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Kids and Radio, Parts 1, 2 & 3

**by David Giovannoni
(22 pages)**

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KIDS AND RADIO

Part 1: Teens Not the Biggest Listeners

by David Giovannoni

*Teenagers aren't the heaviest users of radio.
They are, however, the loudest.*

—Lawrence W. Lichty

The conventional wisdom in public radio is that we don't know much about how children use radio. Actually, we know quite a bit — certainly enough to address the following questions.

- How adept is radio at delivering targeted audio programming to young persons? Given the ubiquity of pre-recorded video and audio media, and given kids' early attraction to television, is radio an effective and appropriate delivery system for such programming?
- If radio does have a role to play for children,

what is it? What qualities does it offer that other media do not? What do we know about kids' use of the medium that could guide our efforts in this area?

- What effects do children's programs have on a station's "regular audience?" Are there ways to minimize any negative audience effects and maximize the positive?

The series beginning in this column reviews what is known about young persons' use of radio in general, their use of public radio in particular, and specifically their use of programming for kids. We'll take a fresh look at Arbitron data, and synthesize the many industry and academic studies exploring children's use of radio. We focus first on teens, then pre-teens and younger children, and conclude by assessing the impact of a successful children's program on a successful public radio station.

If you are a producer involved in the creation of kid's radio; or a program director, station manager, or distributor considering the efficacy of such programming; or a policy maker pondering radio's role in education — there is information here for you. This series may not change your convictions, but it should inform your understanding of the challenges.

Radio Use in the Wonder Years

One thing we know for sure: **teens don't tune to public radio in large numbers.** An average of 2.46 million teens are listening to radio at any given time; of these, 2.45 million choose not to listen to CPB-supported stations. Two percent of all teens tune to a CPB station for at least five minutes over

What Is a "Kid"?

"Kids love radio." "Kids don't use radio." "We don't know if kids use radio." The veracity of each commonly-heard statement depends on how "kids" is defined.

- **Teens.** Adopting Arbitron's terminology, we define "teens" as persons 12-to-18 years-of-age. Although often excluded from the stated target audience of kid's shows, young teens can comprise significant portions of the audience for this programming.
- **Pre-teens.** Children 8-to-11 years-old. Academic and industry studies typically report this age group as a discrete demographic.
- Studies show that radio use is very limited among children younger than 8 year-old. In describing this research, we use the age or grade groupings reported in the studies.

the course of a week. Another two or three percent tune to an expansion station. In both cases their listening is minimal.

This is not to suggest that public radio is failing. In today's highly-segmented media environment, no national radio system — and certainly no single radio station — can be all things to all people. Teens simply prefer other radio stations. Yesterday these stations were “Top 40” or “Contemporary Hit Radio.” Today these formats have given way to some flavor of “Urban,” usually with significant components of Rap.

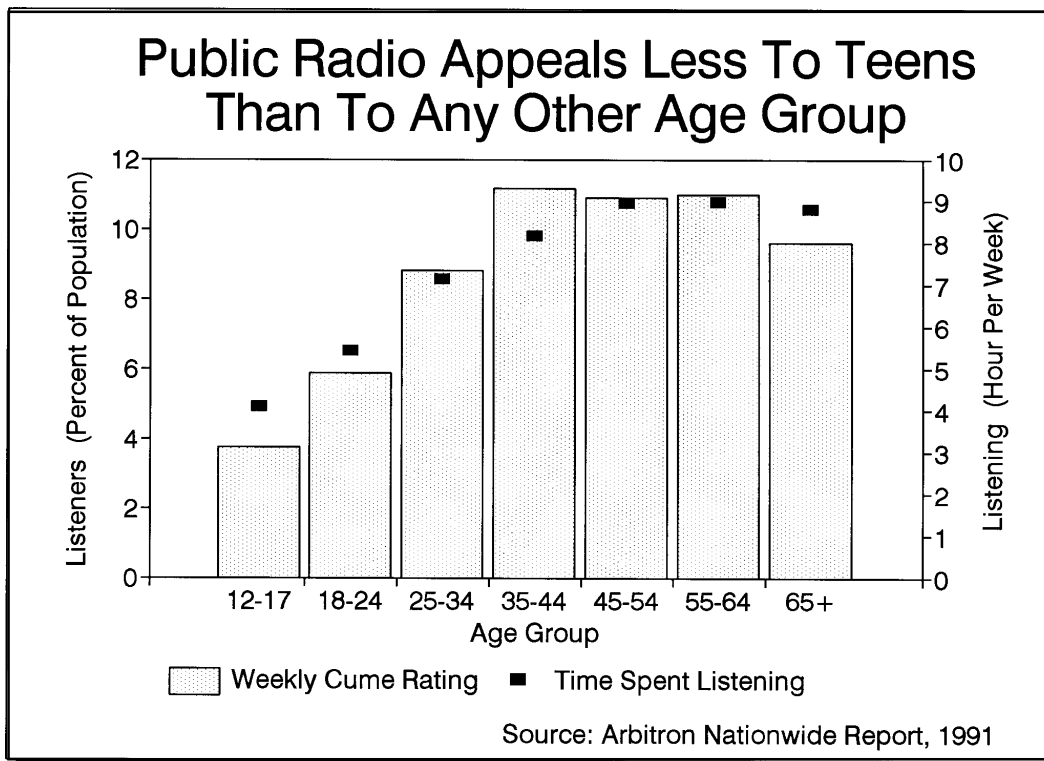
Ninety-five percent of all teenagers listen to radio sometime during the week. [Graph 2] The pervasive medium of radio is used each week by more than 90 percent of all persons in all age groups. In this sense teens are just like other people.

However, **teens are the lightest radio users.** Whereas other age groups average 22 to 25 hours of radio listening per week, teens average only 16 hours per week.

Could this lighter-than-average radio use be caused by teens being in school much of the day? Only partially. Looking at radio listening week by week throughout the year, we find that indeed, **school attenuates radio use.** [Graphs 3 and 4]

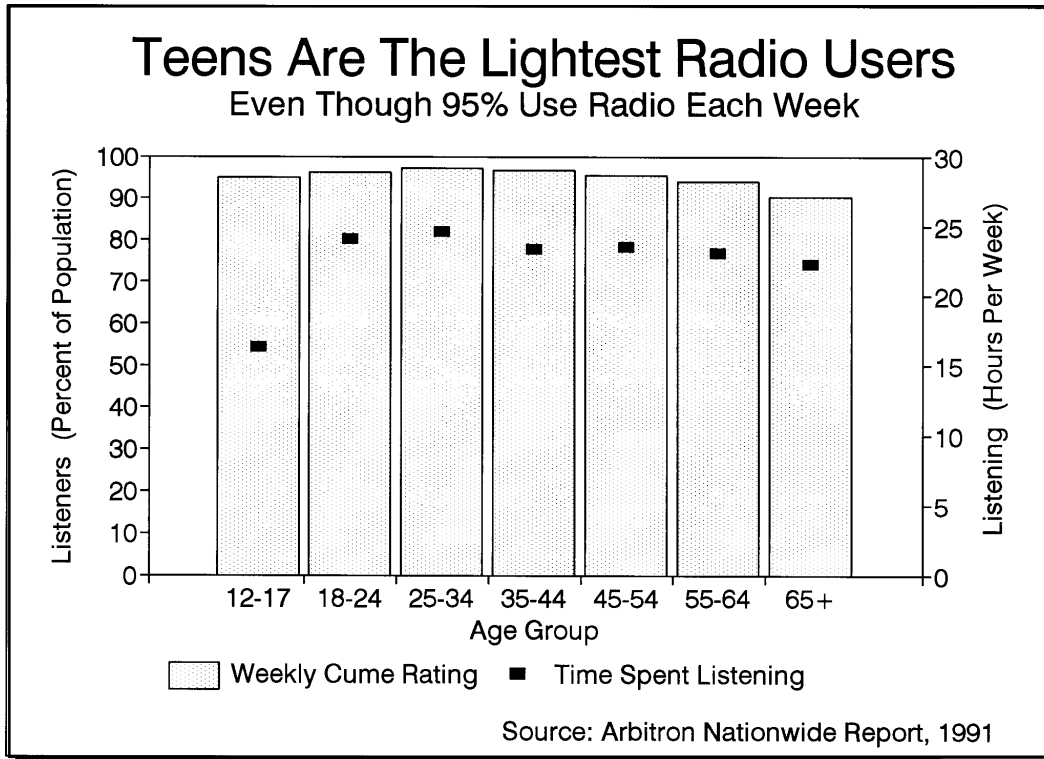
But even during summer vacation, **teens listen to less radio than other persons.** [Graph 5] In fact, **school-related routines may actually increase radio use by teens at certain times of day,** as Graphs 7a-7h strongly suggest.

The forces at work become clear when we disaggregate the concept of “teens” and look at how younger teens differ from older teens in their radio use.



Graph 1. Public radio's appeal is strongest to persons 25-years-old and older. Even including the audience for expansion stations (many of which have relatively younger audiences), public radio appeals less to teens than to any other age group. (On this graph teens are persons 12-to-17 years-old.)

Between four and five percent of all teens listen to public radio (height of bar, read on left axis). The few teens that do tune in average only four hours of listening per week (height of block, read on the right axis).



Graph 2. Regardless of their age, most people listen to radio, and teens are no exception. Each week, 95 percent of all teens listen to radio (height of bar, read on the left axis). However, teens are by far the *lightest* radio users, averaging only 16.3 hours per week (height of block, read on the right axis).

