Researching media participation by listening to people with disability

Abstract

A significant body of literature examines the under-representation of people with disability in the media. In news and fictional portrayals, people with disability are often defined by disability first, their personhood second, perpetuating stereotypes of people with disability as different. Activists attempt to change how media portray people with disability. Less well-considered are the challenges of media participation. This article argues that the presence of people with disability in the spaces that comprise media institutions is also a necessary condition for social change, not just improved representation and participation. However, even in Australian community broadcasting, a sector founded in a normative policy commitment to democratising media participation, people with disability encounter a range of barriers to accessing the resources and spaces of community broadcasting. The Australian case study reported here supports broad consideration of how listening to the views of community broadcasting participants with disability contributes to improving their media presence.

Introduction

As a research approach, listening considers the receptiveness of listeners to the perspectives of socially marginalised groups and individuals. It requires a commitment to understand and accurately represent what people say about their lived experiences. Competent, purposeful listening is the corollary of having voice (Dreher, 2017). It is also a social and political act of recognition (Bassel, 2017; Dreher, 2017; Dutta, 2014) that demonstrates respect for and solidarity with the teller's experience (Bassel, 2017). Listening can form the basis of action for social justice (Thill, 2015) and assist disadvantaged groups find their political power

(Dutta, 2014). It can also help organisations make good policy (Burnside-Lawry, 2012; Macnamara, 2018). Change advocates in the field of disability argue that including and listening to the views and experiences of people with disability is essential to any research activity that may affect them, and a precondition for the recognition of the human rights of people with disabilities (Charlton, 1998). Listening was deployed in the practice-led research described here in pursuit of these benefits and to avoid the kind of top-down communication that typically denies the communicative rights of oppressed and marginalised groups and reproduces relations of inequality (Dutta, 2014), in this instance, for Australian community radio participants who identify as having a disability.

Social theories of disability seek to explain how society is built around the needs of the able-bodied and wittingly or unwittingly excludes people who veer from this norm (Oliver, 2013). They attribute the span of systemic exclusion experienced by people with disability to the social shaping of a range of factors. This includes the attitudes that non-disabled people have towards those with different bodily needs and abilities (Anastasiou and Kauffman, 2013; Oliver, 2013); and towards neurodivergent people who challenge various neurotypical communicative norms and assumptions (Gentle, O'Brien, Parmenter, & Rhodes, 2019; Reading, 2018). Media provide an important social mechanism by which ableist values are learned, transmitted and reproduced (Nelson, 2000). In general, ability is discursively constructed as the norm and disability as a point of difference. This helps to explain why media generally reflect the needs and successes of the able-bodied over those of people with disability (Goodley, 2014; Haller, 2010). The normative use of ableism excludes and marginalises a large swathe of human experience and capacity and, as Goodley suggests, consolidates the intersection of oppressions affecting individuals, namely, 'hetero/sexism, racism, homophobia, colonialism, imperialism, patriarchy and capitalism' (Goodley, 2014, 35). Participation by people with disability in media-making can disrupt the discourses and

dynamics of ableism. However, participation alone may not lead to social change if people and organisations with social privilege do not also listen to these voices.

The rise of global social media giants, whose businesses rely upon the productivity of users, complicates the meaning of media participation. Now associated with everything from liking Facebook posts to following on Twitter, critical media studies theorists have made strenuous efforts to, 'clarify the meanings of participation and assert its critical potential' (Dreher, 2017: 24). Participation is also a basic tenet of Australian community broadcasting, the possibilities of which range from relatively passive forms like being a station member, subscriber or supporter, to more active, usually voluntary forms of media-making, as well as personal and professional development through formal training and informal, socially connected learning. For this reason, the sector is an important pathway to professional careers in public service and commercial media. Australian community broadcasting is also is a platform for 'maximalist' (Carpentier, 2016) forms of participation that can effect change in the systems and structures of economic and political power. Dreher (2017: 14) argues that the over-arching purpose of Australian community broadcasting is to facilitate the maximalist exercise of political influence, especially for marginalised social groups and individuals. Normatively speaking, the sector is not only concerned with the amplification of voice through media production and dissemination, but also participation in the ownership, management and operation of services and the broader social shaping of Australian media and social systems.

