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## CAPTURING THE ‘AUTHENTIC VOICE’: CHALLENGES AND OPPORTUNITIES FOR VOICE AND SELF-REPRESENTATION IN TWO ABC STORYTELLING PROJECTS

**ABSTRACT:** This paper discusses the opportunities and challenges that arise within storytelling projects that are facilitated by public service broadcasters and that aim to amplify the voices of ‘ordinary people’. In particular, it focuses on two of the Australian Broadcasting Corporation’s current life storytelling projects: *ABC Open* and *Heywire*.

In recent years there has been a noticeable move by various public institutions, such as public service broadcasters, cultural institutions including art galleries and libraries, and community media and arts organisations to capture and disseminate the voices and viewpoints of ‘ordinary people’ through inviting them to share stories about their lives. One of the foremost objectives of many such projects is to provide under-represented individuals and groups with an opportunity to express and represent themselves, and thus change or challenge representations that have been created by others; as such, the capture and broadcast of ‘authentic voices’ is a central value. This paper begins by discussing the challenges and opportunities that arise within storytelling projects that are facilitated by public service broadcasting institutions (PSBs) and that aim to amplify the voices of ‘ordinary people’ (Thumim, “Everyone Has a Story to Tell”). It discusses how ‘voice’ and ‘authenticity’ are defined and examines ways in which self-representations are facilitated, curated, and broadcast within such projects in order to demonstrate ways in which institutional objectives and editorial policies shape and often limit project participants’ capacity for a voice that is authentic for them.

### DEFINITIONS AND METHODS

This research investigates two of the Australian Broadcasting Corporation’s (ABC’s) life storytelling initiatives, *ABC Open* and *Heywire*, both current projects within the ABC that encourage participation from rural and regional Australians, and on which little academic scholarship exists. The narrative focus and the value placed on personal storytelling positions these projects within a large and diverse field of initiatives that use new media and narrative practices for engagement; digital storytelling is a particularly popular format. We align *ABC Open* and *Heywire* loosely with the digital storytelling ‘movement’ (Hartley and McWilliam 5) and draw from much of the research in this field; however, in describing the storytelling projects initiated by the ABC, we prefer to use the term ‘life storytelling’, finding this phrase better encompasses the range of practices used to capture and disseminate personal narratives

in the projects we discuss in this paper, as well as the variety of types of personal stories shared through them.

Following the work of many prominent researchers in the field, we use 'digital storytelling' to refer specifically to "a workshop-based process by which 'ordinary people' create their own short autobiographical films that can be streamed on the Web or broadcast on television" (Burgess 2007). Further, Poletti (2011), referring to Lambert and the elements of digital storytelling developed by the Center for Digital Storytelling in California, proposes digital storytelling is a distinct genre of autobiographical narrative, governed by a set of specific textual features and 'rules' (Poletti 77). While many of the ABC's intentions for the life storytelling projects they facilitate reflect some of the broad principles of digital storytelling—such as to "give voice to the myriad tales of everyday life as experienced by ordinary people in their own terms" (Hartley and McWilliam 3)—*ABC Open* and *Heywire* are not primarily workshop-based projects and many of the stories produced within them deviate from the generic features of digital stories as outlined by Poletti.

For example, digital stories tend to follow a narrative arc, have a protagonist whose needs, desires and realisations are clear to the audience, and provide a sense of closure (Poletti 77-78). The life narratives captured through the ABC's projects, however, do not always include these distinctive elements. *Heywire* stories, in particular, are often fragmentary, a slice of life, and can lack closure or a distinct sense of an ending. Thus, finding the term digital storytelling refers to a very specific kind of story and storytelling practice, we favour the broader term life storytelling when describing the range of life narratives that *ABC Open* and *Heywire* comprise. While we find many similarities between life stories and digital stories and frequently refer to these throughout this paper, by writing 'life narratives' we mean the personal stories captured through workshops as well as acquired contribution; the structured, "uniform" style of short, autobiographical story (Poletti 78) in addition to the more fragmentary, incomplete life narratives.