As teens get older, they listen to more radio. [Graph 6] Indeed, **youngsters “grow into” radio.** At 12 years-of-age they are listening a little; by 16 they are listening more; by 19 they are listening a lot.

This is a key fact, because use of the medium by any target audience is a prerequisite to its use of targeted programming. That is, radio programming aimed at older teens will have a much better chance of being heard by its intended audience than programming aimed at younger teens. Older teens are simply more tuned-in to the medium.

Educational Radio Lessons

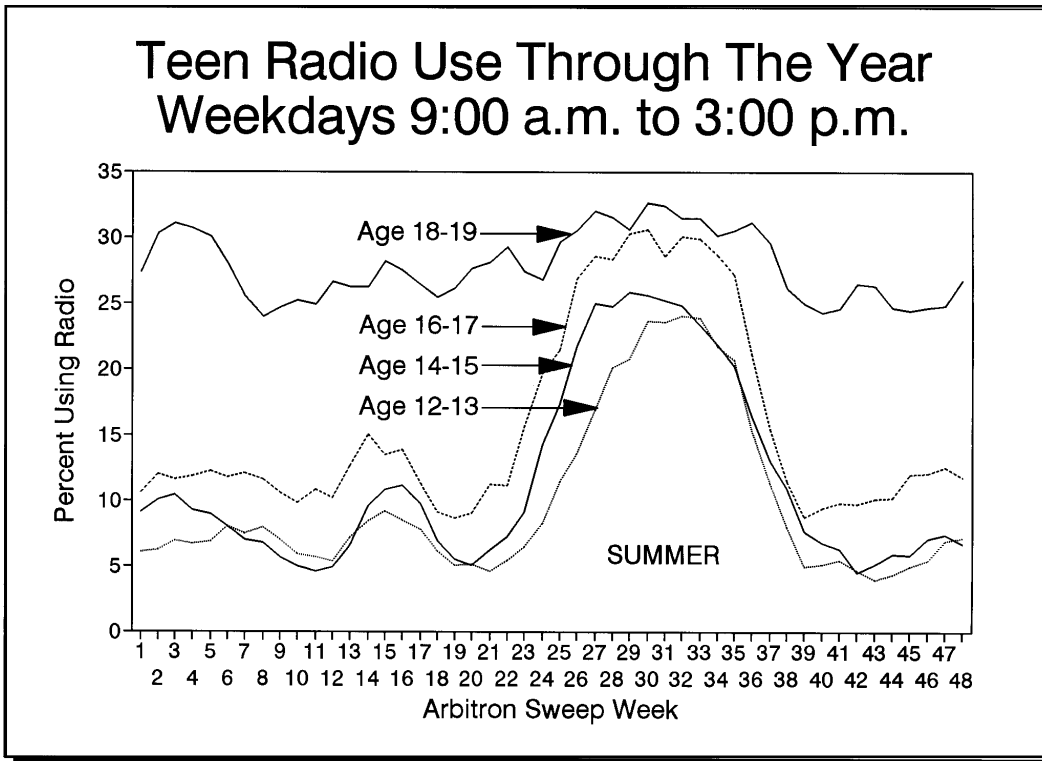
If there is any educational radio use in the classroom at all by teens, it is so little as to be essentially unmeasurable. Given what we know about the virtual disappearance of in-school programming from the broadcast band, it’s pointless to look for listening to it. (It would be mixed in with “other” listening during the in-school daypart,

weekdays 9:00 a.m. to 3:00 p.m.) However, it’s instructive to consider the reasons why such programming has disappeared.

In some communities years ago, radio played an important part in delivering educational materials into the classroom. But during the last twenty years this use of the medium has been supplanted by television and recorded media.

The reasons why are obvious. Television delivers sound with pictures. Video and audio cassettes make the materials available on the teacher’s schedule — not the program director’s. Teachers can choose what they want to hear (or see) when they want to hear (or see) it. So can students.

In short, **other media offer significant advantages to radio which make them more appropriate to the task.** In preparing this series we found educational radio research still being conducted in (and for) developing countries. Where video and audio tape are not as ubiquitous as they



Graph 3. This graph shows the percent of teens in each age group listening to radio during school hours (weekdays 9:00 a.m. to 3:00 p.m.) from Arbitron’s week 1 (in January) to week 48 (in December). Clearly, teens’ radio use is greatly attenuated during the hours that they are in school. Through the age of 17, their listening to radio during the “in-school daypart” is roughly one-third that of the summer months. (Also notice some increase in listening during spring break.)

School has the smallest effect on the oldest teens (18 and 19 year-olds) because they are out of high school. Many are in college, however, and this is reflected by some attenuation of radio use during school hours during the school year.

are here, or where teachers and books are at a premium, the delivery of educational materials by radio can still be effective and appropriate. But in America at the end of the twentieth century, better alternatives are readily available.

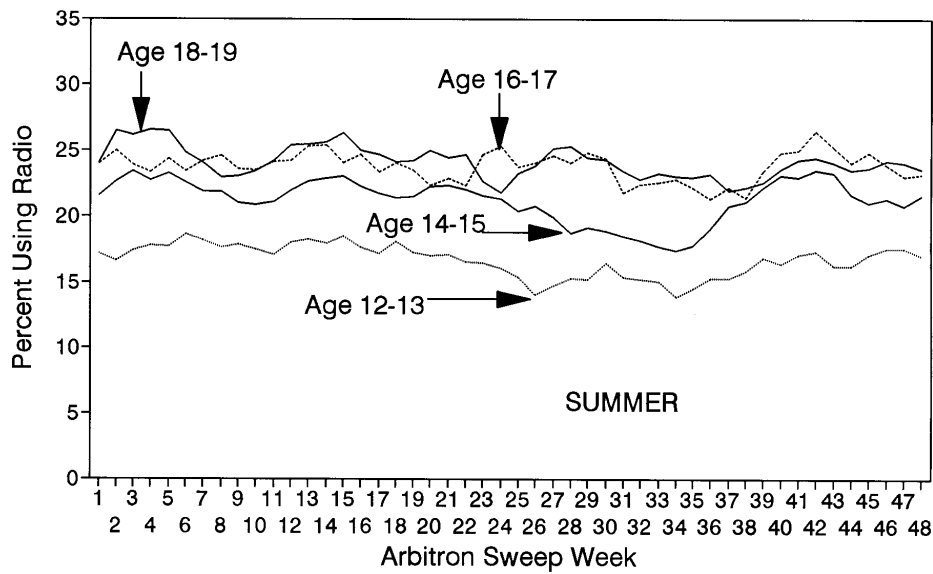
The forces that make radio an ineffective medium for the delivery of audio into the classroom are the same forces that make it less effective than other media for delivery of audio materials to pre-teens and younger children in their homes. Kids would rather listen to kid’s radio on television or video cassettes (where it comes with moving color pictures), or — most apropos to audio producers

— audio cassettes and compact disks.

All radio is audio; but not all audio is radio. This is addressed in the next column.

David Giovannoni heads Audience Research Analysis, an independent firm specializing in radio audience research. The Corporation for Public Broadcasting funded this report. Opinions expressed in it are the author’s and do not necessarily reflect opinions or policies of the corporation. The author thanks the Radio Research Consortium for the loan of its materials, and The Arbitron Company for allowing its Radio Today data to be re-analyzed for this scholarly

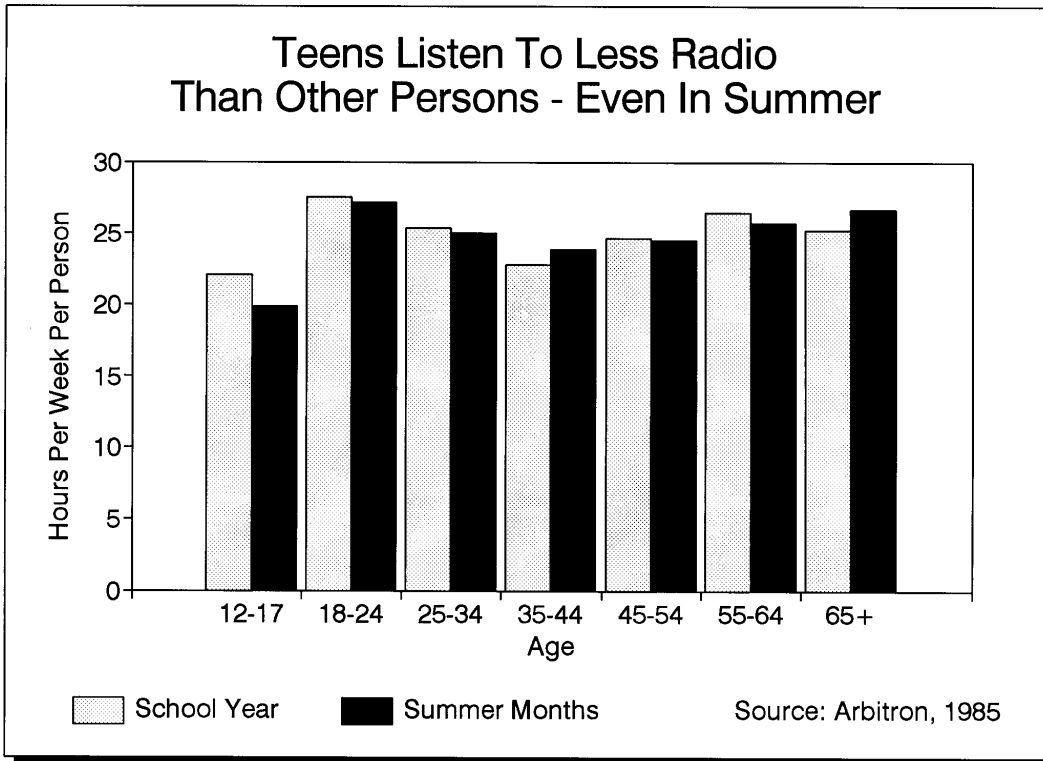
Teen Radio Use Through The Year Weekdays 3:00 p.m. to 10:00 p.m.



