that people hired us knew that we're not going to say no to an artist showing up because they're Black. That was just ABC's policy (B. Hale, personal communication, March 9, 2016).

Bob Becker suggested that some of the record hops in Grand Rapids may have played a role in keeping his station a little “whiter.” He hosted “illicit” record hops, with no official promotion from the station, for the benefit of some of the Christian Reformed students in the Grand Rapids area that were not supposed to be out dancing.

I was doing speakeasy record hops. Kids from the Christian schools were not supposed to listen to the radio, and had to sneak to listen to the radio, but certainly could not dance. This was Footloose. I used to do speakeasy record hops for those kids where they rented a place and their parents wouldn't even know... They were worried. They really didn't want to hear the Black music as they'd get into more trouble. They'd be too far down in hell. (Laughs) ‘We'll go to hell, but not too far.’ So it would stand to reason that the station that they chose to sneak to listen to would match... (and not be) too far gone (B. Becker, personal communication, March 10, 2016).

The actual positions on the playlists were, on occasion, a carefully calculated means of establishing the rotation of songs. Bob Stickroe explained that at WZZM-FM the station's list could be segmented to determine the categories of the songs for rotation purposes.

For the most part, at ZZM, the top 10 was the powers ... the 10 or 11 to 20 was the B's, 21 to 30 the C's, ... but every once in a while, like when "Brown Sugar" came out, we knew it was going to be a smash and even though it had debuted at Number 37, we made it a B immediately and the next week, when it moved up from 37 to 12, we made it an A just because it was ... we knew it was a hot record. And, once in a while, if something was, like, say Number 9 but had been in the top 10 for 12 weeks, it's likely that it's getting fried, so let's take something out of the 11 to 15 range; let's move it up and make that an A and drop this thing down to a B (B. Stickroe, personal communication, March 8, 2016).

For stations that aired countdown shows, like WLAV, the exact order of the songs on the chart may have been adjusted to accommodate the “segue rules” discussed earlier. George McDaniel played the countdown list every night on his show, and indicated that “I might have looked at

that and said, oh well, let's move him up one, or her down one, so that they won't be back to back so I won't be counting them back to back, but nobody else would have cared" (G.

McDaniel, personal communication, March 11, 2016).

While this question was not posed as a true hypothesis, it is safe to conclude that the arrangement of songs in position on the local charts was a combination of art and science, and perhaps varying levels of "fudging" data in order to achieve a music flow to hold an audience longer based on segue rules. That may have played more of a role than any sort of mathematical analysis in ordering the songs on the chart each week.

Research Question 8 asked the talent to recall how closely, in their estimation, the printed playlist reflected the actual airplay that songs received on the station. In almost every case the disk jockeys insisted that the playlist data was reputable, and for good reason. The aforementioned payola scare from earlier in the decade squelched thoughts of wrongdoing in the form of reporting airplay for records that did not actually get airplay. What did emerge from the conversations, though, was the notion that the rules changed after about 1970. For this study, we can safely assume that the playlists are a fair reflection of what the stations did. Into the 1970s, however, the notion of "paper adds" – stations putting songs on to their playlists that did not see any airplay – became a real phenomenon. Bob Stickroe explained that multiple stations engaged in the practice.

The first, real music hassle I had with the program director, Bill Holen, was "Ball of Confusion." He wanted to add it to the list, but just have it be a paper add. A paper add is where you just list the record on your list but you don't play it. At ZZM, probably out of any of the 40, you'd have maybe 2 or 3 paper adds. For the most part, it wasn't the songs that were real high on the list; it were the songs that 'Oh, I owe this guy a favor so we'll just print it on the bottom of the list for two or three weeks and he'll think we're playing it.' GRD didn't start having paper adds probably until '72 or so, and they started taking over the market. By the time '75 came around, GRD had 30 songs on their list, but they only played 18 of them (B. Stickroe personal communication, March 8, 2016).

Author and former music director Ron Smith corroborated the existence of the paper add:

This brings up a problem in the industry in the mid 80's. As research coordinator at WKQX, I knew every song we were testing and playing. Yet, towards the end of my stay (and this probably hastened my departure) I noticed songs attributed to us in the trades that were neither being played or even being tested. We now call these "paper adds". In my naivety, I couldn't understand why a station would report songs it wasn't playing, especially since it wasn't that interested in impressing record labels. Later I found that cocaine was being used as "payola" in order to purchase these "adds"-- though I'm not suggesting that anyone I worked with was involved. I do know that shortly after I left the chain, NBC forbid its employees from reporting to the trades. (*Radio and Records*) and *Billboard* compensated by going to independent monitoring of station airplay that eliminated the problem of playlist numbering and reflected reality (R. Smith, personal communication, March 14, 2016).

The concept of the paper add had no place, however, on the radio playlist of the 1960s. Bob Hale of WLS invoked the fear of the payola scandal in assuring that the playlists were accurate.

... (The) American Broadcasting Company owned WLS at that time, while it was really strict on how these are going to turn out, because that was just at the tail end of the payola scandal. We wanted no smudge on the stations that ABC owned, so there was, there was no shenanigans, and it wasn't a question of well, there's a tune that seems to be going, but we don't like it, we won't play it. Or, what do you say we try to make something out of this (B. Hale, personal communication, March 9, 2016).

Ken Draper agreed, and made an interesting comparison to news coverage:

I don't know how to say it more directly, we didn't care that much about (if) we made people happy in the record industry and unhappy because of the way we did it. And we weren't married to them. It wasn't – I didn't feel I was in radio because of the music industry any more than I would presume that I owed Associated Press or Metro News or somebody else some kind of allegiance because we were in the news business (K. Draper, personal communication, March 11, 2016).

Overwhelmingly the radio personalities said that, for this time period, the lists were an accurate representation of the music that the stations played. In that sense the post-payola hysteria that still ran rampant through the hallways of radio stations served to help create a mostly accurate historical record of airplay, making the 1960s a unique period of time for playlist study.

Research Question 9a dealt with the subject of pressure from record companies to add songs to the playlist that the disk jockeys did not feel would be right for the audience. This question was asked to ascertain the role of the record promoter as a gatekeeper. Overwhelmingly the role of the record companies was downplayed by the respondents in this study, again citing concerns over the appearance of manipulation for money to be a huge factor. Even WVON, which was owned by Leonard Chess of Chess Records, was careful not to necessarily add product just because it would help the parent company. WVON disk jockey Herb Kent said “We would never do that – that would be an FCC violation. We just played hits or what we deemed to be hits” (H. Kent, personal communication, March 16, 2016). WCFL personality Ron Britain confirmed that the music promoters from record companies would try to sell the product to the jocks to no avail.

