

Conversational Storytelling in Community Context: Examining Talk on Transgender Radio

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Abstract

This paper considers the role of co-participatory storytelling within the framework of community radio, radio talk and transgender media. It considers this by examining storytelling by participants on an Australian radio program, TRANS*Positions, which is broadcast on JOY FM, a successful and well-known Australian community radio station. The paper reveals the ways co-participatory conversational storytelling, a dominant form of talk on this program designed for a transgender audience, informs listeners and fosters a sense of community. It analyses the very localised form of interactions between hosts, guests, and callers and reveals the way in which participants make relevant topics that are considered potentially controversial if spoken by a non-transgender audience. The interactions demonstrate the way in which co-participants in localised talk for an overhearing audience represent “ourselves to ourselves”. While it is an Australian case-study, there are implications more broadly for broadcasters wishing to create space for very localised, community-oriented talk.

Keywords: transgender media, broadcast talk, community radio, storytelling, community

Introduction

The transgender community internationally is associated with high levels of risk for social exclusion, mental health issues, discrimination, suicide, and homelessness. Social isolation is noted as a common theme in transgender-based research, and it is linked to poor mental health within the transgender community (Bariola et al 2015; Hyde et al 2013). In Australia, a number of reports since 2010, including *Private Lives* (Pitt et al 2006), *Private Lives 2* (Leonard et al 2012), and the *First Australian Trans Mental Health Study* (Hyde et al. 2013) have highlighted the role of community and access to support in promoting mental health for gay, lesbian, and transgender people. Connection to community is noted as potentially more important for GLBTI people who may be alienated from their original family (Pitt et al. 2006: 53).

While media has a potentially important role to play in connecting GLBTI communities and promoting community connection to reduce social isolation, these reports have not specifically examined the role of media in facilitating community membership, reducing social isolation, and in constructing and negotiating identity. Pitt et. al briefly noted that gay media can provide a form of access to community in *Private Lives 2* (2006: 54) but transgender people are not necessarily gay, and being transgender is not about sexual orientation. There are also differences between gay, lesbian and transgender people's response to what constitutes community connection (Pitt et al 2006). Additionally, stories in mainstream media are generally not written for transgender people or by transgender people. Organisations like GLAAD in the US, and LGTBI Alliance in Australia have attempted to address issues associated with representation and use of language, more often within a broader homogenous lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender, and intersex (LGBTI) perspective but specific analysis of transgender media is limited academically.

Questions therefore remain about transgender representation in the media. Who, for example, is entitled to speak on behalf of a community? How do we speak about issues of importance? How do we know what is important? What is the right way to talk about issues? These questions drove a desire to initially understand how a community represents itself to itself, and one way to explore this is to analyse talk *within* a community. Examining the way participants orient to topics within talk can reveal moral order and common sense understandings. These are taken-for-granted assumptions about the way the world works or should work within a particular group of participants in interaction (Fitzgerald & Housley 2002). An ethno-methodological approach to discourse, based on conversation and membership category analysis, can reveal in situ orientation to action and role. It reveals, through talk-based action, what is relevant to members of a community. This type of analysis has not been done within a transgender media context.

This paper examines talk between hosts and callers on a transgender-oriented community radio program broadcast in Melbourne, Australia. The research question on which the study was based was: What forms of interaction occur between listeners and hosts on a transgender-oriented community radio program? This question aimed to investigate how members of a marginalised group communicated with one another on issues of relevance to them in a public way. Conversational storytelling emerged as the dominant form of host and caller interaction, whereby personal stories of experience were shared publicly, and this is the focus of this particular paper.

First, the paper introduces the analysis with discussion about representations of transgender people in the media generally, and the relationship between conversational storytelling and

community radio. This paper does not theorise about transgenderism more broadly. Rather, it reveals the way transgender people speak of their personal transgender experience, and highlights issues that are specifically relevant to them and potentially the broader community. Finding the answers to the questions aims to contribute knowledge about how to communicate more effectively with groups who are traditionally marginalised or homogenised in mainstream media. For example, the analysis may provide possible lessons for media practitioners when trying to use inclusive language.