Graph 4. After school (weekdays 3:00 p.m. to 10:00 p.m.) all teens have the same shot at radio. But this graph suggests two very important points.

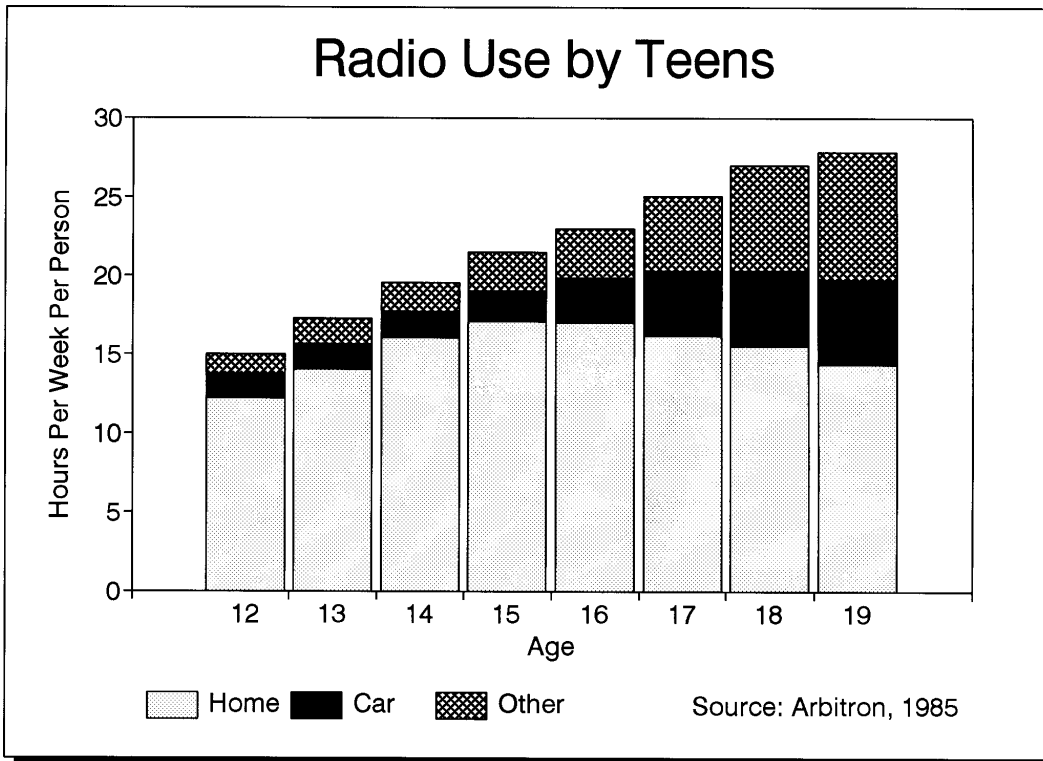
Younger teens use far less radio than older teens at any time of the year, at any time of day (also apparent in Graph 3). Roughly 15 percent of all 12 and 13 year-olds are listening to radio at any time in this daypart, compared to roughly 20 percent of all 14-to-15 year-olds and 25 percent of all 16-to-19 year-olds.

Also in this daypart, teen radio use *declines* during the summer — particularly among younger teens. Graph 5 focuses on both of these points.



Graph 5. School is not the cause of teens' light radio use. In the summer months, when out of school, they use less radio than during school months.

An examination of their radio listening through the day suggests why this is so. (Refer to Graphs 7a-7h at the end of this section.) The routines that center around school — traveling to school and back, doing homework after school, and so forth — apparently accompany a lot of teens' radio use. By removing school and these routines from teens' schedules, summer significantly alters their radio use.



Graph 6. Youngsters grow into radio. Each teen year adds two hours of weekly radio use from ages 12 through 18. Twelve year-olds average only 15 hours of listening per week; 18 year-olds average 27 hours.

The location of radio use changes through the teen years. At-home listening peaks at 15-to-16 years of age. At 16, at-home listening begins to decline; but this loss is more-than-offset by heavier listening in cars and at other locations outside of the home.

pursuit.

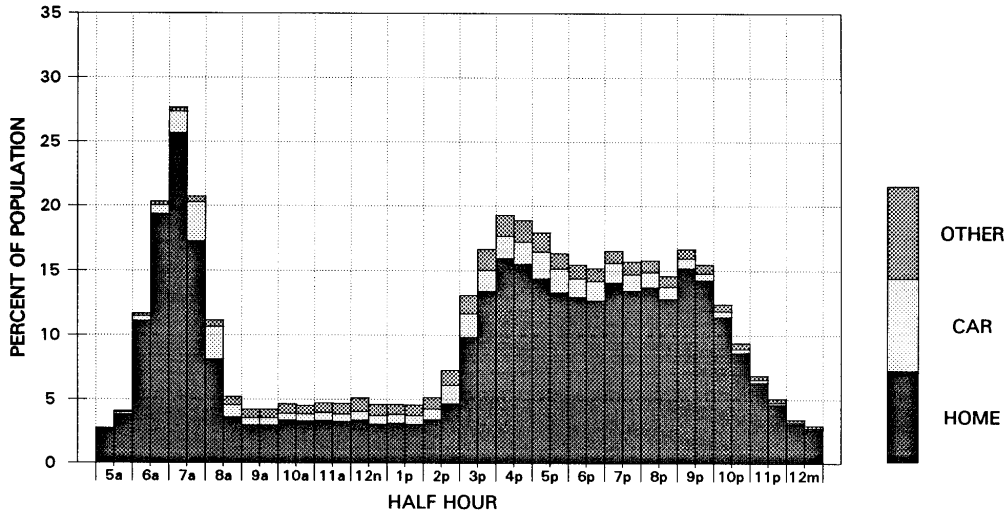
Graphs 7a-7h (following pages). The use of radio by teens is greatly influenced by two key factors: the age of the teen and the time of year — i.e., school or summer. These graphs display teen radio use during the weekday broken out by these two factors.

It's often assumed that school is the reason teens are the lightest users of radio. This is only partially true. Obviously teens' radio use is greatly attenuated while they're in class. But radio also ac-

companies the routines that accompany school — preparing in the morning, riding there or back home, spending longer hours indoors after school (presumably with homework), and so forth. These listening venues more than offset depressed in-school listening. Indeed, **teens listen to more radio while school is in session than they do during the summer months.**

Why, then, do teens use less radio than other persons if school isn't the reason? Children “grow into” radio, and teens listen less because younger teens have yet to adopt it into their lives to the extent of older teens and adults.

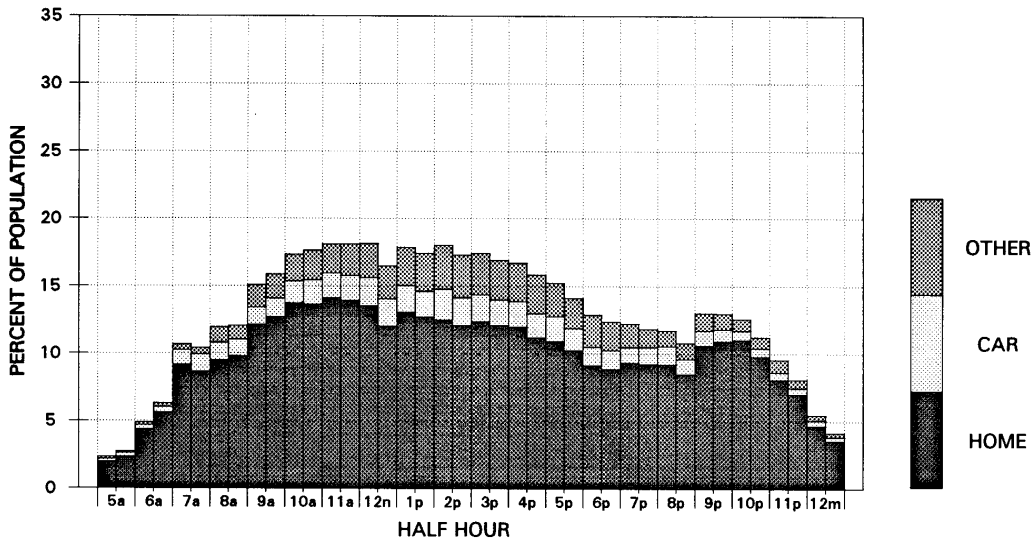
LISTENING TO RADIO DURING THE SCHOOL YEAR BY PERSONS 12-13 YEARS-OLD Monday-Friday