And the record guys would come in with their records, you know, the different guys with their records that they were trying to promote, and you would vote on them...you would vote whether you liked the record, or you didn't like the record. You know, I really don't think it made any difference because the music director was the guy who made all the decisions, I think (R. Britain, personal communication, March 4, 2016).

Bob Stickroe added that often, the hype presented by the promotions men was taken with the appropriate grain of salt:

So once I became music director ... I remember talking to the program director after seeing some of the record guys and he says “Huh, it's amazing. These guys all have, like, a stack of 50 songs that are going to be the biggest records ever to hit the airwaves and I listened to them and some of them are junk” (B. Stickroe, personal communication, March 8, 2016).

John Alfenito, who helped shape music decisions at three Grand Rapids stations, said that the pressure from the record reps to get their songs added was “constant.”

Because Grand Rapids was a “secondary market,” the record companies were obliged to get their new music aired there first before going to the “major markets” (Detroit,

Chicago) to get play there. So, the promo guys worked stations like WGRD and WLAV very hard to get us to add their new records each week (J. Alfenito, personal communication, April 5, 2016).

As John Landecker explained, the wisest record reps knew to walk a thin line.

...it was the record rep's job to sell you and you're the customer. And the customer is always right. And it would not be a good idea for them to piss off some music director, over a song that didn't matter that much and then down the road, even subconsciously have this music director retain resentment against this guy and his label (J. Landecker, personal communication, March 9, 2016)

But it was also possible for a singer or artist to get some extra airplay by being available to the station for promotional purposes. While not meeting the traditional definition of payola in that money was not traded for the airplay, access to the singer as entertainment for record hops was sometimes a factor in the decision to add a record to the list. This led to a number of artists who were not necessarily local to a city getting the sort of "hometown" treatment that placed higher than expected numbers of their recordings on station playlists. Bob Hale recalls this being the case at WLS:

And, this talent would come to our record hops, and they would perform their tunes, and we, if nothing else, we would make them a Silver Dollar Survey extra, but there were a few of the tunes that we played that did get bought and the record buyers were going for. One of our close friends was Nick Noble. Now Nick's kind of music was not rock and roll but it was popular, it was dance-able and it was a Chicago guy. Every time Nick showed up at a record hop, the folks really liked him personally and we would play it as an extra. Once in a while we would see that there's a spike in record sales and Nick would show up on the Top 40 as number 39 or 28, uh, I don't know, but a couple of them got up to the top five... when a Chicago artist came out, it was always a Silver Dollar Survey extra and if we saw it was starting to move at all, we wanted to make sure it got played. And I, I think we in playing probably nudged a few of those tunes up into the top 15, maybe even into the top 10 (B. Hale, personal communication, March 9, 2016).

Bob Becker explained that the same practice was in place at WGRD in Grand Rapids:

GRD was big on doing the Shower of Stars. This was usually once a month...Now, early on, some of those people were very close to the music director. Bobby Bare is an example. Bobby Bare's music was probably promoted more heavily here than anywhere else because he was a repeat on the Shower of Stars. So we could get him in here cheaper, right? We're going to play his music, and make a bigger deal out of him than I

think you guys probably had in Chicago... GRD wanted him here and, and, in exchange then build him up on the survey (B. Becker, personal communication, March 10, 2016).

Becker also explained that, while Grand Rapids wasn't of sufficient size to attract payola, booze and access were offered as compensation to add certain records.

So we were invited to cocktail parties down at the hotel Pontchartrain. And that was the idea, to get you down there to make you friendlier to that particular artist. Case in point, the Cowsills. Pretty lame group. But, they wanted to make sure you got down there, you got your booze, and you got fed, and you had a good time, and the Cowsills were there for pictures, and ... you could record them so that you could use them on the air. So, they tried to pressure you into things that you might not have necessarily have done. And the vehicle was through these, uh, I'll call them cocktail parties (B. Becker, personal communication, March 10, 2016).

George McDaniel corroborated the exchange of the "liquid lunch" for playlist position, noting that how effective it was as a method of trade depended on the individual program director.

So, the record guys would (come to town). And when (Jack) Hoppus got to be the program director, they would – and they did this to (Dick) McKay too – they would come to town and drink their lunch. And McKay never bothered me about that but Hoppus would call occasionally and say "Come down here!" Which would make me furious, to start with, in the middle of the day. He'd been drinking with the guy from Columbia (Records), or somebody like that, and... I'd walk in, and they'd go "How come you're not playing this?" (G. McDaniel, personal communication, March 11, 2016).

It appears that while record companies were able to move conversation about a particular record, they were still subject to the whim of the program director, music director, or perhaps the external broadcast consultant. Though they may have played an important role in the process, we cannot speak of them as gatekeepers in the same sense that we can program directors.

Research Question 9b dealt with the subject of stations getting pressure from advertisers to remove songs from the playlist that the disk jockeys did feel were appropriate for the audience. Here the aim is to determine the role of the station sponsor as a gatekeeper. If the advertisers of the station were able to wield influence and keep certain types of music off of the

airwaves, they would be seen to fit the role of a gatekeeper in that they would be essentially making decisions for the station through their influence. In almost every case, however, the role of the advertiser – as perceived by the air talent – was minimal. Bob Stickroe shared that even into the 1970s program directors were willing to stand by their on-air product and the choices that were made in its creation, citing the competition’s gatekeeping force as a bigger reason to play a song than a complaint from an advertiser was not to play it.

Once in a while, we'd have a complaint from somebody saying (the music was too Black) and we'd say "Well, it's a hit." And I used to say, whenever anybody would complain about a song we're playing, whether it be a listener or, a (station manager) ... "Well, you can ... you convince Ron White to quit playing that song on my competition, then I'll consider not playing that song. Until you do that, then we're going to play it (B. Stickroe, personal communication, March 8, 2016).

Even employees of the station’s sales department, should they try to suggest what the advertisers wanted, were met with similar objections.

I remember a story coming out of WGRD in the 70s when Ron White was the program director and Don Anderson was the GM; they were both obviously former jocks. One of the sales reps came to Don Anderson, one time, complaining about the music that was being played and the rotations about how quickly they (turned) ... “My clients are complaining about ...” and Don Anderson just looked at him and he said “Do you like selling this 18 share radio station just by taking phone calls in your office and not having to go out and beat the streets for business? Then shut up about the music.” (Laughs) (B. Stickroe, personal communication, March 8, 2016).

John Alfenito may have had the best answer when faced with a discussion about a song that his boss wanted removed from the station.