There are problems with all these forms of media participation for people with disability, even in the one sector that should be most accommodating. One in five Australians has a disability, yet few people with disability are active in community broadcasting at a commensurate rate. Australian community broadcasting nonetheless affords unique opportunities to exercise voice and political influence. For researchers, the sector also affords

a supportive and responsive institutional context for this application of a listening approach to user research. Listening to community radio producers with disability provided the foundation for this qualitative, practice-led research that aimed to improve media participation by people with disability. In addition to difficulties accessing radio station facilities, most participants identified attitudinal barriers as the main constraints on their participation. Many recognised the social and personal value of having a voice in the media, reported positive experiences, and offered helpful reflections on how they might be better included. While the research reported here adds to contemporary dialogue around social inclusion of people with disability in the media, and shows that listening can be contribute to evidence-based policy-making, the risks of a listening approach to policy research should also be acknowledged. For instance, in her critique of the use of listening in public policy formation associated with the development of Australia's National Disability Insurance Scheme, Thill (2015) warned that 'selective listening… can problematically facilitate the appropriation of disabled people's voices for disabling ends'.

This article contextualises the research findings first with a discussion of disability activism and scholarship that links improvements in representation and participation to questions of presence, before moving to the specifics of Australian community broadcasting. It outlines the research design and conduct and concludes with observations about the role of a listening approach in creating change opportunities for people with disability in Australian community broadcasting and beyond.

Asserting communicative, cultural and political presence

People with disability have endured skewed representation in the media (Goggin and Newell, 2005; Haller, 2010) and in daily life, have been 'protected' from decision-making power, from relationships, from sex lives, and denied economic justice and respect. Hence, theirs are

often angry voices (Godrej, 2005). Awareness of the systemic character of their oppression has increased since the International Year of Disabled Peoples in 1981. Disability rights activists have challenged dominant discourses that often frame disability as a 'tragedy' (McRuer, 2006). They have proposed more dynamic and empowered possibilities. Examples of attempts by disability activists to change attitudes in Australia include the work of organisations such as the Attitude Foundation, People With Disability Australia and Women With Disability Australia. Australian campaigns often follow overseas trends. This includes the movement to recognise the rights of people with disability as fully human and not defined by disability, such as the 'People First' self-advocacy movement (Goodley, 2005).

People with disability, alongside other diverse and excluded groups have, for decades, called for equal representation and participation in media against a background of continuing disempowerment and misrepresentation (Ellis, Kent, Hollier, Burns, and Goggin, 2018). However, Australian disability activism has been impeded by an absence of positive media stories (Newell, 1996) and an historical preoccupation with inadequate social security as people with disability have struggled to survive (Cooper ,1999). Public funding support for media advocacy has also been a source of tension. In 2010 one of Australia's public service broadcasters, the ABC, established the *Ramp Up* website to provide a public platform for advocacy and debate. This became popular with people with disability but was shut down three years later, a casualty of federal funding cuts. Since then, disability advocacy organisations like People With Disability Australia have tried to fill the dual role of service organisation and media voice. The Attitude Foundation was formed in 2017 by former Australian Disability Commissioner Graeme Innes in response to the repeated withdrawal of funding for disability advocacy services. A partial response to disability activism, Australia's National Disability Insurance Scheme (NDIS) was established in 2013 to fund support services required by people with disability. However, the individual consumer-focus of the

NDIS has seen funding for advocacy groups come under further pressure (Michael, 2018; Thill, 2015). The loss of funding for advocacy organisations occurred during a period when nearly half of all individuals with disability were living in poverty (47 percent), many experiencing discrimination (32 percent) and facing multiple forms of disadvantage (Commonwealth of Australia, 2012).

Researchers looking at media representations of people with disability have often analysed existing content. Some have looked at what people with disability think of their portrayal. Respondents to Zhang and Haller's (2013) survey agreed that media portrayals devalued them, but that the positive or 'super-crip' frame was to some extent empowering and a boost to their self-esteem. However, the authors concluded that predominantly negative representations created a 'disabling environment' and were a valid target for disability activism (Zhang and Haller, 2013: 329). Other researchers have reached similar conclusions when considering the link between communicative rights and social change movements targeting media (Couldry, 2015; Fox, 2017).