Media Representation and Transgender People

Globally, we know media play a role in increasing transgender people's awareness of gender identity (Capuzza 2014, 2016; Moscowitz 2010). Olympian and celebrity Bruce Jenner's transition to becoming a woman, Caitlyn Jenner, was profiled extensively in mainstream media globally during 2015. Additionally, the success of *Transparent* and *Orange Is the New Black* (2013–), US-based television programs that feature a transgender character and actor respectively, generated discussion about representation and acceptance of transgender characters and people (see as examples Avery 2014; Molloy 2015; Riggs 2015).

Media representation can strengthen and manifest awareness of identity, but negative portrayals can be detrimental (Ringo 2002). In one of the few pieces of transgender research that specifically examines how transgender people feel about representation, Mullen & Moane argued for the need to identify sources of affirmation for transgender people at interpersonal, personal and sociocultural levels (2013). Participants in their study expressed desire for transgender issues to be covered more positively in mainstream media and to be normalized rather than problematized (Mullen & Moane 2013). This problematization contributes to the public perception that transgender people are unusual, simply expressing a fetish, and follow a tragic narrative (2013: 151). Mullen and Moane argued for research that explores transgender identity formation and affirmation, specifically "in exploring how supportive and non-supportive factors in interaction have an overall positive or negative impact on individuals" (153).

In Australia, the already high risk of mental health issues, discrimination, suicide, and homelessness within the trans community is compounded by physical isolation thanks to geographic distance between regional areas and metropolitan centres where services may be located. This geographic isolation brings with it further challenges as local definitions and understandings of what it is to be a trans person can remain unchallenged and influence the experience of members of isolated communities. For example, Costello and Nannup noted differences in the use of the term 'sistergirl' within the Australian indigenous communities, arguing that sistergirl terminology is influenced by the diversity of communities, and often defined within a community depending on geographical location (1999: 6). The lack of transgender role models and transgender networks has also been noted as an issue for the transgender community (Kerry 2014) although it needs to be noted that much of the research was conducted in the pre-digital era prior to the rise of the internet or ability to access virtual networks.

Access and Community Radio

Providing opportunities for connection is a potentially supportive factor in accordance with Mullen and Moane's arguments about transgender identity formation (2013). Community or public radio has traditionally been associated with access to the public sphere as an enabler to a community that may otherwise have difficulty being heard (Bosch 2007; Law 1986). It has

played an important role in the Australian radio environment since the 1970s. Research into community radio in Australia has tended to frame it as a cultural resource that allows for increased access to the public sphere and means of democratic participation for community members at a local level (see Forde, Foxwell & Meadows 2002; van Vuuren 2002). This access is not necessarily equal, but it is able to reflect local cultures in ways national or commercial broadcasters can't achieve (Forde, Foxwell & Meadows 2002: 65). Community radio stations may be funded by local sponsors, subscriptions, and government grants. Licences are often geographically restrictive which limits transmission range and therefore impact in a country like Australia, although many stations are now broadcasting digitally to expand their reach. Most stations are run by volunteers, and programming is driven by what is of interest to those who volunteer or the station's local audience.

The specific role of community broadcasting in the emotional and social well-being of its audiences has been established in Australia (Thornley 1999; van Vuuren 2003, 2006). Meadows and Foxwell (2011) reviewed studies of the role of community radio and argued that community media creates an environment that supports an engaged and participatory culture with the proviso that the culture is driven by an existing will to communicate (95). Empowerment has been cited as the reason most Australian audiences give when describing why they engage with community broadcasting, which is seen as a hub where ordinary people are able to engage with other ordinary people to experiences, problems, and solutions (96). In this way, community media allows people who may otherwise have limited access to the public sphere to communicate and stories play a particular role on via the medium when it comes to emotional well-being (96). For some, simply having the opportunity to hear fellow members of their community talk is significant, as noted by Meadows and Foxwell who cited a participant: "Talking to people...just the Murri way of talking and communicating; that's what I see as really important in that way so people understand what you're talking about" (102). That simply listening to "the Murri way" of talking and communicating helps someone feel connected highlights the connective role of community radio.