My management backed up my decisions 100%, which was very reassuring. I recall one of my early General Managers at WLAV told me his wife didn’t like a particular song we were playing. I told him I didn’t like them all, either. That was as far as the discussion went (J. Alfenito, personal communication, April 5, 2016).

An interesting final thought came from John Landecker. While this study has attempted to explain the different actors and resources that possessed agency to act as gatekeepers in top 40 radio, Landecker suggested one other important group to include: the owners.

I think when you get into bigger markets, you've got ... you know, lawyers are gatekeepers. And corporate owners are gatekeepers. Business is an overriding element. By playing it safe and not taking any chances, and playing things close to the vest. And if we're going to do something, we want to believe that we have a very high percentage return on what we're about to do. Because we don't want to play any duds (J. Landecker, personal communication, March 9, 2016).

It was not just the large corporate owners, either. Local businessmen, who very much saw the stations as extensions of their community presence, were able to shape the sound of the stations by keeping “offensive” material off of them. Bob Becker said that in Grand Rapids,

...back then, in this community, songs are going to be pulled by the music director based on the advertisers and the churches ... Because it's the fact that John Shepard owned the station, and my goodness gracious, buddies with, you know, the rest of the community. He's not going to allow that station to (cause problems with his friends.) Joe Hooker, at WMAX is not going to have a problem with the music. We'd rather not play it at all if it was going to cause trouble from a provocative point (B. Becker, personal communication, March 10, 2016).

While owners may have had some influence – all decisions were made in order to secure the best level of profit for the radio station – it appears that by and large the trust to make the right decisions was left in the hands of the local program directors, and those people were kept free from the undue influence of the business community for as long a period of time as those stations managed to do well in the ratings and garner listeners. In that sense, we may think of the business community as a secondary gatekeeper with a rather weak influence.

## **Summary**

Both the mathematical process and the interviews yielded important information about how the playlists for the stations were put together. Taken together, they give some clues as to what the process was for determining which songs would be played and with what frequency.



The comments made by the radio personalities inform the data in a way that simply analyzing the numbers cannot. A simple look at the percentages of Black songs on station playlists compared to the percentages on the *Billboard* charts would paint a clear picture of profiling by race. But when the process of the “segue rule” is considered, some of the discrepancies start to make more sense. Stations rarely if ever would have had occasion to play the *Billboard* list in sequence. In fact, when they played their own printed list in sequence, that list was likely altered from the order of what was truly most popular in favor of an order that was more interesting in terms of sonic texture, taking care to separate performers by style, race, and gender. While the interview subjects downplayed the role of the record company promoter and insisted that the fear of a payola investigation was still very real, there were other ways that a record company could influence airplay. Some artists may have been selected for airplay based on their availability for appearances to benefit the station rather than purely for the merits of their music. By the end of the 1960s, this composition of the list would have been carried out under the watchful eye of upper management or outside personnel in the form of a consultant. Despite the best efforts of individual disk jockeys and even of program directors and music directors, there were other forces shaping the music decisions that a single dissenting voice could not overcome lest one’s job be in danger.

The interview respondents also did not necessarily rule out a sort of pre-censorship of music. Each indicated that the advertising community did not have a particular say in what was or what was not played, but it is quite possible that any controversy with respect to content was simply avoided in the first place. To simply think of the voice heard on the radio as the gatekeeper of the music is impractical. While the data alone cannot explain these discrepancies

in chart position, the gaps that were filled in by the study respondents help to paint a clearer picture of how songs were – and were not – selected for airplay on Top 40 stations in the 1960s.

## Chapter 6: Discussion, Limitations, and Implications for Future Study

### Discussion

This study attempted to take a widely used communication theory typically applied to news coverage, gatekeeping theory, and instead apply it to music radio programming in the 1960s. Instead of thinking of the adoption of news stories, this study used the theory proposed by Shoemaker and Vos (2009) and applied it to decision making in the selection of songs for airplay. The purpose in doing so was to determine two things: first, what role, if any, gatekeeping played in the selection of music for airplay and, as a result, shaping popular culture in the period, and second, who or what may have served in the role of gatekeeper. The study also looked specifically at radio stations in Chicago, Illinois, and Grand Rapids, Michigan, to see if the gatekeeping effect had an important consequence on the playlists of those radio stations – the suppression of musical selections by performers of color and of women. Through mathematical analysis of local level playlist data, a disconnection was found to exist between the relative popularity of certain types of music in both cities when compared to the popularity chart in a nationally-circulated music publication, *Billboard* magazine.

Parallels exist between gatekeeping in radio and other media. Breed (1955) suggested that “every newspaper has a policy, admitted or not” (p. 327) with respect to the stories it covers. Breed suggested that a newspaper would likely take a particular position on a topic (schools, for instance), and that position would likely color how it covered any topic in that arena. Radio stations have a similar policy concerning the type of content they play, and even the variety of music they feature. A station may decide to be a Top 40 station, but the music that is chosen to represent what is popular may tend to lean a little more White or more Black depending on the programming staff’s decisions. The sort of “socialization” or process by which newsroom staff

learn about achieving conformity (Breed, 1955, p. 328) also applies to the process in music radio by which programming staff communicate to individual disk jockeys the playlist decisions that are made and the expectation that the disk jockeys will follow the instructions. In the qualitative interviews conducted in this study, the respondents indicated they had little or no individual power to change what was chosen for airplay on their radio stations. Those decisions were made for them, and successful disk jockeys followed the instructions and conformed to the structure of the station.

The first research questions dealt with how closely the stations in the study followed the popular music charts as printed by *Billboard*. Analysis showed discrepancies in the content of the local stations' weekly playlists, and scatter plots of station chart positions compared to *Billboard* positions showed weak to moderate correlation. These analyses took all types of music into consideration and did not differentiate by demographic factors concerning the performers. In all cases, for all five stations analyzed, a good number of songs were passed over for airplay. A closer look at the data revealed that some of the songs missed were those that *Billboard* placed in rather high positions on its charts. While the bulk of songs that were missed fall at the lower positions on both the station charts and in *Billboard*, the omission of songs thought to be nationally popular was interesting to discover.

The third research question and the first hypothesis focus on which market held influence over the other. Despite the large stations in Chicago possessing powerful AM signals that could easily get into Grand Rapids and attract audience attention, these stations tended to add new music later than the stations in Grand Rapids did. This disproved the notion that the "big city" stations served as a gatekeeper, influencing the stations in the smaller market to add selections to their playlists. Since the small signals coming from Grand Rapids could not reach Chicago

(WGRD signed off the air at night and could not be heard anywhere), it would be impossible for them to have had any sort of influence through what was broadcast. Admittedly, it is not known if the printed playlists from Grand Rapids made their way to Chicago, but in a pre-Internet world the only means by which this could have been accomplished would have been a physical transport, such as the mail or by being carried around by record company representatives. No interview respondents specifically mentioned access to these playlists during interviews, so it cannot be established what role, if any, they played in the decisions to add music.