An important feature of this disabling environment is the very limited availability of cultural resources (including media representations) for people with disability that most other individuals and groups routinely draw upon in identity work. As Barnes (2003) observed, an underlying problem in the debates about media representation is a dearth of 'positive cultural identity for disabled people to draw upon… disability culture and art has had to be created almost from scratch'. More recently, Ellis and Goggin (2015) have observed the important roles that increasing media literacy and online, blogging and podcasting cultures play in creating spaces for the voices of people with disability. However, social media have not generally been the participation panacea for people with disability. Sometimes digital social media platforms permit or at best ignore bullying and stigmatisation, or can provide opportunities for exploitation by other users (Fridh, Köhler, Modén, Lindström, and Rosvall,

2018). Some independent media makers with a disability, such as Dale Reardon of My Disability Matters, have made their own digital platforms that are fully accessible to screen readers and offer protection from the bullying and stigmatisation experienced by participants in commercial social media platforms (Ogilvie, 2016). However, digital participation often presents an economic barrier to people with disability who live on low incomes, face high levels of unemployment, or otherwise cannot afford to pay to have a voice.

From representation and participation to presence

The participation of people with disability in the media has been suggested as a path to dismantling the prejudice of ableism (Ellis and Goggin, 2015). Qualitative research has established that media participation and self-representation have both political and personal significance to the participants, as a type of autobiographical enterprise (Carpentier 2016; Thornborrow, 2001). Barnes' (2003) examination of arts production by people with disability also noted the important role participation played in consolidating disability as an identity. Telling one's life story and acting on the issues that affect oneself helps people develop their identities as active participants in political and social life. This is the key to active and meaningful social inclusion. Naming one's identity may not be easy for people with disability who have historically been isolated from the wider community and socialised to accept themselves as different, both appearing and functioning at a lesser level than others and dependent on them. Zola (1993) suggests that the reclamation of a positive identity asserts control over the meaning of one's life. For example, the person 'confined to a wheelchair' becomes a 'wheelchair user', with a disability re-positioned as part of a wider experience and abilities. Identity reclamation can also come from researchers examining the participation of people with disability in dialogue about the conditions of their lives (Goodley, 2005; Meininger, 2010).

Although important, access and literacy alone do not appear to bring about the changes required to achieve equitable social participation opportunities for people with disability. Also needed are mechanisms and practices that help broad social change and learning through understanding difference (Phillips, 2002). The physical presence of people with disability in the public and institutional spaces of media is an important catalyst to social change in two key ways. Through participation as media makers representing themselves in the way they want to be represented, on issues that matter to them, people with disability can be included in making a political and cultural world of 'valued social diversity', where their status 'as full citizens' is recognised (Garland-Thomson, 2017: 52). Their physical presence in media and media organisations can also create conditions for attitude change. Clifford (2012: 212) examined how the inclusion of people with speech differences and 'disabled bodies' helped deliberative democracy by 'provoking new conversations similar to rational speech acts' and necessitating more collaborative communication as people seek to understand each other. Rollo (2017) notes that people with speech differences, deafness or cognitive differences challenge dominant modes of discourse in democratic spaces, where people communicate with actions rather than words. The presence of bodies in public spaces can be a form of protest and dialogue, resisting exclusion and realising 'justice and equality' physically (Butler, 2014: 100). Bodily presence can be another form of voice, invoking a collaborative making of meaning by body language and movement that goes beyond conventional use of voice, as people make sense of the new conditions of inclusivity (Couldry, 2015). When communication is understood as a 'creative, on-going process of joint action' (Penman and Turnbull, 2012: 63), and presence as a 'quality of dialogue' (66-67) it is also possible to shift focus from 'the activities of speaking up, finding a voice, and making oneself heard' (62) to the neglected act of listening. This research explores this link between

presence and improving the institutional capacity of Australian community broadcasting to listen to people with disability.