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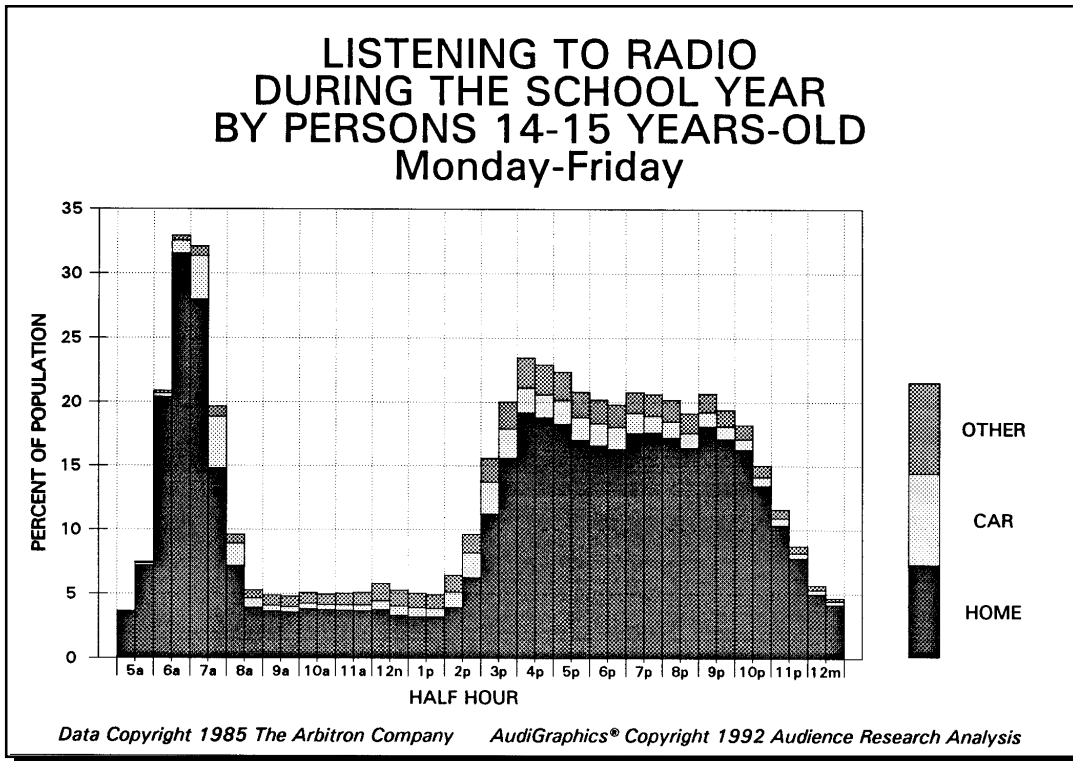
Graph 7a.

LISTENING TO RADIO DURING THE SUMMER MONTHS BY PERSONS 12-13 YEARS-OLD Monday-Friday

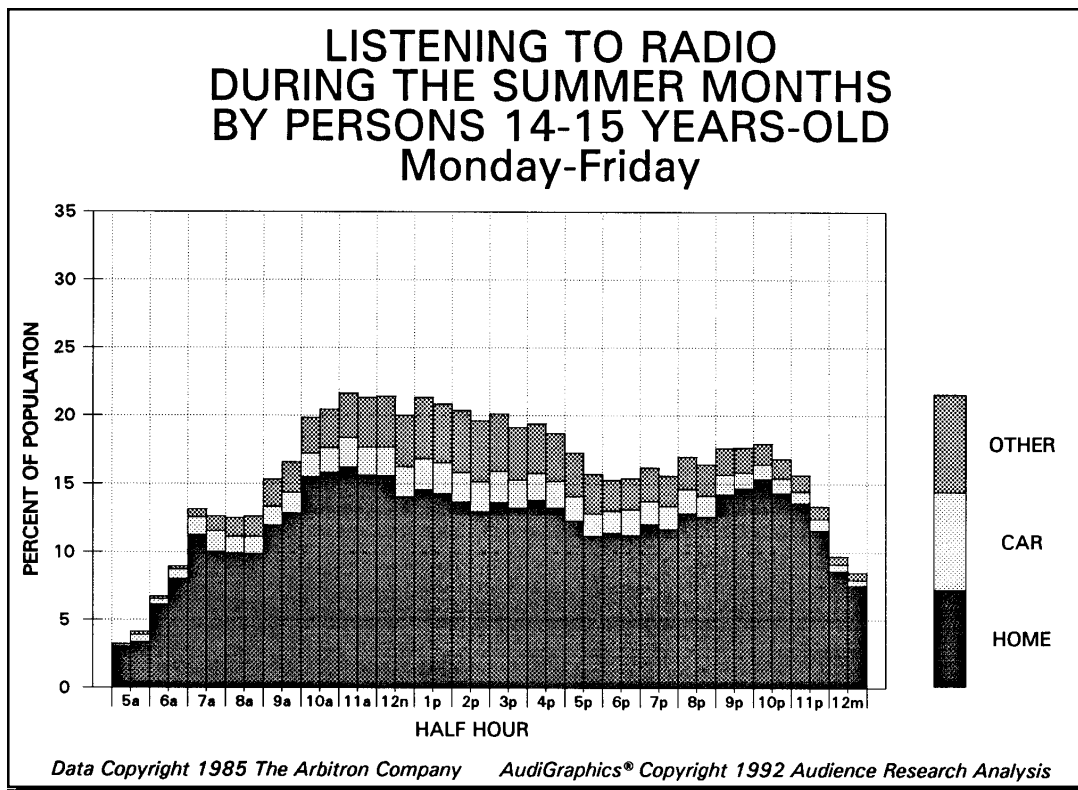


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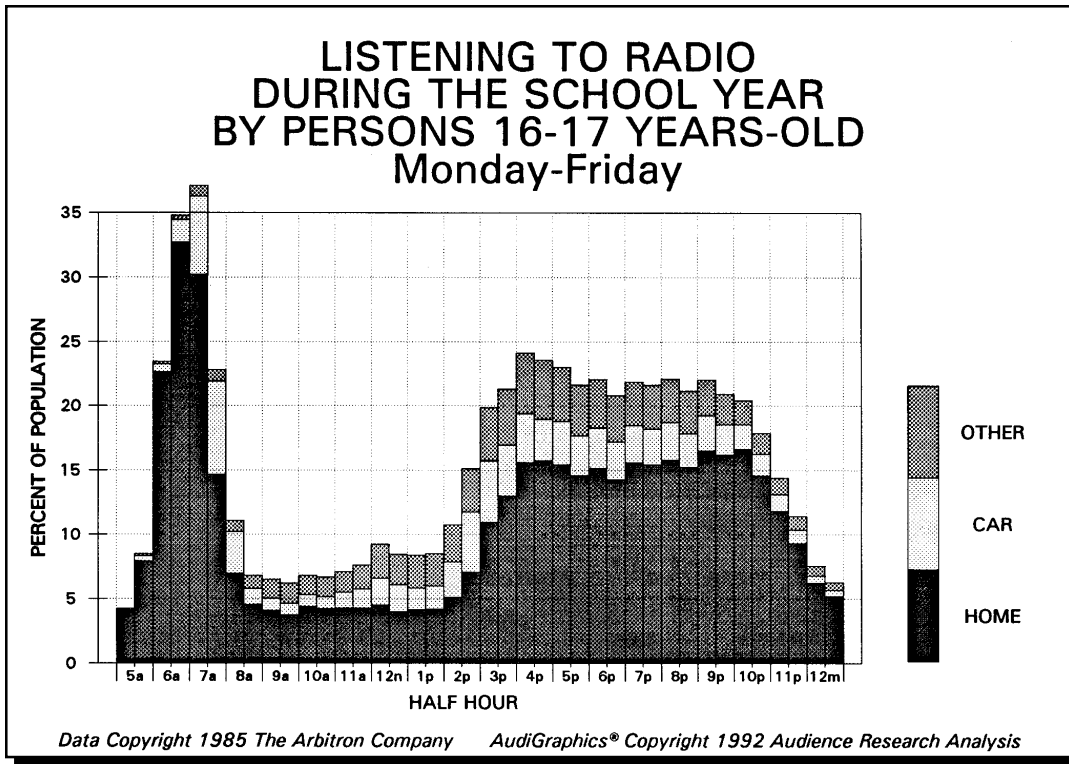
Graph 7b.



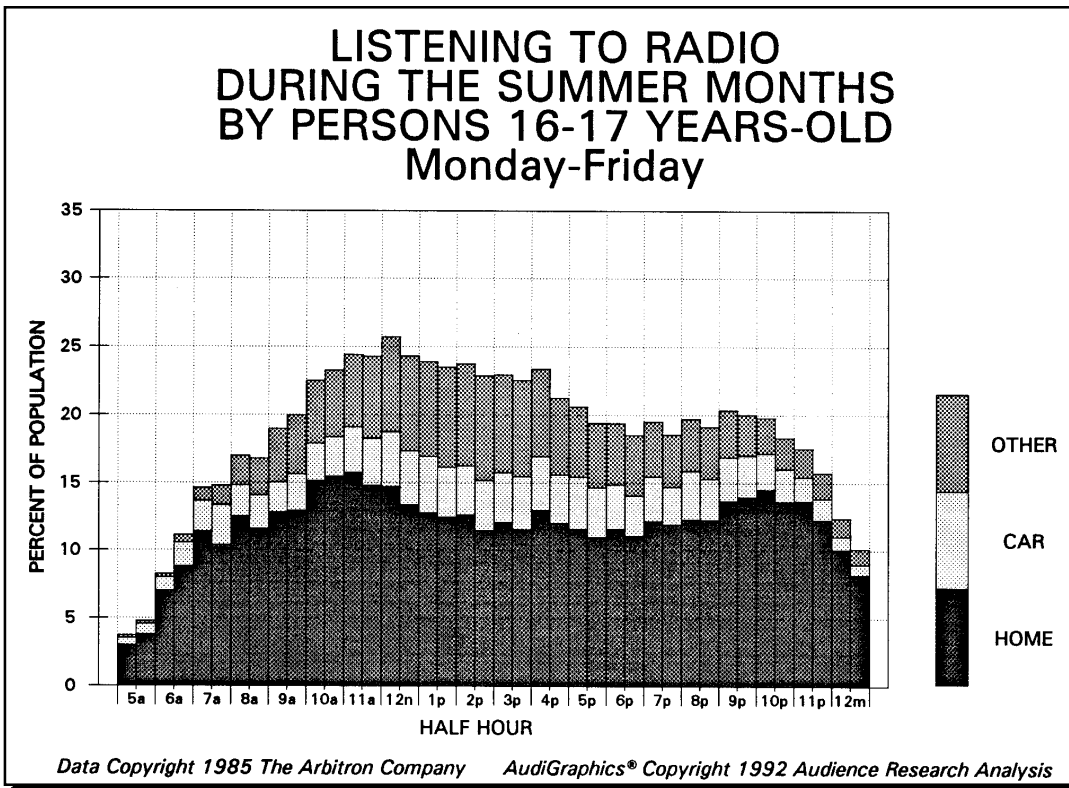
Graph 7c.