Hypotheses two and three dealt with the relationship between the songs reported to have been played by radio stations in Chicago and the national charts' measures of popularity. Since Chicago represented a bigger percentage of the population than a smaller city, it stood to reason that the selections of songs by these stations would have some impact on the placement of songs on national charts. It was shown that songs tended to appear on local station playlists before appearing on national charts, and that the charts reported by Chicago stations did more closely match the national lists. However, there was a reasonable amount of discrepancy between what Chicago reported as popular versus what the national charts indicated. It is not known what metric *Billboard* used to compile its chart. It is known that the *Billboard* measure of popularity between 1958 and 1991 was calculated from a combination of self-reported radio airplay and record sales (Whitburn, 2003, p. xii), but in what percentage the two are represented and, of radio airplay, how much effect a single market can have is unclear. Future research may well serve to create an aggregate chart of major market playlists – say, the top 10 or top 20 markets in the country – and see how closely such a chart would align to the magazine's report.

Hypothesis four attempted to establish the role individual stations had as gatekeeper over each other within a market. This was measured by looking at “non-hit” songs, defined as those

that failed to make the national chart. Analysis was performed on the instances where such songs were featured on one station in a market, and the amount of time for adoption by other stations was scrutinized as well. In these instances a pattern emerged showing a market leader consistently debuting music first and a secondary station following suit. Since there was little to no national pressure (such as repeated push through trade magazines or on television shows such as *American Bandstand*) to play a record that was not a hit, it is more likely that the decision to add a song followed the same decision being made at another station. In that sense market leading stations, especially in Chicago, may have acted as gatekeepers over stations that trailed them in the ratings.

The fifth hypothesis dealt with questions of race and gender. In all cases a clear discrepancy existed between where songs by Black performers charted locally compared to national ranks of popularity. In some instances the median difference in song popularity was as many as nine chart positions lower on local charts. While this may not seem on the surface like a major difference, it can have a measurable effect on the amount of airplay that songs received. This difference is still felt 50 years later as many “golden oldie” stations in local markets determine the relative strength of songs not through any measured research but through a cursory examination of chart data. Modern airplay amounts still translate to royalty payments for the composers of these songs. It is hoped that this study will call into question the practice of simply replaying old charts, and that modern-day program directors will take into account factors that may have contributed to the differences in the relative popularity of songs by Black performers.

While a difference was seen in Black performers overall, the difference was not as pronounced when the music was split between pop and soul categories. The popular Motown titles, sought after by White audiences, were not necessarily played in higher rotation than

expected than the Soul titles thought to be preferred by Black audiences. What was determined, however, was that a greater number of the pop titles were played at all on most stations in Chicago (see Table 14), and that a considerable number of both were passed over in favor of other selections. The program directors and music directors of the local stations, by choosing to keep these titles off their airwaves, served as gatekeepers shaping the face of popular music in their communities.

A difference was not found for female performers. At first glance, when looking at the chart data, it appeared that songs by female performers were given the short shrift. Numbers did not bear this out, however, and songs sung by women charted at the local level in almost identical places as at the national level. While the analysis of the 1960s found Black records had difficulty gaining airplay in these markets, songs by women did not. But interviews with radio personalities revealed that “segue rules” – programming rules that indicated what types of songs should not be played in succession – may have limited the number of songs by women that stations could conceivably have played in their rotations. Those same rules are in effect in many formats today, despite a lack of research citing listener preference for the segregation of female vocals. As with the overall chart findings, modern oldies programmers may wish to rethink the continuation of these practices in the selection of their music.

The last of the mathematical analyses dealt with the phenomenon of local music. Both Chicago and Grand Rapids had vibrant local music scenes with bands rising to some level of prominence nationally. Hypothesis six suggested that discrepancies in song selection may have been due to preference given to local bands. This was disproven, as the percentage of songs of local origin was nowhere near the percentage of charting records passed over by local stations. In fact, broadcast consultants in the smaller market may have again served as gatekeepers here,

blocking access by local bands citing the lack of airplay in other markets as a reason for exclusion (G. McDaniel, personal communication, May 11, 2016). Paying attention to local content is a potentially valuable exercise for modern oldies programmers looking to build affinity with their audiences, as listeners who grew up in the same markets in which they live may have fond memories of seeing these local bands playing live when they were younger. Local recordings also turn up in strange places. Late in 2015, the recording of “In the Park” by Grand Rapids band The Ju-Jus was inexplicably chosen for use in a Subaru commercial despite never having charted anywhere, let alone in Grand Rapids. This revitalized interest in the band on that city’s oldies station. Having at least a passing familiarity with the musical heritage and history can be important for program directors looking to attract an audience.

The remaining research questions were designed to tease some information out of the interviews that were conducted with radio personalities for this study. Ten different personalities from both Chicago and Grand Rapids consented to be interviewed for the project, and their discussions about radio and their careers and observations helped to inform the data in many cases. The alignment of station playlist size with *Billboard*, for example, made more sense as Bob Becker, Bob Stickroe, and George McDaniel spoke of the role that *The Gavin Report* and the broadcast consultant played in Grand Rapids radio programming. Stories from the various Chicago personalities about the fear that the payola scandal of 1960 stuck in the hearts and minds of disk jockeys even as many as ten years later gave credence to the validity of the individual station surveys. Perhaps most telling, however, were the discussions on race. Most personalities acknowledged the difference of race with respect to music selection, but denied that it ever came up in discussion in the stations as to selecting a particular record over another to fulfill a quota. Despite this, almost all made reference to the various “segue rules” that kept Black artists or



female performers from playing back to back and thus lowering the need for as many selections by those types of musicians on active playlists.

Research questions seven and eight had to do with the station playlists themselves. Each station had a slightly different method for determining the relative worth of songs on their lists, but patterns emerged as to the external forces that may have played the role of gatekeeper. Those forces included local record hops, record stores, jukebox companies, consultants, trade publications, and input from other radio stations. Stations relied on various combinations of these forces, with varying levels of importance, to arrive at the decision to move a song up or down the playlist. Once the playlist was set and published, however, it represented an actual snapshot of what the radio station sounded like at that time. The respondents in this study unanimously pointed to a fear of investigation over charges of accepting payola, what with the national scandal still fresh in the minds of both the announcers and the public. It was not until the 1970s and beyond that the concept of the “paper add” – a song not given airplay but reported as having received it – became more common in practice. The scars of the payola scandal were still too fresh in the 1960s, and no one wanted to risk their livelihood or their career in exchange for a little profit.