Australian community broadcasting and media participation

Community broadcasting has developed in over 100 countries, often as a 'third' sector of democratic media systems to complement the offerings of commercial and public service media by facilitating direct citizen access to, and sometimes ownership and control of, media resources (Couldry, 2015). In many places, including Australia, community broadcasting serves the normative purpose of encouraging social and political enfranchisement through media self-representation and participation. It also functions as a communication infrastructure for social and economic development in many countries.

The Australian tradition of social inclusion through community media participation is governed by the licensing regime of the *Broadcasting Services Act* 1992 (Commonwealth of Australia, 1992) which requires community licensees to serve geographical or cultural communities of interest. The remit to encourage marginalised people to participate is also articulated in the Community Radio Codes of Practice (CBAA, 2008). There are more than 450 Australian community radio stations, enabled by some 22,000 active volunteers. Many stations and program makers operate on multiple platforms and are active podcasters, streamers, social media and digital radio users. All are not-for-profits. The majority are small, voluntary organisations, located in regional centres and rural and remote communities. They depend on diverse income sources including memberships and subscriptions, sponsorship, fundraising, philanthropic support, and grant income from government-funded agencies. Formal sub-sectors include networks of Indigenous, Ethnic, Christian and Radio for Print Handicapped stations, as well as supporting program supply networks, such as the Australian Music Radio Airplay Project and the Community Radio Network (CRN). There are also

informal networks of youth, LGBTQ+ and specialist music stations, and networked communities of practice based on program genres and intent. Creating inclusive training opportunities is also a core function of community radio (CBAA, 2008; Forde, Meadows, and Foxwell, 2002).

Community broadcasting has a track record of successfully amplifying the voices and perspectives of a diverse range of marginalised social groups (Anderson, 2013; Grimes and Stevenson, 2011). Aggregate audiences for Australian community broadcasting are large. Market research shows that 28 percent of the population regularly listens to community radio, of whom up to 34 percent identify themselves as having a disability (McNair Ingenuity Research, 2017). While the social impact of the sector is difficult to quantify, it has played an important role in the grass roots development and maintenance of Australia since the 1970s as a diverse, multicultural society. Yet the sector has been slow to embrace people with disability as potential participants.

This failing of Australian community broadcasting is partly a consequence of the way in which disability has been institutionalised in the Australian media system. Radio for the Print Handicapped (RPH) is a network of seven capital city community stations committed to providing news and information services in audio form to people who cannot read print, so that they have access to the same quality of information as people who can. It is, arguably, a remedial approach to a specific range of disabilities. There is a debate within the network about updating its name, if not its well-intended approach. Even though RPH stations produce the most radio content for people with disability in Australia, there are very few people with disability participating in the RPH network as producers. The existence of RPH has also inadvertently contributed to a default policy assumption that people with disability are well-catered for by community broadcasting when in fact very little radio is produced by and for people with disability outside of the RPH network. Outside the RPH network this

research identified only 20 specialist radio programs produced by people with disability, mainly but not exclusively in capital city stations (Author removed, 2019).

Nonetheless, community radio, including the RPH network, has the mandate to create accessible pathways for people with disability to participate in media, including their associated digital and social media platforms. Prior to this research the Community Broadcasting Association of Australia (CBAA, 2014) acknowledged that more could and should be done to facilitate participation of people with disability and that the sector was well-placed to expand to embrace and promote this cause. Yet, as the research reported here demonstrates, there are many obstacles and impediments to on-the-ground participation in community radio stations. This research was conceived to clearly identify and better address these problems, thereby supporting the participation of people with disability in shaping the development trajectory of Australian community radio, and through this activity, their participation in media and society more generally.

Research design and conduct

Listening was understood in the research reported here as 'the practice that completes the circuit' (Dreher 2017: 26) between the participatory affordances of community broadcasting and political engagement with coordinating agencies that can facilitate sector-wide change. The research proceeded from an understanding that community radio affords opportunities for people from marginalised groups to represent themselves as they wish to be heard and understood; and that they can use it to find and amplify their own voices and agency. It mobilised the deliberative democratic potential of community broadcasting by creating resources and opportunities for sector-wide listening to the experiences and insights of people with disability who have worked in Australian community broadcasting.