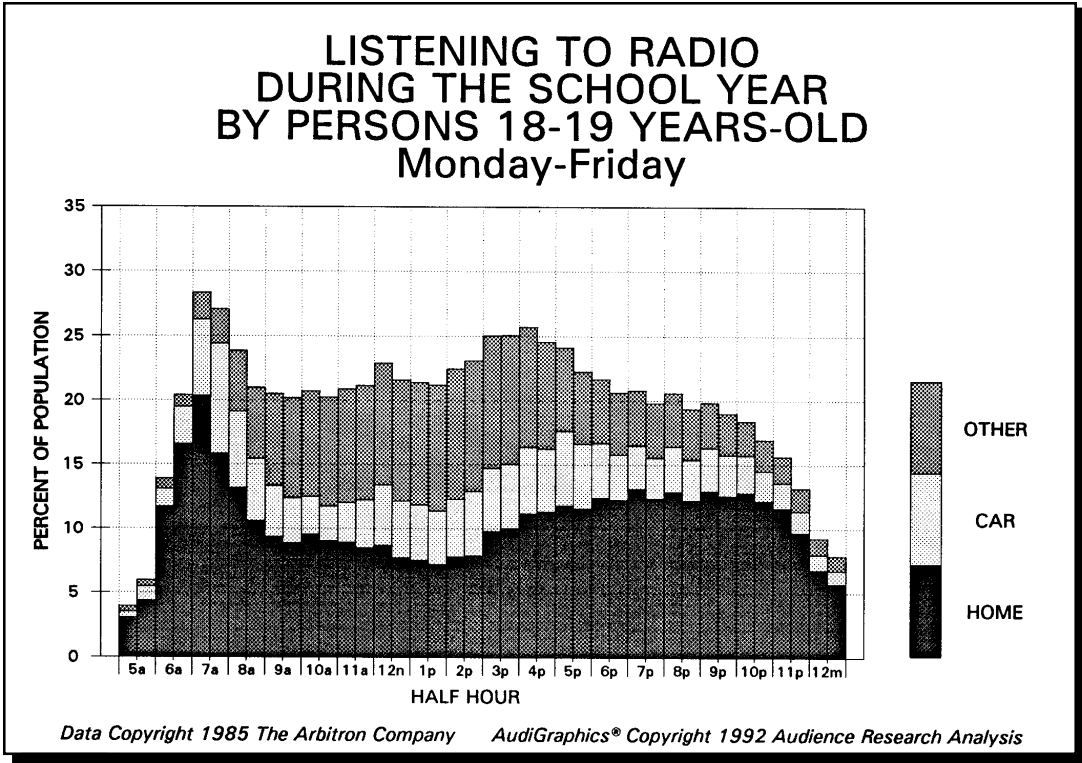
Graph 7d.



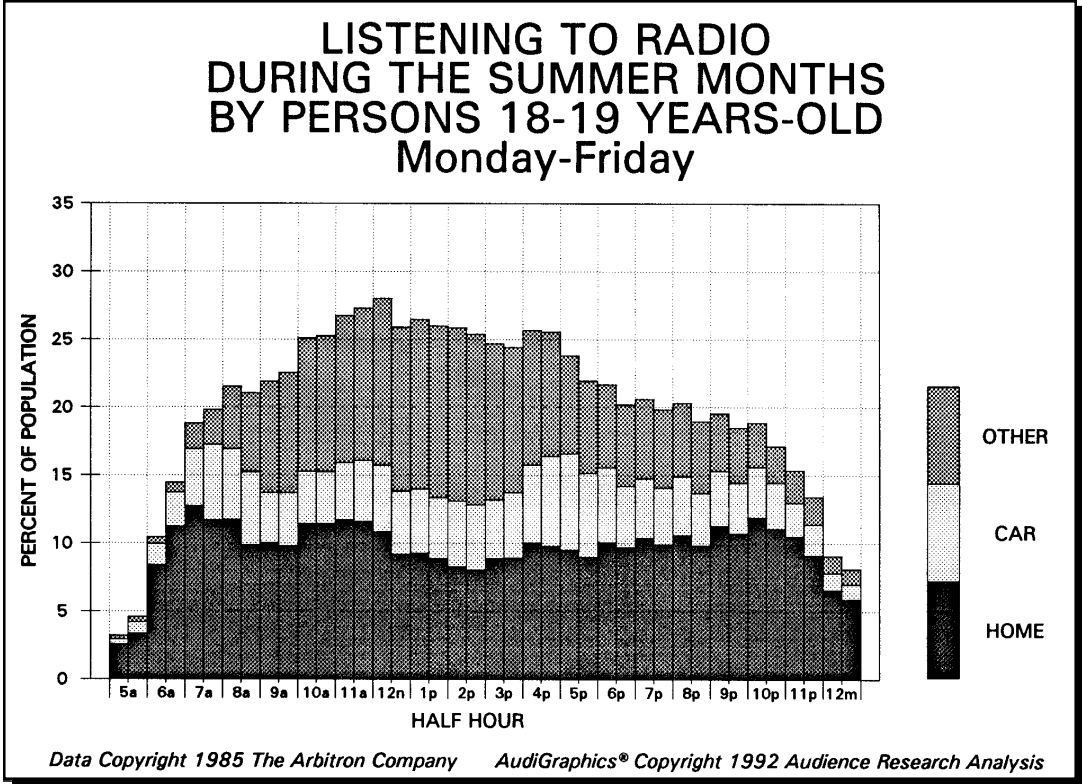
Graph 7e.



Graph 7f.



Graph 7g.



Graph 7h.

KIDS AND RADIO

Part 2: How Children “Grow Into” Radio During their Pre-Teen Years

by David Giovannoni

My kids love kids' radio — on cassette.

—Thomas J. Thomas

Children “grow into” radio. Unlike television, radio isn't used by younger children. Their audio use is primarily of audio cassettes which they choose themselves. The radio they hear is chosen by older persons.

By age 12, their movement into radio is in full swing. Twelve year-olds listen to radio an average of 15 hours per week. At this age most kids have their own radios and their parent's permission to choose stations. They inevitably listen to music intended for teens and young adults.

When left to their own (audio) devices, older children prefer to tune their radios to music-based formats; younger children prefer to listen to kids' programming on pre-recorded media. This puts the broadcaster of a children's program in a bind. A radio show for young children may have the right content, but it's on the wrong medium. A radio show for older children may be on the right medium, but by this stage in their development children aren't listening to kids' stuff anymore.

What's left is a rather narrow window of opportunity — depending on the child's development somewhere in the 8-to-12 year-old range. Most public stations choose not to serve this audience. Studies of those that do show that **kids listen to kids' shows on public radio because their public-radio-listening parents make them listen.**

Adults who guide children to a kids' show listen to the station's adult programming. They think books are good and read lots; they think television is evil and watch little. In striving to impart

these values to their children, they attempt to replace television with radio. They may succeed but not for long. Use of parent-controlled radio in a family setting is quickly replaced by solitary radio listening by the child.

These are the conclusions of the many academic, industry, and public radio studies (highlighted in the accompanying vignettes and graphics). The message to practitioners is clear. **Producers of audio programs for children will have the greatest success when they deliver their programming through the appropriate medium. A medium's appropriateness changes with the target audience's age.**

All radio is audio; not all audio is radio. **Producers of kids' audio who limit distribution to radio may be reaching only a small part of their potential target market — especially if aiming for the youngest listeners.**

Children's Exposure to Audio

By the time they're 6 or 7, most American children have access to an audio playback source (cassette, compact disk, or record player). This may be in the form of a tape player in the car, a stereo in the family room, or the child's own Fisher Price cassette, Walkman, or radio-cassette combination in the bedroom.