Talk that occurs on community radio involves interaction between hosts, and hosts and callers. It provides an opportunity for community members to tell their stories in local contexts. Before we proceed to analysis, it is important to consider conversational storytelling as a specific form of broadcast talk because of the dominance of this form of talk in the corpus.

Storytelling to Making Sense of the World

People use storytelling to make sense of the world. Storytelling as narrative theory was pioneered, and is today still often framed, by research conducted by Labov and Waletzky in the late 1960s (Labov 1972; Labov & Waletzky 1967). This research was based on a series of interviews, and highlighted the narrative structure of stories and the reliance by individual storytellers on remembered sequences of events. Conversational storytelling, however, is very different. It is fragmentary and co-participatory by nature. It reveals the moral order of participants and what is relevant to speakers at the time and place the conversation takes place (Norrick 2000). In conversation, stories can surge up and recede again in topical talk, and stories in this context may consist of "fragments produced by separate speakers among extraneous talk and random interruptions, so that it is often difficult to say just where they begin or end" (2000: 17). The co-participatory nature of storytelling means it takes place between a number of people, and reveals what is immediately relevant to those participants.

As a form of public talk, storytelling in a community setting generally has a civic purpose, although there is some debate about what form that storytelling takes. For example, Wilkin and Ball-Rokeach (2006) argued that storytelling has an impact on civic engagement, and that for a community to thrive, it must have a “strong network of such storytellers using mediated and interpersonal types of communication to building a discursive community for the identification and resolution of issues of concern to the residents” (Wilkin & Ball-Rokeach 2006: 304). The stronger the storytelling network, the more likely residents feel like they belong to a community (Wilkin & Ball-Rokeach 2006). In a specific example of application, Wilkin and Ball-Rokeach noted the importance of geo-ethnic (or in an Australia context, community) media and interpersonal communication to Latinos. They argued that health storytelling would be improved by becoming integrated into a health storytelling network, and that this could be achieved by framing health stories to encourage interpersonal discussion (Wilkin & Ball-Rokeach 2006: 313). In an Australian transgender example, the opportunity to share stories of personal histories within Australian indigenous communities by transgender people “provided all participants with a greater understanding of the history of sistergirl existence and promoted much peer and self-respect, generating a sense of self-worth and self-esteem” (Costello & Nannup 1999: 7).

The opportunity to share stories on radio occurs during talk-based segments facilitated by a host and significant attention has been paid to radio interactions generally to understand host/caller interaction. However these have tended to focus attention on talkback or genre-specific talk (as examples see Hutchby 1991; Hutchby 1996; Montgomery 1986; O'Sullivan 2005; Rendle-Short 2005). We do know that conversational storytelling is a feature of chat-based radio programming which is a specific genre and relies on an orientation to personal, the risk of transgression, and use of humour or wit (Ames 2016; Tolson 1991). The seemingly casual conversations occur between hosts, and hosts and callers, but are broadcast for the specific purpose of being heard (Scannell 1991). Stories told between participants in this context are performed for a community of listeners in the form of multi-party talk (Korolija 1998).

Conversational storytelling on chat-based radio assists in fostering a sense of community with a clear orientation by participants (including hosts) to being social rather than being argumentative (Ames 2012a). The way hosts engage with guests and listeners, and the way stories are prompted or emerge from talk also reveal a social worldview and moral order to which all participants orient (Ames 2012b; Jayyusi 1984). Multiparty talk, which is talk than includes more than two people, is particularly interesting to analyse. This is because it reveals the way participants within a social setting orient to social norms because orientation to stereotypes demonstrate moral order in action (Ames 2012b; Bergmann 1998; Korolija 1998, 2009). A stereotype in talk is demonstrated as being based on formulations and displays of category-bound activities by participants in talk (Jayyusi 1984), and how these may be “treated by” speakers. Analysing co-participatory storytelling for an overhearing audience on community radio can therefore reveal *what* is important to a community and the way in which stories can help members of that community make sense of experiences.