The research arose from the first author's experience as a long-term community radio volunteer, trainer and facilitator of media production by people of different abilities. It took place in Australia in 2016 and 2017 and used the production methods and listening practices inherent to radio production to work with colleagues with disability to document the barriers and enablers they encountered in Australian community broadcasting. A systematic analysis of interview transcripts identified and confirmed themes. Research findings were returned to the community broadcasting sector in forms to which it could respond, and as aids to finding solutions informed by the needs and aspirations of people with disability. These outputs included a multi-part radio documentary (Author removed, 2019) and a draft access and inclusion policy to guide station-level actions (CBAA, 2018).

Practice-led research emanates from the recognition of a problem or deficit in practice, to explore elements of practice in a systematic way to help develop that field of practice (Smith and Dean, 2009). It is also a means by which a research problem is identified through creative practice. With 20 years in the community media sector, the first author began running radio making workshops for people facing disadvantage in 2015 through the Ability Radio Project (CBAA, 2018; Author removed 2018) at a Brisbane community radio station, 4ZZZ. Participants raised the issue of low levels of representation and participation of people with disability in community radio and the need to build capacity in the sector to increase their participation. Working with these and other participants with disability in the sector, this research asked, 'What factors facilitate the inclusion of people with disability in community radio?' The interview phase of research turned to these program makers. The formal mechanisms for interviewee recruitment were an ad in the CBAA newsletter, verbal invitation at a public forum at a CBAA conference, and direct email to stations and individuals. Of the 65 individuals and organisations approached, 25 people responded, leading to 19 interviews, 15 of which were people with disability, reported here. One

participant was referred by the CBAA. Participants were community radio producers who have a disability. A summary of participants is provided in Table 1. It shows the gender, age range and reported years of experience in Australian community radio. It also shows the disability of those participants who chose to disclose this information.

[Table 1 near here]

Interviews were conducted with a strategic listening goal. Some participants were known to the researcher as long-term radio producers, yet nothing had been previously published about aspects of their participation. People with disability had not been systematically heard by the community radio sector. This research aimed to address this gap. Research participants were invited to discuss their experiences of participation and inclusion in community broadcasting in semi-structured, recorded interviews. An interview outline was distributed to participants prior to interviews taking place. Questions addressed participants' experiences, and perceived barriers and enablers to their involvements in community radio. Questions were informed by social inclusion literature and the experience and practice of the first researcher in training radio volunteers. Most interviews were conducted by telephone, with participants either at home or at their community radio station. Participants were located in Brisbane, Sydney, Melbourne, and Adelaide and in rural Queensland and Western Australia. The semi-structured format supported close listening during interviews to support unambiguous expression. Interviews took place over a seven-month period to June 2017 and were between 20 minutes and 1.5 hours long. Participants were invited to contact the researcher for a second interview if there was more they wanted to say. None chose to do so.

A four-part radio series, *It's The People's Radio* (Author removed, 2019), was created with the interviews. A disability and community radio forum that featured in the 2016 CBAA national conference was also recorded and included in the research and the documentary. The production process created opportunities for further listening cycles that

informed the research. The recorded interviews were made available to participants so that they could review and discuss their own contributions during the documentary production process. Feedback from one participant (P11) was used to modify the documentary to their satisfaction in the editing process. All other participants reported they were satisfied with how they were represented. The documentary was distributed for airplay on stations around Australia, via the Community Radio Network, on the International Day for People with a Disability in 2018. It was also made available online as a resource to support ongoing advocacy in the sector. Two interview participants took part in the following advocacy phase of this research (not reported in detail here). Informal and organisational collaborations also continued with several participants after the research concluded.

Close listening was also required to analyse transcripts of recordings to identify common themes. Thematic analysis took place concurrently with radio documentary production. The themes derived from the analysis guided the construction of the documentary in four parts. They also guided subsequent policy-related advocacy and informed the development of an Access and Inclusion policy for use by community broadcasting stations (CBAA, 2018). Themes were derived from a first listening of the research inputs (interview and conference recordings) then refined through two further readings of transcripts of these recordings. Themes were found in the data by identifying similarities in the reported experiences and impressions of the participants. This involved looking for similar word use, phrases, or concepts that were salient to the topic of research while transcribing and coding of the interview data (Saldana, 2016).

