

Move over, Meredith

The morning talk show circuit heats up with **Mika Brzezinski**.

BY CAROL CLURMAN

IN THE ENDLESS battle for morning TV domination, Mika Brzezinski may not be a household name — yet.

The smart and saucy co-host of MSNBC's *Morning Joe* has helped propel the show from obscurity to cable's hottest wake-up program. Named for one of its hosts, the irrepressible know-it-all Joe Scarborough, the show has become the thinking viewer's choice for company during the shower-and-shave morning minutes.

In March, it surpassed its rival on CNN for the first time among viewers ages 25 to 54.

Brzezinski (pronounced bra-ZIN-skee) adds a much-needed dose of estrogen to the testosterone-heavy gabfest of politicians, journalists and assorted decision-makers. And the co-host with the exotic name (her father is former national security adviser Zbigniew Brzezinski) is clearly, she notes, "unfazed."

"I don't ever feel intimidated," declares the married mother of two, clad in brown suede platform boots with spike heels and a tight knit skirt.

Brzezinski, 42, made a splash two years ago when she refused on air to read a "news" brief about Paris Hilton. The video clip dominated YouTube and impressed the bosses, who soon promoted her from being a news reader to also co-hosting the show.

She chatted with us recently in New York City while on breaks from her TV show and the two-hour talk radio program she also hosts daily with Scarborough.

Q: Are there still challenges to being a woman in the industry?

Yeah. It is a constant battle to be taken seriously. I'm talking about the viewers who write in about my hair or my weight. The problem is our society, our viewers. I would look at our viewers and start there with misogyny.

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Q: Meaning?

Look at segments on other shows, like *Inside Edition* on lingerie, and it will get the highest ratings on television. There's the problem.

Q: *Morning Joe* is definitely not *Inside Edition*.

On our show, I found an outlet where I can be a little imperfect and a little bitter — but be a little smart, too. I used to have to hide.

Q: CBS fired you in 2006. What happened?

I was 39 — start the violins — and it was my birthday. I got this great contract, I was making a lot of money, and I was going to be the Sunday anchor — I was already filling in on Sundays when [former weekend anchor] John Roberts filled in for Dan Rather. After I signed my contract, Dan Rather left, new management came in, and the week they hired Katie Couric, I was let go. My gut is that they couldn't have a woman during the week and a woman on Sunday, and I made too much money. When I was fired, it was a tremendous loss, not just for me, but for my children, and I felt very guilty.

Q: How come?

I had brought my kids into the CBS fold. If I did the Sunday evening news, chances are that the kids were with me under the desk. I tried so hard to strike the perfect balance of motherhood and work.

Q: Are you offended when the MSNBC guys talk about how hot you are?

If I ever thought [they were] serious, I'd be the first person down in human resources. And I'm not that hot. I'm a 42-year-old Westchester housewife. **TV**



Mika Brzezinski, daughter of former national security adviser Zbigniew Brzezinski, co-hosts MSNBC's *Morning Joe* with fellow pundit Joe Scarborough.