Indeed, **most children's first — and only — exposure to kids' audio is on tape.** When it comes to delivering kids' programs to kids, pre-recorded audio media are much more appropriate

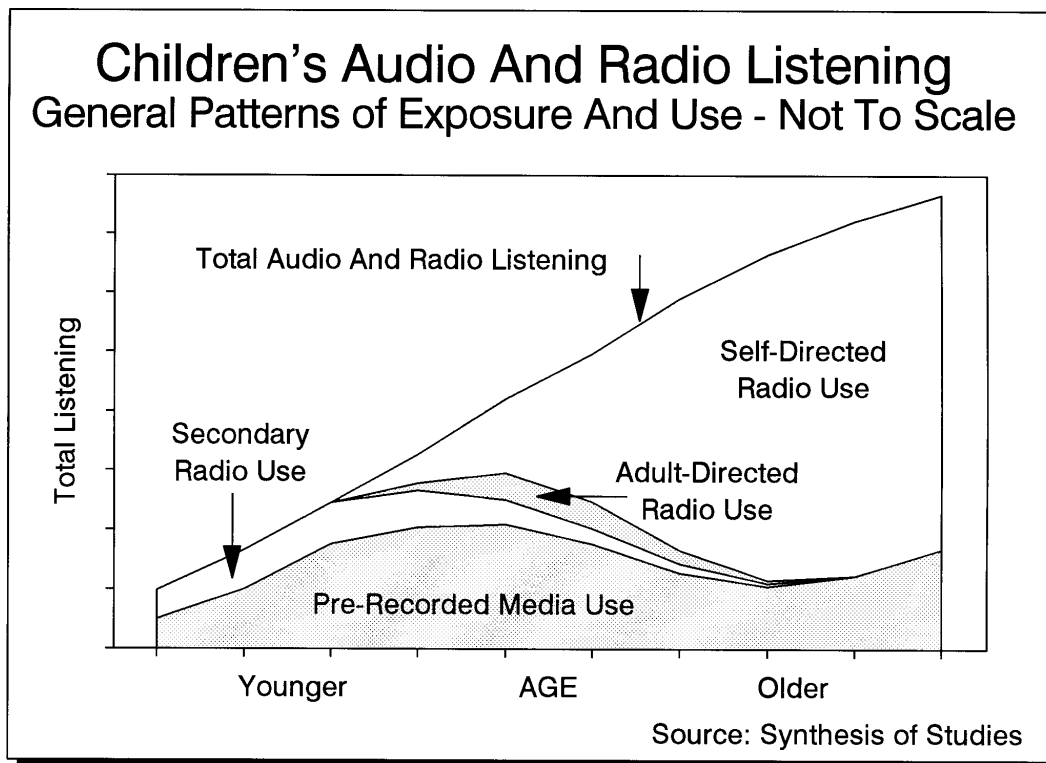
distribution channels than radio because they are much more effective. (This was addressed in the previous column.) A tape, CD, or record can be selected by the child, heard at the convenience of the child, and played over and over and ... (as anyone with kids will attest) ... over and over....

Radio doesn't become a part of children's lives until later. Adoption seems to progress through two or perhaps three stages.

- **Secondary Radio Use.** A child's initial exposure to radio is to a station being used by an adult. The use of radio by very young children is therefore secondary in nature. The

child doesn't select the station, and the station (usually) isn't chosen with the child's interests in mind.

- **Adult-Directed Radio Use.** Once the child reaches a certain age, many parents decide what type of station is appropriate for the child to hear while riding in the car or playing at home (classical music instead of rock, for instance). In markets where a kids' radio show is available on a station used by a parent, the child can be guided to the station at the appropriate time, and provided with a listening environment that encourages the child's attention. This stage is optional; many children do not have their radio use guided in this way.



Graph 8. Listening to pre-recorded audio and radio increases steadily through childhood. At first all exposure to audio is secondary — the result of an adult's or older sibling's listening. At an early age many children gain access to kids' audio programming on pre-recorded media, which account for the bulk of their audio exposure as young children. As children gain access to and start listening to radio, adults may help direct their listening by establishing family listening situations, particularly where kids' radio programs are available. This direction is minimal and short-lived, however. Older children prefer to listen alone to adult radio formats of their own choosing. Their use of pre-recorded media may increase as they listen to rock and rap music cassettes and CDs that they select — perhaps purchase — themselves.

- **Self-Directed Radio Use.** By the age of 8 or 9, most children have a radio in their rooms and can exercise control over their own listening. Although a child who has been exposed by parental guidance to a kids' show may occasionally continue to listen to it, the child's preference is clearly for music (primarily rap and rock) and other formats not targeted to children. As one study put it, radio allows children to "eavesdrop" on the adult world behind a closed door.

Graph 8 shows how children's audio and radio listening may develop with age. The appropriateness of radio as a delivery medium — how much it is used, and the nature of that use — clearly changes throughout childhood.

David Giovannoni heads Audience Research Analysis, an independent firm specializing in radio audience research. The Corporation for Public Broadcasting funded this report. Opinions expressed in it are the author's and do not necessarily reflect opinions or policies of the corporation. The author thanks CPB, Linda McKenna, and Peter Christenson for making available many of the materials used in this report, as well as the parents who have shared their observations of and insights into kids' use of audio media.

Note

The public broadcaster's best overview of the state of children's radio in America is *Defining The Role of The Corporation for Public Broadcasting In Support Of Children's Radio*, a study undertaken for CPB in 1990 by Media Perspectives of Marlton, New Jersey. The executive summary and report of the findings may be viewed at CPB.

RESEARCH VIGNETTES

#1. KIDS' AUDIO Children actively listen to records and tapes that they own. A 1971 study by Jack Lyle and Heidi Hoffman found that half of all sixth graders owned either a record or tape player, and most listened to them at least once a week. In 1984 Peter Christenson and Peter DeBenedittis found higher levels of record and tape player penetration and use.

The 1984 study also confirmed that radios become more prevalent in kids' rooms with age. Two-thirds of the fourth through sixth graders had radios in their rooms compared with only one-in-four first-through-third graders. Graph 9 displays Christenson's most recent audio penetration data.

These researchers found that kids use pre-recorded audio as a background sound to accompany other activities. More important, kids create their own domains apart from the adult world by selecting whatever recording they like and playing it whenever and as often as they like.

#2. KIDS GROW INTO RADIO Radio use increases linearly between the ages of 12 and 15. Graph 10 estimates radio use by 9, 10, and 11 year-olds by projecting backwards from 12 to 15 year olds. It suggests total radio use of about 8, 10, and 12 hours per week among 9, 10, and 11 year-olds respectively. Projecting all the way back, it suggests that radio listening begins at about age 6. This projection is clearly not scientific, but it does provide a starting assumption that generally agrees with studies of actual pre-teen radio use.

#3. MORE ROCK 'N' RAP — LESS TALK 'N' YAP In a 1992 University of Pennsylvania dissertation, Linda McKenna asked inner-city Philadelphia children between the ages of 10 and 12 what they thought of various audio segments originally aired on *Kid's Corner* on WXPN. These youngsters found popular music most interesting. Their interest was significantly dampened by jokes, instruction, introductions, and other talking elements. This supports the 1984 study by Christenson and DeBenedittis that found kids pre-

ferred music to information on the radio by a margin of three-to-one.

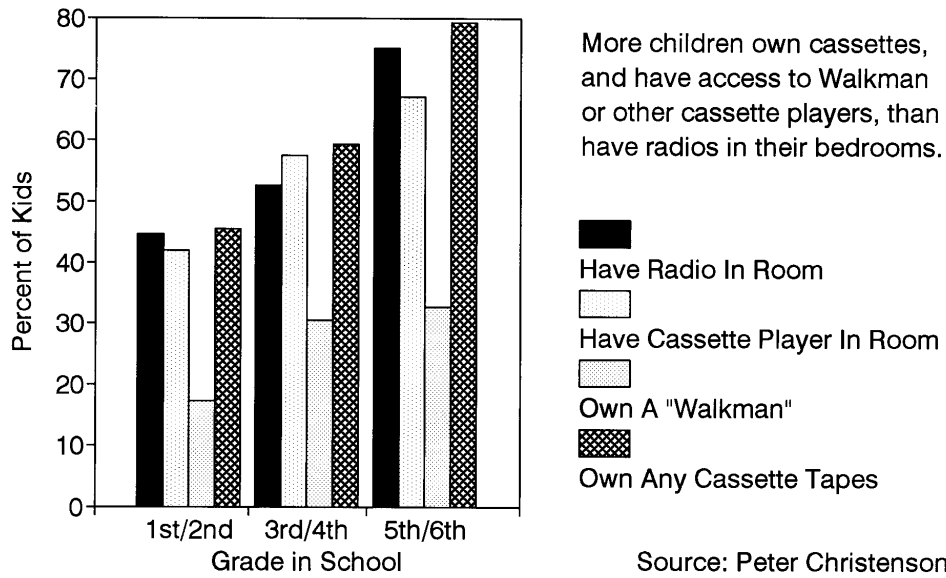
#4. SOMEBODY'S HOME BUT THE STEREO LIGHT'S NOT ON In 1986, CPB commissioned a coincidental study to determine the number of children listening to *Kids America* on WNYC-AM in New York. About 9 percent of the contacted 6-to-11 year-olds claimed to have heard of the program (mostly from adults), and 6 percent said they'd listened to it at some time or another. But in terms of actual use, fewer than five percent were listening to the radio when *Kids America* was on (week nights from 6:30 to 8:00), and none were listening to *Kids America*.

#5. PARENTAL CONTROL Children who listened — or who were asked to listen — to kids' radio shows were studied to ascertain how they used three public radio programs: *East of the Sun, West of the Moon* (Children's Audio Service; 1984), *Kids America* (Research Communications Limited; 1986), and *Kid's Corner* (Christine Bachen, University of Pennsylvania; 1989). All three studies are in accord.

Children who listened to kids' radio shows watched significantly less television than non-listeners, and were more likely to read books for fun and enjoyment — **just like their parents**, who had much higher levels of education than the parents of non-listeners. **These, of course, were public-radio-listener babies.** Their parents believed these programs to be better than television. They created a "family listening" environment in which they controlled the child's radio use. (The family listening environment has also been documented by Christenson.)