The data was coded line-by-line twice for themes and stored in NVivo, a qualitative data analysis application. NVivo enabled the number of occurrences of topics and words to be counted and text relevant to themes across all research inputs to be examined. NVivo was also useful for searching the data and locating direct quotes for use in the radio documentary

and this article. Themes and codes were derived from research inputs and literature. They were decided by the researcher based on interpretation of NVivo data and deduction (Saldana, 2016: 4). Theme descriptors were not all taken verbatim from the data, but represent concepts that participants talked about during interviews, without necessarily naming them. For example, the theme 'Attitudes' was derived from the word itself, which was explicitly mentioned 23 times in interviews but also encompassed the concept of people's attitudes. Other phrases and words subsumed into this theme, included assumptions, attitudinal, care, encourage, expectation, inclusive, supportive, problem and helpful (more than 300 mentions in total) and increased the likelihood that the concept of 'attitudes' was a theme. Although there were many references to the concept of attitudes, many words occurred together, and were often repeated by some individual participants, and not mentioned at all by others, so that mentions of individual words do not exactly reflect numbers of mentions of the concept.

Results

Five themes were identified in the analysis of recordings: accessibility concerns, attitudinal concerns, audience/listener concerns, factors that helped or hindered involvement, and the importance of having a voice. A further overarching finding was that people with disability derived satisfaction from participating in community broadcasting. Participants had a wide range of community radio experience. Most had two to five years. Six participants had up to twenty years of experience. The long periods of involvement by seven of the participants reflected the satisfaction they got from participating in community radio. Of that subgroup, all but one made programs (some with a disability focus) and had been involved at an organisational level, in both paid and voluntary capacities, on boards or special projects. Most continued to be involved in community radio at the time of this research.

Accessibility Concerns

Accessibility is an ongoing issue for people with disability attempting to participate in public life. Participants noted that many community radio stations were physically difficult to access for people with mobility issues. Eight participants cited difficulties accessing buildings, for themselves or people they supported. Stairs were the most often cited reason for building inaccessibility. Other physical access issues included width of doors, lack of ramps, lack of disability parking and slippery tiles. One participant said that their station had made adaptations to improve physical accessibility including, having some meetings off site, adapting or choosing suitable technology, arranging an assisted entry doorbell system and other building modifications. One station was able to find funding for an accessibility audit to identify and plan for the changes needed to make to their building accessible.

Participants reported difficulty in finding accessible technology at stations. Much of the new technology in radio stations is constructed and chosen without thought to accessibility, particularly for those with vision-impairments. This problem was also perceived as easily overcome. One participant noted the importance of avoiding touchscreens and digital readouts in studios when making new technology purchase decisions, observing the availability of purpose-built accessible software. For some participants the accessibility of technology and volunteer opportunities came down to the presence or absence of someone willing to help regularly.

Participants also reported the attitudes of other volunteers and their own self-confidence as problems for accessibility. Accessibility was affected by the helpfulness of people at the station. Good communication was identified as important, with four participants referring to the need for stations to make all volunteers aware of the processes for adjusting to a volunteer with a disability.

…we found quite a lot of it was around the communication stuff, just simple things like putting the doorbell and a sign at the doors where there wasn't access so people knew that the doorbell rings, go and open it and give that person assistance (P10).

Consequences of communication failure were not good. For one participant conflict with other less accommodating volunteers escalated rather than resolved and was the reason they eventually stopped volunteering. Participants generally attributed accessibility difficulties to a lack of understanding amongst the non-disabled about these challenges for people with disability. The issue of attitudes and accessibility is also discussed in the next theme, as there was overlap between physical and social inclusion at stations and the attitudes of others.

Attitudinal concerns

Every participant reported that the attitudes of others, both positive and inclusive, or negative and unhelpful, were important to their full participation in community radio. Some praised the inclusive and helpful attitudes of station volunteers, while others noted the importance of changing attitudes to improve access.

Changing attitudes is the first step and [my radio station] have certainly embraced that especially with me and others like me. Understanding that my needs are different (P7).

The attitude can sort of be that a person with a disability might be a bit of a burden because it can take up a volunteer's time or a staff member's time (P1).