Data and Method

JOY94.6 FM is a community radio station broadcast from Melbourne, Australia, with approximately 330,000 listeners. It promotes itself as “an independent voice for the diverse lesbian and gay communities”, and is staffed by over 200 volunteers. It states, as its mission, that it is: “providing a voice for the diverse lesbian and gay communities, enabling freedom of

expression, the breaking down of isolation and the celebration of our culture, achievements and pride” (About us 2017). JOY94.9 programming does not rely specifically on breakfast and drive time regulars, as is the case in mainstream commercial radio. Breakfast and drive time slots are allocated to host teams, with different teams featuring each day. The specific program under analysis, *TRANS*positions*, was broadcast at the time of study every Tuesday between 9 and 10 pm on JOY94.9 and promoted itself as a:

Radio program for and about the Trans communities produced by Melbourne's JOY 94.9.' *TRANS*positions* discusses what it's like to be trans* with honest discussions on the issues facing our trans* communities across all areas of our lives. A diverse range of voices will be here to educate, inspire and engage. *TRANS*positions* is a safe place for you to share your story, opinions, and healthy feedback. (*TRANS*positions* 2014)

The article derives its findings from a content analysis of the show's first eight programs conducted between 8 April, when the program first aired, to 28 May 2014. The podcasts ranged from 33 minutes to 48 minutes, and were available for download via the Joy94.9 website. Analysis was based on a mixed method approach to discourse analysis of a chat-based radio program.

Accepting that radio is a mixed mode media that now incorporates social media, video, and print as supplementary/back channels, the moment of broadcast remains immediate between a listener and the program. Examining transgender radio provides a unique opportunity to review the way in which a community speaks to itself, and the way in which issues such as race, class, and gender conformity are (or are not) specifically relevant. Although radio programs are routinely supported by social media, in that moment of listening we do not see the participants. We may not know whether the hosts are transmen/transwomen/indigenous/ cisgender; all we know is what the hosts or participants say they are/feel. There is an opportunity, therefore, to listen closely to what is relevant. The tenets of conversation and membership category analysis are that relevance emerges from the data – as opposed to critical discourse approaches, which are looking for evidence or proof to support theories of power, ethno-methodological approaches simply explore what is evident (see Hutchby & Wooffitt 1998).

The first step in analysis was to categorise calls, topics, and types of interaction between hosts and listeners to determine what would be analysed in further detail and identify possibly themes. Categorisation was based on previous research that has identified four types of calls to chat-based programs: competition, storytelling, promotion, and community (Ames 2012a). In this genre, storytelling is a dominant means by which hosts can foster a sense of community. In this type of talk, hosts enact roles as “friends telling stories” in their daily interaction with listeners (Ames 2012a). In doing so, they perform familiarity that aims to include the overhearing audience. This familiarity may or may not be real – that is, the hosts may be friends off-air. The dominance of storytelling was evident in the *TRANS*positions* broadcasts and storytelling-based segments were therefore chosen for more detailed analysis because it was in these segments that co-participatory interaction was most evident.

Discussion

Listeners, guests and hosts were encouraged to share their story in a number of ways on this radio program. During the period of analysis, there were 20 overt calls for interaction by hosts, and these calls for interaction were often framed by a request to help keep the show on the air.

This suggested to the listener that a lack of response would place the program at risk of being discontinued as this was its first year of broadcast. When the origin of the response was identified, most were SMS/text messages as per Table 1.1.