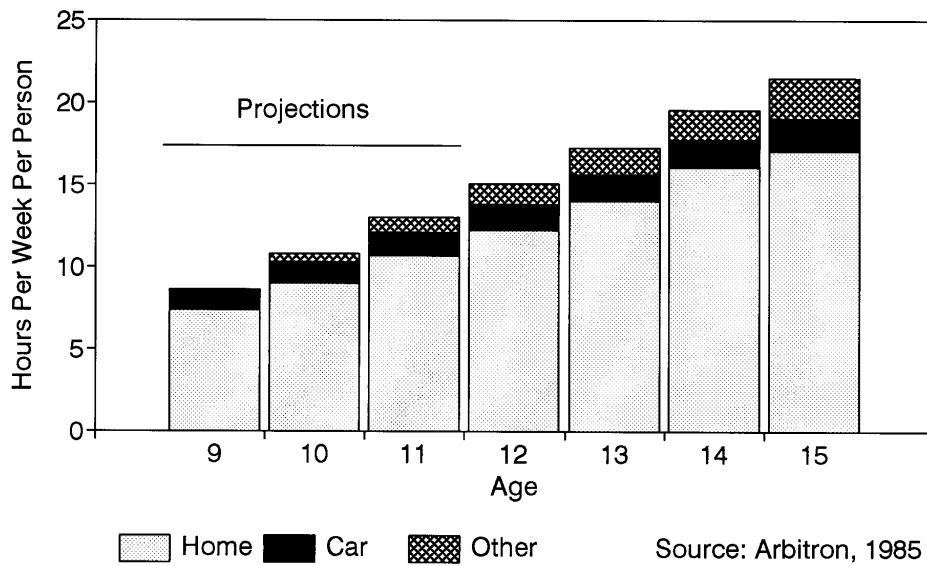
Kids did not find the programs on their own. Parents learned about the shows while listening to the public station's regular programming. Parents who were not public radio listeners did not express as much interest in the kids' programming as listeners; nor did their children.

Kids Have Ready Access To Radio & Audio Playback Media



Graph 9.

An Estimate of Radio Use by Pre-Teens Projected from 12 to 15 Year-Old Use



Graph 10.

KIDS AND RADIO

Part 3: *Kid's Corner* Case Study in Specialty Programming

by David Giovannoni

*Yeah, my kids listen to children's radio.
Howard Stern.*

—*Anonymous Parent*

Kids' shows often convey high praise, good will, and subsidization upon the stations airing them. But most stations experience only negative response in terms of actual audience use. Few if any adults listen, and the extent of kid's listening is purely speculative.

Of the several public stations airing children's programs, WXPB-FM in Philadelphia has perhaps the highest profile with *Kid's Corner*. The following case study examines what happens when public radio's most visible kids' show meets public radio's fastest-growing adult audience.

Produced live 7 to 8 o'clock week nights, *Kid's Corner* has won all the awards. It's aired in the same time slot since 1988, when it migrated from WNYC following the withdrawal of CPB funding for its predecessor, *Kids America*. It's ambitiously produced; it can afford to be, with more than 25 underwriters or institutions contributing to its \$125,000 annual budget.

Off-air, *Kid's Corner* serves the station well by providing a source of revenue, a unique position in the radio market, and national visibility. But how well does it serve listeners **on-air**? Do kids actually listen? Do adults? Is *Kid's Corner* a positive, negative, or benign influence on station use overall?

Some Kids Listen

The show's producers report that kids who call the program range from 6-to-14 years-of-age, with most between 8 and 12. Research presented in the previous column shows this to be the "win-

dow" in which kids have begun listening to radio and are still susceptible to parental control of content. Of the more than 500,000 youngsters in this age group living under WXPB's signal, about 50,000 are listening to radio at 7:00 in the evening — a prime time for radio's youngest listeners. How many are tuned to *Kid's Corner*?

For two years the station has been tracking calls to a toll-free number that lets kids in New Jersey and Delaware participate on the air. Between 200 and 1000 calls are made to the number during a typical day [Graph 11]. Participation is lowest in the summer months and highest during the school year, conforming with the effects of school on young teens' and pre-teens' radio use (as detailed in the previous two columns).

Arbitron measures listening by persons 12 and older, and as such it captures the old end of the *Kid's Corner* audience. It found nearly **400 12-to-15 year-olds listening to *Kid's Corner* on an average night during the 1991-92 school year**. Roughly 1,500 kids in this age group heard *Kid's Corner* sometime during the week.

Of course, partial Arbitron estimates and phone calls can't accurately project the actual kid's audience. However, they do indicate that during the school year, certainly hundreds — perhaps thousands — of kids are hearing *Kid's Corner* on any night. On one hand, this is a lot of kids — more than most people would want to baby sit in a lifetime. On the other hand, this is a tiny fraction of the kids listening to radio at that time, and an even smaller fraction of the kids who live under the signal.

The previous column showed that for kids of this age to listen to kids' radio, adults must guide their listening. Adult listening is picked up by Arbitron.

Some Adults Listen Too

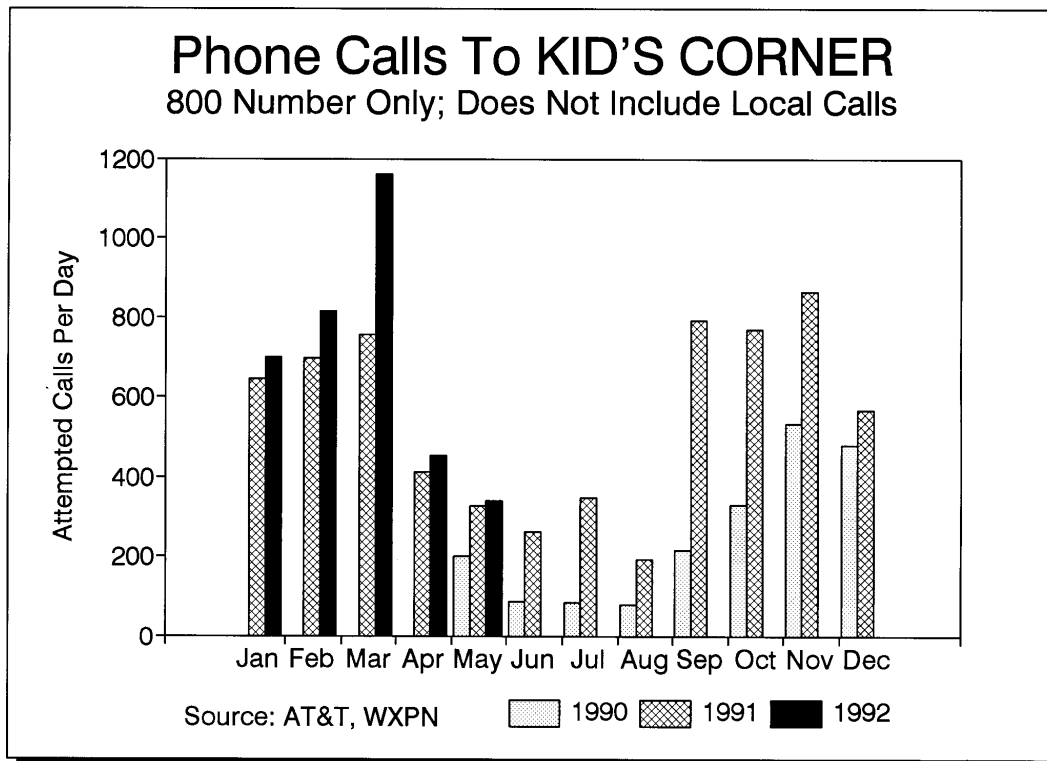
Of the 175,000 adults who listened to WXPB each week during the last school year, 33,000 listened to at least 10 minutes of *Kid's Corner* (less than one percent of the adults who live in the Philadelphia metro). We might infer that many of these are the parents of youngsters listening to the program (or the parents of youngsters who *wish* their kids were listening to the program). This is supported by a study that shows one-in-three people in WXPB's weekly audience has one or more children of *Kid's Corner* age.

However, we can't assume that all listeners tune in with children in tow. Anecdotal evidence related by WXPB's management suggests that many

adults find parts of the program compelling enough, or its music appealing enough, to listen without the excuse of kids. For all we know, none of these listeners may have kids.