Two participants reported they were initially rejected by radio stations they approached, but they persevered to find places that were more open to the challenges of

accommodating different needs. One waited three years for training and felt that the training manager had been 'holding me back' (P4), while another faced explicit teasing about his disability by a musician he interviewed. Another participant noted that after initial good support to participate, the intolerance of one other volunteer led to his withdrawal. However, good experiences of support and enthusiasm were more usual, with every participant nominating someone who was key to their continued involvement.

One participant who considered the station she participated at to have good practices around inclusion, also reported that other volunteers were still unsure if they had 'permission' to talk about disability and what language to use to do that.

Audience/listener concerns

Many participants wanted to make entertaining and listenable shows, catering to their skills and interests, without an overt disability agenda. Some participants went on to say that they still wanted their on-air sound to be authentic, with one participant saying she wanted to 'push the boundaries' (P11) of what was broadcast, especially where it concerns people whose disability affects the clarity or speed of their voice, respecting the differences amongst people.

Factors that facilitated involvement

Most participants experienced one or more helpful people who embraced and facilitated their involvement in the station. These were often trainers, managers or long-term volunteers. Often it was a person the participant knew outside the station, an acquaintance or friend who brought them into the station, was already aware of or willing to learn about disability, and helped create physical and social space for difference:

[name] she gave me an awful lot of support. … She was a really good mentor, not just with the technical skills… But also some of the interpersonal things that go on in the station when … you introduce a whole new idea, and people perhaps don't understand it (P9).

An important goal for this research was to hear ideas people with disability had to improve the inclusivity of community radio stations. Many cited the importance of a mentor and one participant thought mentoring could better enable participation although he hadn't experienced it himself. Many others were confident that exposure to the skills and abilities of people with disability would help, if only that first chance was given. One participant reflected that prejudicial attitudes were a problem for him:

People just don't want to give us a go, um, and that could be anything you know. It could be how we look, to how we talk, to how we go about doing things, I think (P6).

Many concluded that just being 'given the chance to have a go at it' (P12) was important; to give people with disability 'time to try' (P12) and prove their capacity.

The importance of having a voice

Every participant spoke of their enjoyment of some, if not all of their community radio experiences. This was often expressed in terms of being listened to and having a voice, and as a form of personal empowerment. Some enjoyed the friendships, social skills growth, or the music they played, without any social change agenda. Other participants were able to speak of the attitude change they observed at their station, such as changes in the way other volunteers talked about disability, and increased reportage on disability issues. Some saw their participation in radio as part of a broader goal for social change and either made radio

specifically about this or saw their own participation as a political act in itself, introducing a diversity of sounds and physical presences at the station and on-air.

Two of the more experienced producers with a disability (P3 and P9) explicitly saw themselves as facilitators of the voices of others, 'to be able to tell stories, to give people that voice' (P3). Both of those producers were either employed by, or volunteered with, a disability advocacy organisation in addition to radio volunteer activities.

Discussion

The analysis of interviews confirms there is broad agreement between the goals of people with disability who are active in community radio (participants in this research) and that of the community radio sector. However, there were barriers to accessibility in the sector, as elsewhere. In addition to physical access to stations, participants noted the inaccessibility of digital technology that uses touch screens and digital readouts. People with low vision or blindness cannot use these technologies. This issue has been recognised amongst disability and media theorists as a product of the unreflective ableism behind ever-changing new technology that simultaneously increases our cognitive load (Ellis and Goggin, 2015). Nonetheless, within the context of community broadcasting spaces, it is also possible to acknowledge and further explore how affordances of digital technologies, including touchscreens, may also enhance participation, for example, of people who are not able to speak.

The anger that accompanies oppression, noted by theorists (Godrej 2005; Goodley 2005), was evident in the way some participants told their stories. Having to wait for three years to be trained; being teased about one's voice by an interviewee; and being told one's child with autism should 'suck it up', were all examples of ableist attitudes being used to justify lack of consideration for another's rights. Participants were angry and frustrated by

these kinds of failures to treat the needs or differences of another human being as valid ways of being. One participant noted the legitimacy of the demand to have one's abilities recognised. Disability is 'not a pity party, it's a fact of life… everyone is different and it doesn't have to be because of a disability, everyone's different full-stop' (P15).