	Phone	SMS/Text	Email	Unstated
Total	1	8	2	8

Table 1.1: Response to calls for interaction from hosts and callers, TRANS*positions, programs 1–8.

In eight programs, 19 responses were broadcast by hosts, meaning that the texts or emails were read aloud for listeners or explicit reference was made to them by hosts. There were often multiple guests in the studio with hosts. However, those who contacted the program by phone were not put to air to interact directly with the hosts/guests. Whether this was by request for anonymity, or lack of knowledge by hosts as to how to do this given the volunteer nature of the station, is unknown.

The first show had the most potential for interaction between hosts and listeners, and this program included a Question and Answer (Q&A) session, whereby listeners were encouraged to make contact with the station to ask questions of hosts and in-studio guests from a community group supporting people undergoing transition. Most of the topics on this particular episode were generated by a question from a listener (via SMS/text/phone) that was read by the hosts. Topics included whether the trans community in Melbourne was growing; places for trans people to gather and dance; deciding on your trans name; referring to gender labels and misgendering; considering the needs of lesbian partners of female-to-male (FTM) trans; and supporting trans friends through high school.

In following programs sessions included: host/guest discussion about coming out whereby the guest tells his personal story; a checklist for transition, whereby the hosts [one FTM and one Male-to-Female (MTF)] talk about a checklist for those considering transition based on their personal experience; chest surgery, whereby the host's flatmate and partner are guests in-studio, and talk about their experience and views on chest surgery for FTM trans; anxiety management, whereby the host and a guest tell personal stories; and steps to medical transition.

While interaction was encouraged by calls to action from the hosts, there were no more Q&A sessions as was the case in the first program. Seven of the eight shows featured in-studio guests, and one show featured speeches and stories told at a specific promotion day that were recorded on the day and played back to listeners during the program. Most of the storytelling was by hosts and in-studio guests, or by listeners' texting or emailing short remembered narratives. Information in the form of 'advice talk' was also evident but this was often done within the context of telling a story. The types of stories, and the role they play in interaction, will be the focus of the next section.

Types of Stories

The way stories are told in host/host and host/guest interaction was conversational in nature. The focus of host/guest interaction was on personal narrative – “what happened to me”, but there was diversity in this approach. As per Norrick's reflection on the fragmented nature of conversation (2000), the stories were not linear – they surged and receded throughout the interaction. They were not necessarily told by one person, but told collaboratively and responsively. Overall, there were two main ways stories were elicited or integrated into talk:

in response to questions by listeners or hosts which acted as a transition to co-participatory storytelling; or whereby stories from listeners or hosts acted as a prompt or transition to comment or contextual reference.

Response Stories. While there was a fairly low level of participation by listeners to the public conversation within the program *TRANS*positions*, the possibility of interaction was used as a transitional sequence to talk or opportunity to tell a story. Multiple channels of interactional possibility were available but most interaction by listeners was via text. That listeners may be reluctant to participate in a more overt way is not surprising – having to hide one’s status until one comes out and/or transitions is often part of the journey of a trans person. The way in which hosts dealt with this to keep the narrative flow of the program going was to therefore integrate interactions and comments with storytelling. An individual’s story, shared via SMS, therefore became part of the co-participatory storytelling because it was part of a collective remembered narrative as a contribution to the overall program.

Many of the stories were ‘response stories’, whereby one participant constructed a second story to parallel the first (see Norrick 2000), usually based on personal experience. For example, the following interaction occurs between two hosts (H1 and H2) after H1 interrupts discussion between H2 and a guest about transition:

- 1 H1 ((interrupting)) I just wanted to briefly talk about my experience with being
 2 misgendered. It did happen with my old friends. I hadn’t seen them
 3 for ages, so I would occasionally get misgendered, but I have never been
 4 misgendered by any of my new friends, and sometimes when I even talk
 5 to them about the fact that I am trans and used to have a different gender
 6 they sometimes feel a bit strange about it. H2 and I were talking about
 7 this the other day, and while we were talking, I was thinking, but H2
 8 you never could be anything else. I can only see you as a masculine man.
 9 H2 That’s because you never met me before pre.
 10 H1 That’s right. So I kind of got a good sense of what it must be like for other
 11 people when I say those sorts of things to them. Occasionally I get misgendered
 12 on the telephone and I’m actually so comfortable with myself now that I try
 13 to turn it into something that’s quite humorous. So today I was ringing up to
 14 get a car – I need to rent a car for something, and the guy on the other end, on
 15 the phone, misgendered me. He called me Sir, and I said, No it’s Madam. And
 16 I said, wait until you see me tomorrow and then you’ll freak out that you
 17 thought about calling me a Sir. That was my response to that one.
 18 H2 Nice.

This interaction starts as a response story (H1 talks about what happened as “my experience”) in general terms but becomes a two-way conversation with the other host when H1 specifically directs the conversation to H2. It becomes specific as a story in lines 13–17, where the host recounts a story about being misgendered when trying to rent a car by phone. The response by H2 in line 18 (“Nice”) indicates approval for the way H1 handled the issue. The hosts are members of the community they are addressing – they aren’t just being hosts, but also active participants in a conversation about being transgender. This interaction then precedes a conversation between hosts and the guest on the need to be assertive when misgendering occurs, whereby the hosts return to their hosting role by eliciting responses from the guest. The shared experience of being misgendered then becomes something the participants have in common – it is normalised for the overhearing audience, who may have had similar experiences.

Response stories also occurred collectively. The following is a co-participatory interaction whereby the host (H1) reads out a question sent into the station (the method by which this happened is unknown). There are four people in the studio – two hosts (H1 and H2) and two guests (G1 and G2) from a local community organisation.

- 1 H1 ((Reading a question supplied by a listener)) How did you get to decide on
- 2 your new name as trans?
- 3 H2 G1, what about you?
- 4 G1 It was given to me by an old girlfriend.
- 5 H2 I like that story.
- 6 G2 One guy in (organisation) actually asked his mother to rename him.
- 7 I thought that was so cool...and my name was the name of my best friend
- 8 and my partner. I think you just find some name you like.
- 9 For me it was a name that sounded like my old name, which is something I react to.
- 10 G1 It's helpful when you turn around when someone calls your name, isn't it?
- 11 H1 When I was born, I was fostered out for a little while, and the gorgeous wonderful
- 12 family that fostered me hated the name that my parents gave me and I did too, and
- 13 they decided to call me ((name)) and every time I've caught up with them over
- 14 the years, they've always called me ((name)) so it's always been my name. It just
- 15 wasn't officially.

This interaction here starts with a question posed by a listener (lines 1–2). One of the hosts defers to a guest in response (line 3). From here, two response stories are offered – one from a guest (G2 in lines 6–9) and one from a host (H1 in lines 11–15). From a narrative perspective, this overall story about how we got our names becomes something co-created – small fragments of experience that built up to a bigger picture; the guest tells his/her personal story in response to a question from a listener, and the host responds with his own parallel personal story. This collaborative storytelling is conducted in the “presence” of an overhearing audience, and this type of storytelling “lays claim to parallel experiences, and often to shared values and feelings as well” (Norrick 2000: 115). Norrick refers to collaborative retelling of a familiar story as a way to ratify group membership and modulate rapport (2000: 154): “It allows participants to re-live salient common experiences...because it confirms the long-term bond they share, and... because the experience of collaborative narration itself redounds to feelings of belonging” (157). In this case, the stories aren't exactly the same – the storytellers are telling of individual experiences, but the narrative is familiar to others because of the common experiences. In a sense, the speakers are collaborating to tell “a story” (about “how we got our name”) but from different perspectives. This use of a text or interaction from a listener was very common on the program (despite the number of overall interactions by listeners during the period of study being limited).