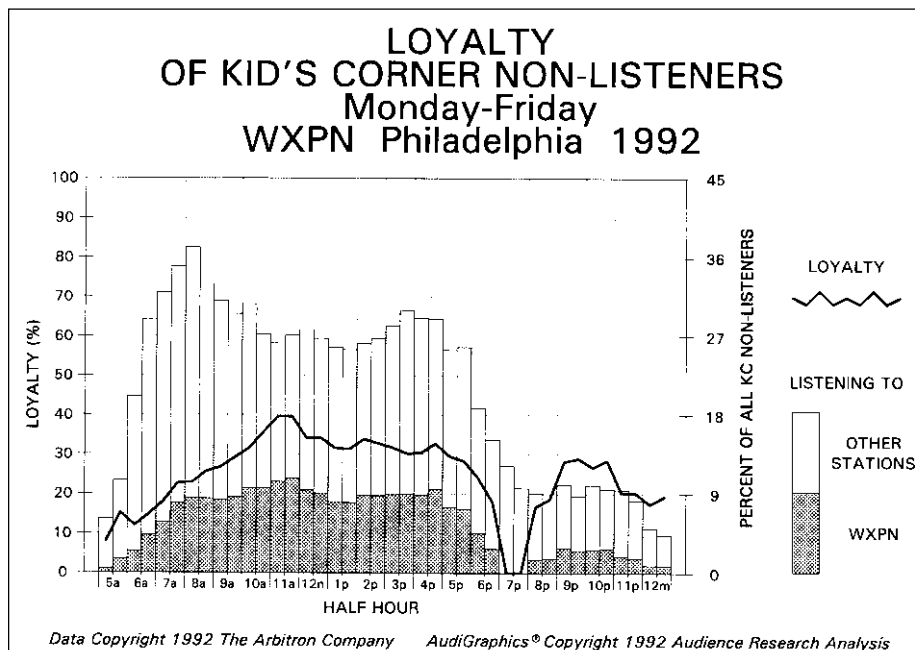
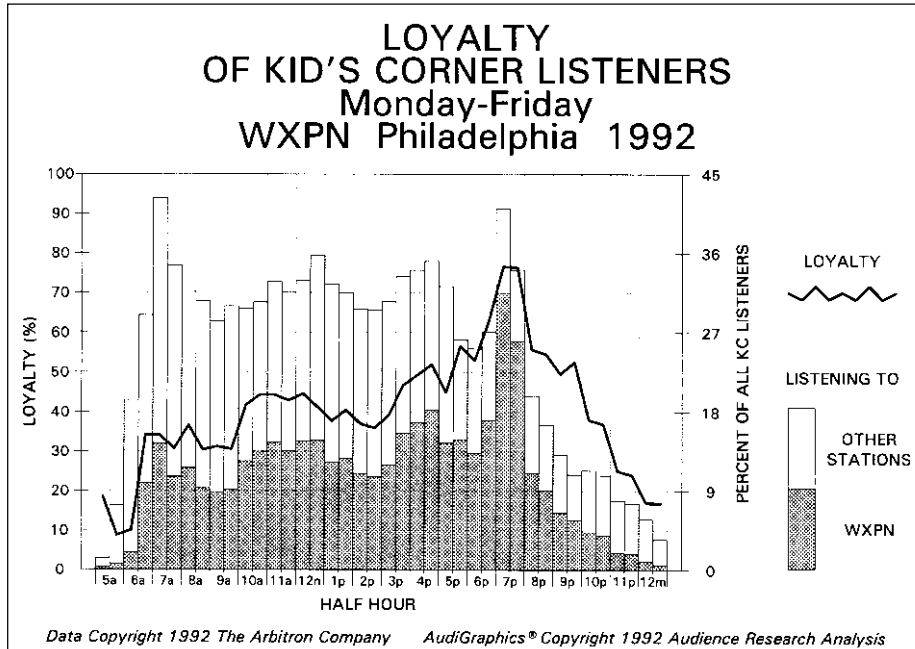
This would, in fact, be consistent with what we know about the audiences for other "targeted-specialty" programs on public radio. Research into a Spanish-language program in the 1980s, for instance, found no evidence of listening by native Spanish speakers; but it did find public radio news listeners brushing up on their Spanish before their next trip to Latin America.

Whether they have kids or not, virtually all of *Kid's Corner's* adult listeners also use other programming on the station. They tend to be heavier users of WXPB and radio, averaging over 14 hours of listening to WXPB per week, and 17 hours to other stations. Men and women appear in equal numbers. Three-quarters are between 25-and-44 years-



Graph 11. The graph shows the average number of calls per day made to the program from out of state. The station estimates that at least as many calls per day are made to the local line — particularly during the summer months, when most kids call from within the city limits.

Calls to *Kid's Corner* echo seasonal fluctuations in kids' radio use. At the time *Kid's Corner* is on the air, radio use by the youngest teens is about 35 percent higher during the school year than in the summer months.



Graphs 12a and 12b. WXPB's listeners who tune to *Kid's Corner* differ significantly from those who don't in their use of WXPB and radio. The dark bars show how many in each segment are listening to WXPB at that time. The light bars show how many are listening to other radio stations. The loyalty line displays listening to WXPB by each audience segment as a percent of that segment's total radio listening at that time.

When *Kid's Corner* is on the air (evenings 7 to 8 o'clock), 75

percent of all radio listening by *Kid's Corner* listeners is to the program. By definition, none of the listening by non-listeners is to the program, even though 10 to 12 percent of them are listening to the radio in that hour.

It's interesting to note that *Kid's Corner* listeners find WXPB more appealing before 10:00 in the morning than do non-listeners. Other analysis shows that many non-listeners are tuned to Howard Stern until 10 o'clock — in the opinion of some parents, children's programming of a different type.

of-age — **the same composition as WXPN’s regular programming.**

All of this parallels findings seen time and time again for specialty programs. ***Kid’s Corner* is serving existing listeners. It is not bringing “new” adult listeners to the station.** It’s no different than *American Radio Company*, *Car Talk*, and *SoundPrint* in this sense. The people who listen to these programs enjoy many hours of other programming on their public stations.

Larger Effects

Although it serves existing WXPN listeners, *Kid’s Corner* is clearly not audience-neutral. For every WXPN listener it serves there are four who aren’t served. It affects listening to the station before, during, and after it airs. Obviously this “halo effect” works positively among *Kid’s Corner* listeners and negatively among non-listeners [Graphs 12a and 12b]. (Note: In the context of this analysis, “non-listeners” refers to people who listen to WXPN but who do not listen to *Kid’s Corner*; it does not refer to all Philadelphians who don’t listen to *Kid’s Corner*.)

Among *Kid’s Corner* listeners, loyalty to the station rises above 50 percent in the 90 minutes preceding the show and the 90 minutes following. Indeed, *Kid’s Corner* affects not just the use of the station among these 33,000 people, but it influences their use of radio as well. Over 35 percent of the people who listen to *Kid’s Corner* sometime during the week are listening to radio between 7 and 8 o’clock in the evening. This is a very high level of radio use for such a “fringe” listening period.

More in the “normal” range, only 10 percent of WXPN’s listeners who don’t listen to *Kid’s Corner* are using radio when the show is on. Part of the reason they don’t use *Kid’s Corner* may simply be that they’re not using radio to the same degree as listeners at that time. As judged by the shape of their radio listening curve, the program does not appear to be attenuating their radio use — just their station use.

For these listeners the halo effect works in reverse. Their loyalty to WXPN dips below 25 percent in the hours preceding and following *Kid’s Corner*. And even though their loyalty recovers after 9:00 p.m., it does not regain its daytime levels. (Whether this is caused by *Kid’s Corner* or the evening programming itself remains unresolved.)

Characteristics of Successful Specialty Programs

Does the very positive effects on one-fifth of the station’s weekly come outweigh the negative effects on the other four-fifths? Does the trade-off work — not just in terms of public good will and off-air accolades, but in terms of actual program use? What lessons might be learned from this experience? And might these lessons also apply to specialty programs of all kinds?

- ***Kid’s Corner* airs regularly, five nights per week, when radio use among its target audience of pre-teens and young teens is high.** This is particularly true during school months, when much of this audience’s radio use is associated with lifestyles and routines that revolve around school. Appropriate placement and regularity serve to maximize the program’s audience among its target — even if it’s just a fraction of the target’s total use of radio at that time.
- ***Kid’s Corner* airs during marginal radio use time for adult non-listeners,** thereby minimizing the disruption of their listening and the program’s adverse effects. An hour earlier and too many non-listeners would be disrupted; an hour later and far fewer kids would be available to listen.
- **The adults who use *Kid’s Corner* are already WXPN listeners.** The show is not bringing “new” adult listeners to the station; but it is lengthening the time some of them spend with it, and some “new” kid listeners are probably in tow.
- **The composition of *Kid’s Corner*’s adult audience matches that of the station’s main**

programming. It's an audience very likely to have kids of *Kid's Corner* age. The program would undoubtedly elicit a very different audience response on a classical dominant station, a station on the AM band, or other station appealing to fifty, sixty, and seventy year-old listeners (like *Kids America* station WNYC-AM).

- ***Kid's Corner* exploits the unique qualities of the radio medium.** The show is appealing to children at a stage when their audio use is shifting from pre-recorded media to radio. With a format that relies heavily on two-way communication, *Kid's Corner* offers something that audio tapes, video tapes, and television cannot, and gives the program a reason to be on the air rather than on some other medium.

Broader Ramifications

***Kid's Corner* works as well as it does on WXPB because the station's regular format delivers listeners to the show.** Parents are instrumental in introducing their children to kids radio; parents with children of *Kid's Corner* age comprise a significant portion of WXPB's audience at all times of the day. To the extent that non-parents may listen to the program (and this may be a great extent), they too are 25-to-44 year-old people who also listen to WXPB's regular music programming.

The show appeals to these listeners — even though it “breaks format”. As AUDIENCE 88 demonstrated, **the break in format isn't what repulses listeners — it's the incongruity of appeal.** *A Prairie Home Companion* broke format, but it performed splendidly because it appealed to public radio's information listeners. *Car Talk* and *SoundPrint* perform well today for the same reason.

Kid's radio and other out-of-format specialty shows clearly are not for every station. They must be selected and scheduled carefully. They must be judged on their appeal to a significant portion of the regular format's audience. They must have a reason to be on radio rather than on another medium. But when they meet all of these criteria, they can offer an appreciated service to an influential segment of the station's listeners. They can increase the time people spend with the station. And they can make the station more important in the lives of its listeners — a key measure of public service and a major prerequisite to listener support.

David Giovannoni heads Audience Research Analysis, an independent firm specializing in radio audience research. The Corporation for Public Broadcasting funded this report. Opinions expressed in it are the author's and do not necessarily reflect opinions or policies of the corporation. The author thanks the management of WXPB for allowing its Arbitron data to be used in this analysis.