Participants speculated that many able-bodied volunteers didn't understand their challenges or needs, and that exposure to them may present a remedy. This reflected an appreciation of the roles of inclusion and media representation in changing attitudes (Goggin and Newell, 2005; Mallett, 2011).

Some participants had been involved in community radio for many years and were aware of sector debates about the tension between professionalism and authenticity (Van Vuuren, 2005). Some stations' focus on professionalism can lead to the purposeful exclusion, particularly people who sound different to professional norms of acceptable radio voices. However, exclusion to maintain professionalism runs contrary to the stated goals of the sector. Three participants noted the contentiousness of including of people with different voices or speech mannerisms. All were adamant that those people are part of our community and should not be disenfranchised because of their speech difficulties.

Finally, having a voice in the media, and helping others to have a voice, was a source of joy and enthusiastic support for community radio for most of the participants. All participants identified gaining new skills, new friends and the sociality of media production as important reasons to be involved in community radio. This is consistent with the research findings of Günnel (2008), Meadows and Foxwell (2011) and Grimes and Stevenson (2011). All participants, even those that had experienced conflict, felt empowered through their community radio experiences and wanted to extend that feeling of empowerment to other people. One participant explained this urge to help others obtain similar opportunities: 'There should be more people with disabilities on the radio, so they've got a voice … as well' (P6).

The small sample of participants in this research project is a consequence of the small number of people with disability participating in community media at present. It also demonstrates the need for longer and more comprehensive studies. People with disability already in stations can provide valuable insights to stations and individuals seeking increased inclusion in the sector. In practice, this research is an ongoing process of collaboration with the sector, as more stations and individuals raise the issue of inclusion.

Findings are generally consistent with inclusion research undertaken in other settings. This is helpful for planning future interventions to increase participation. The experiences of the participants also point to the need for higher order solutions to some problems of participation in community broadcasting. These include more advocacy within organisations to facilitate inclusion; adjusted training to accommodate different learning needs; diversity training for other volunteers and staff to improve attitudes or provide solutions to perceived barriers; and sector-wide change to embrace diversity in practice through policy changes that mandate actions. The stories of the participants in this study hint at the benefits of participation: to people with disability, to stations, the Australian community broadcasting sector as a whole and broader processes of social change that media participation can help to precipitate.

Conclusion

The sociality inherent to the practices and organisations of community radio help to make it an important institution of deliberative democracy. By virtue of the mix of people who inhabit the spaces of community radio ('off' and 'on air') difference is constantly negotiated and re-negotiated in the everyday practices of making radio and running a station, as well as in the high-level public policy spheres the sector as a whole is interconnected with and continually interacts with. It has also shown how listening can be used as a practice-led

research approach. It has shown how a listening approach can help to condition the community radio environment so that it is more accessible to people with disability and simultaneously support people with disability to use and develop their own forms, terms and means of expression in the research process. The insights of the participants have provided an empirical body of evidence that lends strategic support to demands for improved opportunities for media participation, and generates tactical resources for use in a media sector intended to be accessible to marginalised groups and individuals.

However, many other questions remain unanswered and need to be taken up in further research. Community broadcasting affords important opportunities to learn more about the self-representation and self-advocacy practices of people with disability. How can these be understood as practices of deliberative democracy in action? How is the pool of cultural resources expanded through these practices and how can this knowledge be used to benefit people with disability? There is also a need to more closely examine how the change agendas of organisations are attenuated through professional as well as vernacular listening practices. What, for example, are the points of similarity and difference between the kinds of listening used in journalistic documentary practices and the therapeutic practices of social work? How might a better understanding of listening practices contribute to organisational change processes? Quantitative audience research is undertaken in the sector and has been helpful to this research, but there is also an opportunity to consider audience perspectives on the content produced by people with disability. Who are the audiences for this content and how do they make use of it? As stations commit to accessible technologies, opportunities also arise to closely consider and evaluate their costs and benefits to the range of stakeholders involved, including producers with disability, their networks, individual stations and media in general.

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