Research question nine delved into the idea of external control of playlists, both from record companies/promoters and from the advertising community. With respect to record pluggers, all those who took part in the study had some recollection or story about dealing with various promoters. But none had a recollection of record companies exerting any undue influence in getting certain records to air. The closest situations that arose were tales of record companies providing access to performers for record hops, which in turn led to increased airplay for those artists. But tales of cash and prizes in exchange for airplay were absent from the

discussion. This is a much different tale than in the 21<sup>st</sup> century, when then New York attorney general Elliot Spitzer famously sued various record companies for buying airplay in his state, leading to Sony Music paying \$10 million in fines in 2005 (Andorfer, 2005). The local advertisers also did not wield direct influence. Each of the radio talent asked not only had no recollection of this happening, but many shared stories to the contrary. In many cases, advertisers were stopped at the gate in attempts to have certain songs or types of songs removed. However, this does not account for the pre-censorship of material in cases where songs thought to be too “risky” for a variety of reasons never saw the airplay in the first place. Given the high percentage of Black records that never saw the airwaves, it is entirely possible that the stations were simply trying to avoid the controversy of content with advertisers by never allowing it to happen in the first place. Local station owners, especially in the smaller city of Grand Rapids, were cited to have no small amount of power when it came to keeping certain things away from listeners as well. So while no specific stories of post-censorship of music were given by respondents, it cannot be said that the business community played no role whatsoever in the formation of playlists and as such should be considered to be a gatekeeper in their own right.

Of all of the various possible gatekeepers discussed in this study, the roles of industry and trade publications and of consultants are of the greatest importance. While program directors and music directors remain the most potent forces in determining what did or did not see airplay, they did not make all such decisions in a vacuum. There has been a modicum of writing about the role of the record industry in creating a sellable product, but to this point little has been written about the influence of the trade publications – specifically, in this case, *Billboard* and *The Gavin Report*. In multiple conversations with those who had a front-row seat for playlist selection, these sources often entered the discussion as a trusted source, with more emphasis

placed on Bill Gavin's tip sheet than on the national charts ranking popular music. Likewise, the rise of the broadcast consultant is worthy of note. Critics of mass-market radio like to point to the Telecommunications Act of 1996 and its deregulation of the broadcast industry as "the beginning of the end." They see this as the time when homogenization of radio programming escalated due to the growth in corporate ownership of radio stations. While this certainly did occur, to claim that the process began in 1996 would be to miss other important periods in the industry's history. Based on the conversations conducted in this study and the representation in chart data represented in Figures 1 and 2, it can be safely argued that the beginnings of "sameness" on the radio dial can be traced back to the increased use of the consultant in the mid to late 1960s, and that that should be the real starting point for any discussion about homogeneity in programming.

### **Limitations**

Great care was taken with the mathematical data in this study. The huge number of records that were tabulated to have been reported in *Billboard* magazine and/or received airplay on the five stations in the study – over 5,700 of them – led to challenges in data handling. Mistakes in transcription, while certainly possible, were minimized through checking and double-checking of original copies of station surveys when available. As such, errors in the original documents were left to the author to correct. Surveys were, in many cases, originally typed by station personnel, and occasionally contained incorrect title information or saw titles corrected from week to week. Appendix C offers examples of these surveys. Many times a song would be added at a low position, and when it became a hit more care was taken by the station to report its data correctly. Where possible, songs with changing titles were cross-referenced by artist, record label, and serial number when available to ensure accuracy. The Grand Rapids survey data had never been analyzed, and this study represents its first use in research. While

every effort to accurately represent the content of the lists was made, to say that no mistakes were made in the process would be foolish.

One potential limitation to this research is its generalizability. One of the methods of gatekeeping this study looked at was the role one station played (or did not play) in convincing program directors and/or music directors of competing stations to add songs to their playlist. The cities in this study were in part chosen due to proximity to each other, and the fact that the signals from the larger city (Chicago) could all be heard within the limits of the smaller city (Grand Rapids) at a time when Internet streaming did not exist. While Chicago and Grand Rapids certainly fit the model of small-city within coverage range of large-city signal, they are but one such possible combination of cities. This pair of cities was selected in part out of convenience and due to the availability of survey data. To date, there is no formal repository of this playlist information. The data for this study was retrieved from private collections. While some of the data for large-market stations is available online, smaller-market data is much more difficult to come by. Choices of cities and radio stations would depend on how much data, if any, was saved by stations and collectors alike. Future studies could look at other combinations of cities to see if similar patterns arise. Any number of other smaller markets within range of Chicago, such as Davenport, Iowa, Peoria, Illinois, or Madison, Wisconsin might make for interesting comparisons to this data. Ken Draper, program director of WCFL, worked for many years at KSTT in Davenport before moving on to Cleveland and Chicago. That station's programming may be ripe for comparison in this way. Likewise, choosing a major city with a more established music business, like Los Angeles or Detroit, could yield more interesting effects with respect to the time between markets adopting songs to their playlists. Had the Detroit signals been receivable in Grand Rapids, this study might have taken a different turn, as Detroit

tended to be ahead of Grand Rapids in terms of music release time (B. Stickroe, personal communication, March 8, 2016). The availability of data also affects the choice of station that can be analyzed in a study like this. Even though much is available for Chicago, for example, the record of playlists for stations like WVON is far from complete. Further research will again depend on what has been preserved both at the market level and at the individual station level.

Another possible limitation of this study is that the data was processed at the station level rather than by individual times where station personnel changed. At this time, records are few and far between detailing the start and end dates of employment for program directors and music directors. It is suggested in the Implications for Future Study section that it may be valuable to look not merely at the station's history but at the separate tenures of individual gatekeepers so as to minimize any averaging that may have taken place over the duration of the study period.

The major limitation to this work, sadly, is the lack of the capacity for time travel. Many potential interview subjects for this study have passed away or are in ill health or memory. In the case of Chicago's WVON, for example, Herb Kent, at age 85, is the last living veteran of the station. Data is equally scarce. For example, no repository of WVON playlist surveys exists as efforts to preserve that data were not conducted with equal enthusiasm to the effort to save WLS surveys over the years. Likewise, actual radio broadcast recordings from the 1960s are extremely scarce. Work by groups such as the Radio Preservation Task Force (through the Library of Congress) are diligently working to save as many recordings as they can, but it is feared that most of what was created for broadcast in the 1960s was either never saved or recorded on media that has fallen victim to the ravages of time. Radio stations themselves have proven to be poor resources for this sort of information, either printed or recorded. This is due in part to the sale and resale of stations over the years, and the cleanout that happens when stations change their

physical location in a city. The research conducted for this study made full use of what resources were still available, but by no means may be considered complete due to the wide variety of potential sources of information that have been lost forever. It is hoped that those with an interest in radio history will begin to value playlist data as much as recordings of radio broadcasts are sought for preservation, and perhaps a repository for this local chart data can be created.

