

Let's Talk About Sex

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Disc jockeys generally come in two sexes: male and female. So what, you may think, sex doesn't matter. Oh but it does.

On any given night, one or two things might happen. And until recently, I never gave them much thought. But when all of these things happened during a single night, it suddenly seemed clear to me that all those hitherto separate things were, in fact, related. They were all related to my sex.

I had agreed to fill in for a friend, to do his regular gig at a basement bar. When I showed up early for a show-and-tell with his system, I was immediately struck by--size. Mike and I started out as deejays at the same time, we went through training together, we apprenticed with the same outfit, and then we each bought out our identical systems and started our own businesses. I have pretty much kept the same system--a couple cassette players, a search deck, a mixer, an amp, and a pair of 12" X 16" speakers on tripods, with a microprocessor. Mike, I now saw, had added. And he'd added big time: he now had *two* pairs of speakers, each 3' by 2', a second amp of course, and a couple CD players.

What is it with men? They get suckered in to the 'bigger is better' mentality every time. (And it's not just immature, it's dangerous: just look at our world--continual growth is *not* good, we *can't* keep expanding, getting bigger and bigger, using more and more.) I ask him if the smaller set-up wasn't loud enough, if he'd gotten too many complaints. Of course he had to say no. But this looks better, he says. That *really* pisses me off. Most people--most men--are stupid that way: they see Mike's huge array of speakers, etc., compare it to my little set-up, and figure he's a better deejay. There's no logic to it. And either Mike knows it and he's taking advantage of it--and making it that much harder for the rest of us who refuse to be taken in by size, by appearances. Or he doesn't know it and he's just as big a fool as the rest of them--unknowingly at my expense.

Whatever, he walks me through and in a few minutes I'm fine--unless I get a lot of requests. And this is another problem with more, more, more: there's at least four different places to look up a

title--there's one directory for the old cassettes, a separate directory for the new cassettes, and a third directory for the CDs (except for the ones which aren't listed anywhere). This is crazy. I take some time to familiarize myself with what's where, and see a ridiculous amount of duplication--there's got to be at least a hundred songs I can find in at least two places. And altogether he's got ten times as much music as he could ever hope to play in a night.

Well, the requests start coming in at 10:00. The bartender tells me to play Seger's Rock and Roll, Dance Mix 95, and Macarena. Gee, none of those would've occurred to me, thanks. Then the other bartender comes up and asks for something. A little later I get a note with seven or eight titles on it. It occurs to me that I'm getting a lot more requests than Mike usually gets. (He had said this gig would be a piece of cake.) And I wonder, is it because I'm a woman, so people think I'm more approachable? Or is it because I'm a woman, so probably I have to be told what to play, see I probably don't know. (And half the time it is just that: I'm *told*, not asked, to play such-and-such.)

At around 10:30, this guy comes up to chat. He opens with 'so are you Mike's helper?' Excuse me? Mike's *helper*? I tell him no, I have my own business (I give him my card), I'm just doing this gig for him tonight as a favour. The guy continues the small talk. I'm trying to be polite, but I'm also listening for the end of the piece, and trying to find at least *one* of the requested songs in at least one of the directories or boxes of music--and then it dawns on me that this guy is really trying to stretch out the conversation, he is, in fact, 'hitting on me.' And I am, in fact, trying to work.

The same thing happens again later on. Only with this guy, we get into this ridiculous competition of 'I know more about deejaying than you.' I'm sure you know the type, there's one in every crowd who comes up to tell you 'yeah, I used to do this, how many watts do you have?' But this guy *really* wants to win--and it occurs to me that this man-woman thing is getting in the way again, it's complicating simple shop talk, he refuses to lose to a woman. Listen, I'm trying to *work* here--

And then this *third* guy comes up, 'Play some rock, this stuff is shit.' I smile and say 'This shit was requested but I'll certainly put on some rock for you.' I do so within two songs. He comes up again, and this time sits himself down in my chair, behind my table (I've never seen anyone do

that to a male deejay). He tells me he's been drinking since 2:00. He thinks he's bragging rather than proclaiming how pathetic he is, and I realize, geez, he's hitting on me too. 'Play some rock,' he says again. I say, 'I've *been* playing rock, what specifically do you want to hear, what do you mean when you say 'rock'?' 'Any rock,' he explodes, then insults, 'Anyone knows what rock is!' He comes up a third time, he says he's taken a survey and no one wants to hear this shit (dance mix, requested three times), play some rock and roll! By now, I'm just trying to ignore him. I've already played Seger, Springsteen, the Stones, Cochrane, and Adams; I've played Tragically Hip and Pearl Jam; I've played Hootie and I've played the Smashing Pumpkins. This is one drunken asshole I will not be able to please. He persists from the end of the bar, yelling out 'Rock and Roll!' every time I put on some dance or country (also requested several times).

I almost lose it when at around midnight the bartender comes up and asks me to play some rock and roll--he keeps asking us to come up and tell the girl just to play a little rock!' Any man pushing forty would be, I think, rather insulted to be called a boy. Wake up call, guys: most adult women are just as insulted to be called 'girl.'

Shortly after, the first guy comes back up to tell me he thought I was doing a fine job, he saw the shit I was getting from the other guy. Part of me wants to take that at face value, that's a really nice thing to do. But another part of me is thinking 'yeah but he's only nice like that because you're woman': there's a subtext of either making the moves on me or patronizing me (Did he think I was about to burst into tears? Actually I was thinking about just hauling back and decking the drunk--but I didn't want to have to pay Mike for damage to his equipment).

The night finally ends and I leave.

The next night, I have a wedding to do. And it's just like any other wedding I've done, but after last night, well, it's just like last night...

'I don't think this is gonna go, you should play something faster,' I hear someone say to me. I look at him and wonder if he thinks his being male and my being female gives him the right to criticize, to give advice to someone old enough to be his parent. Thirty seconds into the (slow) piece I've chosen, the dance floor is full. Have I proved myself? Of course not--I just lucked out. Again, I

muse sarcastically.

Another guy comes up, around my table, to stand beside me. No, he doesn't have a request, he just wanted to introduce himself, say hi, how's it going. He stays, in my way, for three whole songs, oblivious to my suggestions that he join the party, it looks good.

A little later, an older guy, fifty-something, gives me a gentle warning, 'You can't please everyone, but just try a bit of 50s and 60s.' 'I know,' I tell him, not pointing out that I've already done a 50s-60s set, 'I've been doing this for over five years now.' 'Oh you *have*?' He is so surprised. What, do I have 'novice' written on my forehead? Did the way I set up my equipment suggest that I didn't know what I was doing? (Single-handedly and in fifteen minutes flat.) No--I'm female--so it just goes without saying that *probably* I don't know what I'm doing.

I just want to be a deejay. But people, especially men, keep insisting by their behaviour, that I am a *female* deejay. Sex shouldn't make a difference. But they make it make a difference.

Do male deejays get questioned?

Are they expected to chat while working?

Do they have to deal with a constant stream of guidance, advice?

Frankly, it's irritating, it's insulting, and it's exhausting.