Stories as Comment or Advice Prompts. A second common feature of interaction was whereby hosts used stories as presented by listeners as the basis for transition to comment. For example:

- 1 H1 We've just had a lovely text here from ((name)) and he's written ((reads SMS)) When
- 2 I was 17 I had a friend (name) who was androgynous and we were both gay. Years
- 3 later I'm at a club and a gorgeous girl says, “Remember me”? ((name)) is now a girl,
- 4 and she looks great and is really happy as (name). Amazing to see the
- 5 transition which is so positive. I admire the courage. ((completes reading))
- 6 Thank you (name), that's so great to hear from you and that's a nice

7 little story you've got there and it's great that ((name)) has had such a great transition.
 8 I myself have had a positive transition and it looks like ((name)) here
 9 has had a positive transition=
 10 G1 mmm
 11 H1 =It's so good when there are positive stories coming out around transition
 12 because we do hear a lot of sad stories about the hard lives that transgender
 13 people so, yeah, it's great that there are happy people out there. So, anyway
 14 back to testosterone.

In this interaction, the host reads the text (SMS), and then makes a comment that pays attention to wider social context, in this case to counter the “sad stories about the hard lives that transgender people have” (line 12). The hosts did not simply read the text as a comment; rather, reading the text aloud introduces the listener as a co-participant in conversation without that person actually being present, and the response (line 11) serves to ratify the listener’s comment and inclusion.

In this way, stories were used to provide information for listeners through conversation between hosts and guests. Hutchby (2006) refers to the way an overhearing audience is constructed as an ‘advice recipient’ in advice-giving radio shows which he argues is a specific sub-genre of broadcast talk. However, in the case of *TRANS*Positions*, hosts and guests often stated explicitly that they are not giving advice; rather, they are sharing their experiences in a way that can help. The purpose, therefore, is to assist others and this is clearly oriented to repeatedly by hosts. However, the structure of the talk as co-participatory storytelling to achieve this differs from normal counselling talk which has been well-considered in broadcast talk (Peck 1995). Previous research has overwhelmingly focused on caller/expert interaction. The following example, however, demonstrates a clear orientation to ‘informing’ an overhearing audience but one that is not a response to a call. Rather, it is a topic considered of interest by the host or producers, indicated in the collaborative way the participants contribute to a story:

1 G1 There were complications with me but that’s totally my fault because
 2 I didn’t really look after myself before my surgery. There were a couple
 3 of things that I was supposed to do that I didn’t so I don’t hold ((name))
 4 responsible for that at all. I had a haematoma on my left pec which means
 5 I was in surgery for a little bit longer than I was supposed to – I think four
 6 hours instead of three – and then I came back out. A haematoma is essentially
 7 like I just started bleeding.
 8 H2 It’s like a blood clot isn’t it?
 9 G1 Yeah, it’s like a blood clot so I had to go back in. I had to be opened up, and
 10 they stopped the bleeding and stitched me back up and I was fine, but yeah,
 11 I did have a haematoma.
 12 G2 That can happen to anyone, can’t it?
 13 G1 It can happen to anyone yes. They advise you not to smoke and not take aspirin
 14 and certain medication for about three weeks before your surgery and, um, I let my
 15 guard down a little bit.

In this interaction, the host is talking about surgery with two guests. G1 is telling his story about having breasts removed, and the telling of the story is for the purpose of informing the overhearing audience. The clarifying questions from the host (H1, line 8) and guest (G2, line 12) result in further expansion of the story whereby G1 provides details in responding to the

questions but closes with a personal reflection (G1, lines 14/15). This is not “expert” talk as noted by Hutchby, but articulated as “experience talk” that is spoken explicitly for the purpose of providing information.