### **Implications for Future Study**

The theory section of this study suggested the broadcast consultant may play a significant role as a gatekeeper in terms of music selection. It was not immediately apparent just how significant a role this was until the numbers were crunched. The depiction in Figure 2 in the results section demonstrates a clear pattern showing that after about 1966 AM radio stations tended to play a smaller number of titles, and the number of titles much more closely matched the number of selections to make the *Billboard* Top 40 chart. The role of the consultant in this homogenization of AM radio's sound cannot be overlooked and should be explored more deeply. In this study only two markets were considered, and of those only one – Grand Rapids – yielded any on-air personalities with recollection of the role consultants played this early in the game. Much of the literature into consulting has focused on the period after the 1970s and spotlighted the work of Bill Drake (Simpson, 2011) and others. It may be useful to the scholarship to extend the window backwards to the 1960s and even the Storz system in the 1950s (Fatherley & MacFarland, 2014) to look at the genesis of this model of external control of programming and to determine the effect that it may well have had on music radio. The question should be asked: what role did these consultants play in the shaping of popular culture in the United States?

Further study could also look at the specific preferences of individual program directors. The tenure of a typical program director is not long at a radio station. In the author's broadcast

career he served as a program director six different times in a 17-year period. Each time a new program director is hired, he or she seeks to have an immediate impact on a radio station. That can be achieved through changes in air talent, or it can be through changes in music selection. As stated in the Limitations section this study looked at stations across the entire study period and as a result did not differentiate between periods of time when different men (and during this period, they were men) were in charge of the radio stations. What happened to the “sound” of WCFL after Ken Draper left, and what changed at WLS when John Rook was hired? By working further into the chart data and seeking out more interview subjects, more attention can be paid to the role that personal taste and programming philosophy may have played in the selection of music for airplay. As additional market data is acquired, the same question could be asked in other cities beyond the two selected for this study.

For this study, the only types of coding that took place were by race, gender, and whether or not musicians were from the cities analyzed in the study. Additional work with these charts may want to look into one or more additional types of programming:

- Comedy/novelty – in the early 1960s, a large number of comedy and novelty records were sold. Local station data from WLS and WJJD in Chicago revealed a number of these songs that did not fare well nationally but were locally popular. Likewise, the Ron Britain show on WCFL in the late 1960s stopped music entirely for pre-produced comedy features. What role did comedy play in the overall Top 40 package of the era?
- Beatles and Beatle-related – the British Invasion of 1964 had a noticeable effect on the pop charts for the middle portion of the study period. The music tended to be very White and very male during this time. An interesting exercise could be to work specifically within this time frame of 1964-1967 and see what records by American performers were

more or less likely to see success against the national media attention directed to performers from Great Britain.

- Re-recordings/”cover versions” – Many of the best-known songs of the period were recorded several times over the years. Much has been written about the practice of White performers “covering,” or re-recording songs written by Black performers to make them more palatable for White audiences. But performers of all races would occasionally take songs from the Great American Songbook and re-work them for a younger pop audience. What was the likelihood of a radio station adopting a song by a group if it had been previously recorded in some form?
- Third-song phenomenon – Art Roberts is quoted in a *Chicago Tribune* article (Baker, 1968) stating that the third hit by an artist was the most important, essentially stating that anyone can get lucky once, and that popularity can lead to a second hit. Further research could look into narrowing the field to artists with three or more hits to determine the pattern of airplay received, and to determine if there is a difference by race and gender as well.
- Live performances – Respondents in the study indicated that stations would, on occasion, give preference to acts that were available to the stations for performances at record hops. By cross-referencing radio playlists with newspaper coverage, or even ads for record hops sometimes contained on the surveys themselves, a correlation could emerge between a singer’s live performance in a town and his/her appearance on local playlists.



There are multiple different ways that the playlist data can be worked with to determine patterns of musical preference in the Top 40 format. As nostalgia continues to sell, research into the past could translate into ratings for savvy program directors in the present.

## **Conclusion**

Overwhelmingly the area of radio history has focused on the “golden age” of network radio programming from the period of time before World War Two. Despite the popularity of rock and roll and the fascination with pop culture figures of the postwar era such as Elvis Presley and the Beatles, rock and roll radio receives comparatively little attention in the scholarly area. It is hoped by this author that that will change. The 1960s are now, for the most part, further away than 50 years ago. A student graduating from high school in 1968 was closer chronologically to the end of World War One than a student graduating from high school today is to the Beatles’ appearance on *The Ed Sullivan Show*. As mentioned in the Limitations section, an unacceptable amount of resource material, from recordings of broadcasts to oral history subjects, have been lost forever to time. The time to begin to fully explore the importance and value of Top 40 radio in the United States in its first decades was several years ago, and researchers would do well to begin the study before any more material is lost. Likewise, efforts by groups such as the Radio Preservation Task Force to protect radio-related materials are vital, and should be extended beyond just the recordings of radio stations to the playlist data itself.

The application of gatekeeping theory to Top 40 radio programming yielded valuable explanation in terms of how programming material was selected. It is but one possible application of established communication theories to popular media. The study of such theory has been, by and large, limited to analysis of news content. While news radio remains a popular draw among audiences, it is by no means the only format to study. Music formats outdraw

spoken word formats handily and would be a ripe area for analysis of programming and how those formats deliver messages to audiences. The academy has long looked past the “popular” in favor of the “scholarly” for research and analysis. By no means should news study be abandoned. Instead, it is hoped that scholars will look at both audiences and see how the various methods of content selection and programming theory are applied to best reach and serve audiences.

Finally, the field of media study should continue to embrace radio of all eras. Despite claims for many years of being on its deathbed, radio continues to be the most-used medium in the United States: 91% of Americans had used radio in the past week, according to a Pew Research Survey in 2014 (Vogt, 2015). Online listening bumps the number of hours spent with radio each week even higher. More Americans use radio each week, as a percentage, than use social media sites such as Facebook. It stands to reason that there is still much that can be learned by studying radio audiences and the programming that they are consuming. While a large amount of research attention has been directed to social media outlets, the original social medium – radio – should not be ignored.

## APPENDICES

## Appendix A

### Coding Used for Songs in this Study

In order to be considered for inclusion in this study, a song had to be reported on either the *Billboard* Top 40 chart or reported on at least one of the individual station surveys published by a station considered in the study between 1960 and 1970. Once assembled into a table, all of the songs (n=5,747) were coded based on several attributes.

#### *Race*

Codes were given based on the lead singer of the record as follows:

- 0 – White/Caucasian (Elvis Presley, the Beatles, Brenda Lee)
- 1 – Black/African-American (Marvin Gaye, The Supremes, Aretha Franklin)
- 2 – Hispanic (Santana, Chris Montez)

#### *Black Pop/Soul*

Songs that received the #1 code for Black/African-American were further subdivided into three groups as follows:

- 1 – Black Pop/Motown (Supremes, Four Tops)
- 2 – Black Soul (Aretha Franklin, James Brown)
- 3 – Instrumental (Booker T. & the M.G.s)

It is important to note that the codes were applied by record rather than by artist. Some artists changed their musical style across their career (Jerry Butler is an example). The individual records were coded based on the “feel” of the record. Copies of songs were obtained from the author’s personal collection where available or from various online services such as YouTube.

### *Gender*

Songs were coded based on the singer or lead singer as follows:

0 – male

1 – female

Note again here that codes assigned by song rather than by artist. Some groups used different lead singers on different tracks (The Mamas and Papas). For these artists, each song was coded based on the particular vocalist used on that track. As was the case with determinations of Pop/Soul, individual tracks were listened to in order to determine the lead singer of the track.

### *Local Origin of Artist*

To test for a preference of artist based on proximity to the radio station, songs were coded by home town of artist as follows:

0 – any location excluding stations in this study

1 – Chicago (Buckingham, Cryan Shames, Chicago)

2 – Grand Rapids (Del Shannon, Pedestrians, Kingtones)

## Appendix B

### Qualitative Interview Questions

1. Please state which radio stations you worked for, and the approximate time frame if you remember it.
2. Describe the process by which a song was selected for airplay on the station.
  - a. (Follow-up) Who got the songs first?
  - b. How many people took part in the decision?
  - c. Were you involved in that process?
3. Describe the process by which songs were moved up or down the playlist.
4. Did the printed playlist released by the station reflect the actual amount of airplay that the songs got?
5. Was there ever any discussion that you recall about needing to make sure certain “types” of music were added or not added to the list?
  - a. (Follow-up) Did that discussion ever involve race?
  - b. Did that discussion ever involve gender?
6. Did you have the ability to add songs on your own show that weren’t on the official station playlist?
7. Do you recall any pressure from record companies to add a song the station didn’t want to?
8. Do you recall any pressure from advertisers to remove a song they didn’t approve of?
9. Were there any other factors that you can think of that either helped a song get played or kept it from being included?
10. Are there any other comments that you would like to add?

## Appendix C

### Sample Radio Station Surveys

This study used over 2,000 weekly local radio station surveys as the basis for determining the local radio station playlists. From these primary source documents the debut dates and peak positions for songs on each station were obtained, and these dates and positions were compared to the debut dates and peak positions reported in *Billboard* magazine. Local radio station surveys usually contained advertising to offset the costs of the printing of the sheets, and sometimes information about the contests and personalities heard on the station. Examples of those surveys are included here on the next few pages.





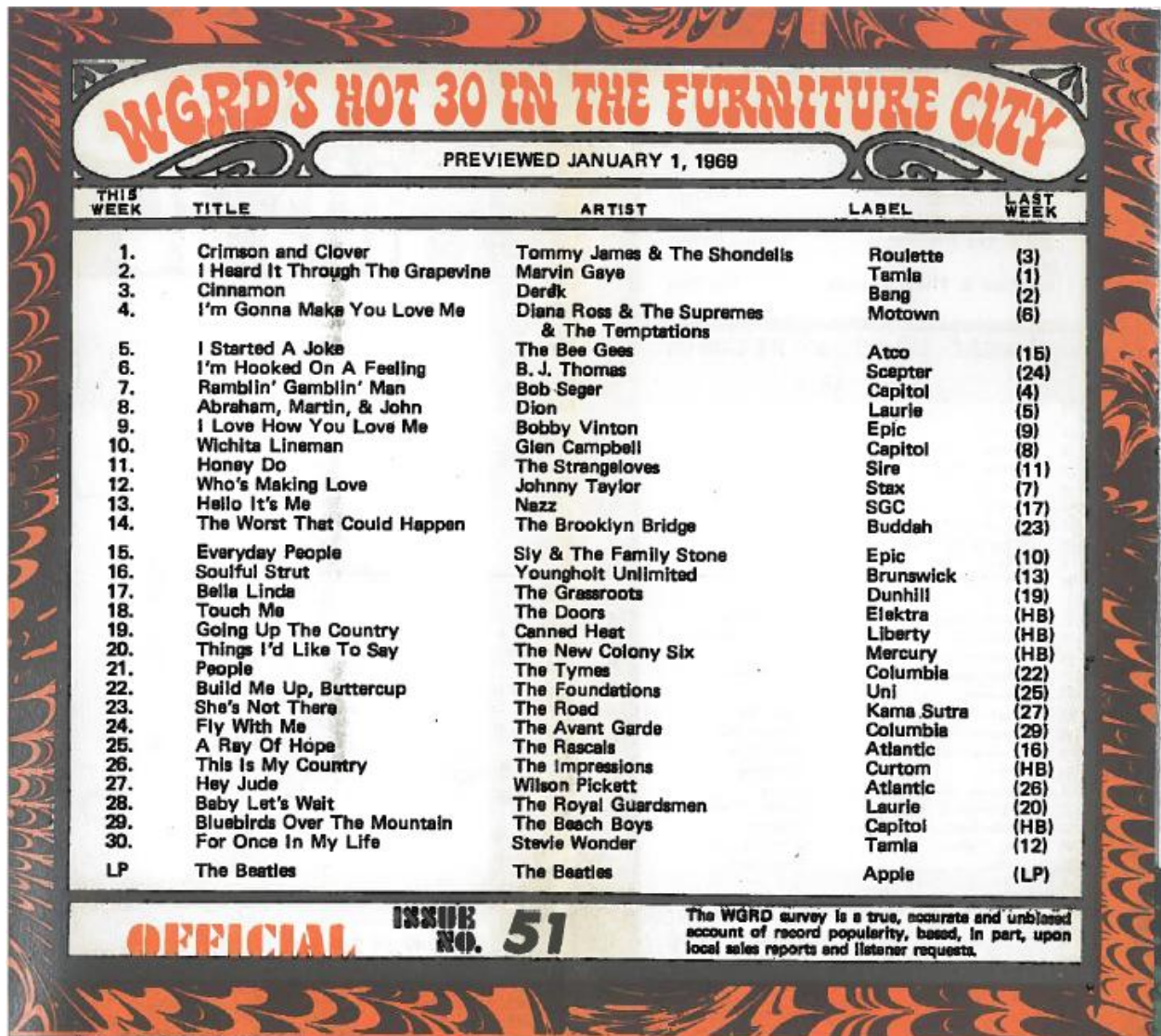


Figure 38. WGRD Hot 30 survey, January 1, 1969.