That these experiences were shared amongst a community is reinforced through familiarity as a common theme. Many of the respondents were personally known to the hosts, as indicated by supporting narrative or comments from the hosts as they read the message from the listener. As an example:

- 1 H1 ((Reading a message from a listener, source unknown) Hi ((H2 name))
- 2 Great show. Just a quick story about being misgendered. When (name) and I
- 3 were a newish couple, he had a pigtail and we both wore overcoats. So at a
- 4 suburban Italian restaurant a waiter approached us from behind, and said:
- 5 “So ladies, what can I get for you?”
- 6 ((Laughter))
- 7 H2 (Name) used to work for me so this is quite funny.
- 8 H1 ((Continues reading the message)) We didn’t make any issue of it, ordered, and
- 9 he went away. He never came back. He swapped tables with another waiter
- 10 in the kitchen, and we never saw him again. (Name) was very amused.

In this instance, the listener’s story is re-told collaboratively by the hosts. The story is interrupted by H2 (line 7) who confirms for the audience that the listener is known and familiar. By telling the overhearing audience that “this is quite funny” (line 7), H2 is setting up suspense as to what might come. This type of familiarity reinforces a sense of closeness (and thus community) between the listener who has contacted the program with his/her story, and the hosts.

Stories, it appears, are therefore elicited and incorporated into this community radio program in a way that works to build rapport, share information, and foster a sense of belonging. This is important because this particular program targets a population known to suffer from discrimination and generally poorer states of mental health than the general population (see Bockting, Knudson & Goldberg 2006; Mustanski, Garofalo & Emerson 2010). In these examples we see evidence that telling stories reflects Hochheimer’s view that community media is an “extension of the desire to communicate to establish a sense of personal and community power” (Meadows et al 2005: 180). Stories are told collaboratively by in-studio members and demonstrate an orientation to sociability and rapport (see Norrick 2000) although the way in which stories are told could differ between host/listener interaction, and host/guest interaction. This appeared to be associated with the way in which interaction occurs – via SMS and e-mail as opposed to via phone.

Most interestingly and importantly, the orientation to storytelling and the topics addressed by participants (hosts and audience members) are counter to advice provided for mainstream media. For example, GLAAD recommends that media “move beyond the coming out narrative” and “avoid focusing on medical issues” (GLAAD 2017). One of the recommendations by GLAAD is, however, that transgender people are experts at talking about transgender people. So while most of the stories told within this program are around the coming out narrative and focus on medical issues, the program represents an opportunity for transgender people to talk about their experience to other transgender people. It therefore represents the program as being something “more” than just a radio program – it is a source of information and support.

This is a reminder for program makers of the importance of creating a space for interaction, not just between hosts and callers, but also between hosts and guests. Enabling talk on a program such as this helps listeners share common experiences and learn from one another, and is potentially important. However, we do not know the impact it has on the audience. For example, do transgender listeners want to listen to this type of talk? Does it help them feel more connected or does it serve to alienate people? This analysis provides the basis for further research that could gather personal perspectives from those involved in producing and hosting the program, and members of the community who listened or contributed to the program.

Conclusion

This article has reviewed talk on a community radio program *TRANS*Positions*, which targets the transgender community in Melbourne, Australia, and more widely through its digital streaming. It specifically explores the way conversational storytelling as told by members of a particular community for a particular community – talking “for ourselves to ourselves”. Conversational storytelling between hosts and guests was a key feature of this program but the way in listeners and hosts interacted differed slightly from previously published studies of host/caller interaction on radio in Australia. It highlights the uniquely personal approach to sharing information between hosts and guests on a chat-based radio program and demonstrates the way members of a community speak about issues that are pertinent to that particular group. Analysis of this type of talk can highlight in great detail how members of a community orient to and are affected by issues. Research of this type, which teases out features of talk-based media genres such as chat-based programming, is useful because it becomes replicable – that is, if it is effective and we know how it is done, we can teach people how to do it. This has significance in community-based radio which relies on volunteers at all levels of production. Conducting further research along these lines as the next step would assist to identify challenges and considerations for co-participants in multi-party talk that appears to serve a greater purpose than simply to “entertain”.

Acknowledgements

I would like to acknowledge the excellent and constructive feedback provided by the reviewers of this article.

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