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**LARRY ADDERLEY**  
2-6 P.M.

ten to the WLAV Favorite  
ty Show Saturday Nights  
n 8 to 12 P.M. Pick next  
ek's number one record and  
FREE COKE! It's all  
ught to you by



**NEWPORT**  
SMOKES FRESHER

**BOB TRAPP**  
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We're  
Lively  
Active  
Vivacious

**JACK HOPKINS**  
12-6 A.M.



Figure 39. WLAV Favorite 40 survey (back), January 2, 1964

# WLAV

## Lively 13 LP's

WEEK OF JANUARY 2ND, 1964

# WLAV

## FAVORITE 40

TITLE	ARTIST	LABEL	TITLE	ARTIST	LABEL
1. Lesley Gore Sings of Mixed-up Hearts	Lesley Gore	Merc.	1. <del>Forget Him</del>	Bobby Rydell	Cam.
2. Deep Purple	April Stevens/Nino Tempo-Atco	Atco	2. <del>Surfin' Bird</del>	Trashmen	Garr.
3. Wonderful, Wonderful	Lawrence Welk	Dot	3. <del>Popsicles &amp; Icicles</del>	Murmaids	Cha.
4. Blue Gene	Gene Pitney	Mus	4. <del>Loddy Lo</del>	Chubby Checker	Par.
5. My Boyfriend's Back	The Angels	Sma.	5. <del>Midnight Mary</del>	Joey Powers	Amy
6. Little Deuce Coupe	Beach Boys	Cap.	6. <del>Hey Little Cobra</del>	Ripchords	Col.
7. For You	Rick Nelson	Dec.	7. <del>Louie, Louie</del>	Kingsmen	Wand
8. The Young Beat	Les. Brown	Col.	8. <del>There I've Said It Again</del>	Bobby Vinton	Epic
9. I Remember Buddy Holly	Bobby Vee	Lib.	9. <del>*Big As I Can Dream</del>	Kris Jensen	Hick.
10. Surfer Girl	Beach Boys	Cap.	10. <del>Drag City</del>	Jon & Dean	Lib.
11. Big Band Hootenanny	Les & Larry Elgart	Col.	11. <del>Dominique</del>	Singing Nun	Phil.
12. Let Me Sing	Brenda Lee	Dec.	12. <del>*Talk Back Trembling Lips</del>	Johnny Tillotson	MGM
13. Dominique	The Singing Nun	Phil.	13. <del>You Don't Own Me</del>	Lesley Gore	Merc.
<b>DISCOVERY LP's</b>			14. <del>Out of Limits</del>	Marketta	W.B.
1. 500 Miles From Home	Bobby Bare	RCA	15. <del>*Daisy Petal Picking</del>	Jimmy Gilmer	Dot
2. Outer Limits	Jerry Cole	Cap.	16. <del>Um, Um, Um, Um, Um, Um</del>	Major Lance	Okeh
3. A Lettermen Kind of Love	The Lettermen	Cap.	17. <del>When The Lovelight . . .</del>	Supremes	Mat.
4. 1963's Greatest Hits	Billy Vaughn	Dot	18. <del>In The Summer of His Years</del>	Connie Francis	MGM
<b>WLAV DISCOVERIES</b>			19. <del>Whispering</del>	April Stevens/Nino Tempo-Atco	Atco
1. <del>I Want to Hold Your Hand</del>	The Beatles	Cap.	20. <del>You Don't Have to Be A Baby to Cry</del>	Caravellas	Sma.
2. <del>A Fool Never Learns</del>	Andy Williams	Col.	21. <del>*Big Town Boy</del>	Shirley Mathews	Atla.
3. <del>Come On</del>	Tommy Roe	ABC	22. <del>*I Met Him At The Dance</del>	Invictas/Ruth Ann	Mavis
4. <del>Southtown U.S.A.</del>	Dixiebelles	S7S	23. <del>That Boy John</del>	Raindrops	Jub.
5. <del>Go On And Have Yourself A Ball</del>	Mor - Vel	But.	24. <del>I Adore Him</del>	Angels	Sma.
6. <del>Here Comes The Boy</del>	Tracey Dae	Amy	25. <del>Peanuts</del>	Four Seasons	V.J.
7. <del>Tonight You're Gonna Fall In Love With Me - Shirelles</del>	Skeeter Davis	RCA	26. <del>Don Doo Wah</del>	Orlens	Cam.
8. <del>He Says The Same Things To Me</del>	Theresa Lindsey	Cor.T.	27. <del>For You</del>	Rick Nelson	Dec.
9. <del>Gotta Find A Way</del>	The Impressions	ABC	28. <del>Guickwand</del>	Martha & Vandellas	Gor.
10. <del>Talking About My Baby</del>	Crampton Sisters	DCP	29. <del>As Usual</del>	Brenda Lee	Dec.
11. <del>I Didn't Know What Time It Was</del>	Draw Vels	Cap.	30. <del>Baby I Love You</del>	Ronettes	Phil.
12. <del>Tell Him</del>	Diane Renay	Fox	31. <del>*Somewhere</del>	Tymes	Pkwy.
13. <del>Navy Blue</del>			32. <del>*Snowman, Snowman</del>	Jaynettes	Tuff
			33. <del>*Be My Girl</del>	Lettermen	Cap.
			34. <del>*Jimmy Boy</del>	Girlfriends	ColP.
			35. <del>*Be Mad Little Girl</del>	Bobby Darin	Cap.
			36. <del>The Boy Next Door</del>	Secrets	Phil.
			37. <del>Nitty Gritty</del>	Shirley Ellis	Can.
			38. <del>Who Do You Love</del>	Saphires	Swan
			39. <del>Anyone Who Had A Heart</del>	Dionne Warwick	Scept.
			40. <del>*Who Needs You</del>	Bobby Paris	Cha.

\* Indicate Previous WLAV Discovery

Figure 40. WLAV Favorite 40 survey (front), January 2, 1964.

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