Through participant observation on the websites of the *ABC Open* and *Heywire* projects and a series of interviews with *Heywire* project facilitators and participants, we have investigated the objectives that underpin each of these projects and considered ways in which these might clash with the intentions of the project participants. Our specific interest in this paper is the idea of 'authentic voice' which pertains to the communication of lived experience and the sense of realness and truth that is inherent in life narratives. We particularly examine the ways in which project facilitation and the curation of stories for public broadcast illuminates the ways the institution's understandings and value of what constitutes authentic self-expression can differ from those of project participants. We find that these conflicting understandings mean that broadcasters can both help and hinder the amplification of authentic voice, discussing both the challenges and affordances they offer in relation to *ABC Open* and *Heywire*. This paper hypothesises that while projects such as *ABC Open* and *Heywire* provide important opportunities for people to express and represent themselves, the aims of the institution necessarily impact upon, and shape, the participants' stories, leading

to the amplification of voices which match the ABC's framework for 'authentic voice', rather than those of the people they sought to engage.

#### VOICE AND AUTHENTICITY

The idea of 'giving voice' is central to many life story and digital storytelling projects; furthermore, that such projects capture authenticity, genuineness, and deliver real accounts of individuals' lives is central to their rationale, and important to project facilitators as well as participants. In this paper, the term voice refers to self-expressions and self-representations by 'ordinary people', captured and disseminated through personal narrative and using digital tools. The idea of authenticity has to do with realness and truth; when considered alongside personal narratives and voice, it is inherently linked to lived experience. Discussing the idea of voice applied to the Internet, Mitra and Watts argue that the idea of authenticity is crucial to establishing a legitimate voice in cyberspace. They write:

We offer authenticity as a multi-dimensional construct that includes notions of truth, accuracy, eloquence and an ontic connection with lived experience. An authentic voice speaks of a lived experience in an ethical and accurate genuine way (Mitra and Watts 490).

The very features that characterise digital stories and the life stories produced through projects such as *ABC Open* and *Heywire* naturally convey a sense of authenticity, accuracy and genuineness. Drawing from Burgess (2006) and Poletti (2011), digital stories are defined by particular content and a number of key stylistic features. Aside from their digital or technological component, digital stories are generally characterised by their use of first-person voice, references to lived experience, use of memory and personal anecdote, and a warm tone or style. As Burgess writes, "digital stories are in general marked by their sincerity, warmth, and humanity" (209); further, they evoke a sense of 'shared language' and connection because they are relatable and accessible to the audience (Burgess 211). For Burgess, "the sense of authentic self-expression they convey lowers the barriers to empathy" (ibid). It is through tone, style, the expression of personal experience and evocation of empathy, therefore, that life stories convey a sense of realness, truth and sincerity, features that are central to the idea of authenticity.

Mitra and Watts's discussion draws attention to a couple of other elements embedded in the notion of authenticity that are particularly relevant to storytelling projects: eloquence and authority. The personal stories that are produced within life story and digital storytelling projects—whether they are a community media based practice or facilitated by public institutions—are commonly a polished, coherent, eloquent and articulate account of lived experience. Poletti, discussing the elements that define digital storytelling, writes that,

as a site of autobiographical narrative, digital storytelling coaxes life stories in response to very specific expectations about what constitutes a 'good' story (closed structure, dramatic question, economy and first-

person perspective) and how that story can be made intelligible to its intended audience (emphasizing affect, reverie, identification and the use of universal themes) (78-79).

In digital stories, the storyteller's voice is therefore authentic because it is engaging; it commands attention and authority precisely because it articulates 'real life' experiences coherently, and quite often poetically.

These ideas of authenticity pertain to how the audience hears and understands the story, rather than what the storyteller feels is authentic for them. In storytelling projects that are managed by public service broadcasters and have sought to facilitate voice, the idea of delivering real, authentic voices to the listening public is a key institutional value (Thumim, "Everyone Has a Story to Tell" 623). In seeking to amplify the voices of 'ordinary people', as opposed to professional media producers, broadcasters also perpetuate the idea that they provide opportunity for people to exercise control over their expressions and representations of self. The institution's concept of what is authentic for the storyteller therefore appears intertwined with their understanding of what constitutes an authentic voice for the audience. However, due to the broadcaster's need to produce stories of a particular quality—"good" stories, as Poletti (79) describes—it is possible people's personal narratives are edited or shaped to be the coherent and polished storytelling voice that an audience wants to hear, rather than the voice that is most authentic for the storyteller.

In considering how broadcasters such as the ABC understand and value the idea of authentic voice and the way they both help and hinder its amplification, we examine two current storytelling projects within the ABC: *ABC Open* and *Heywire*, which we describe in detail below. We also refer to research that has been done on two of the BBC's well-known digital-storytelling projects: *London's Voices* and *Capture Wales*, both of which ended several years ago. These projects garnered significant scholarly comment and are of interest given their public broadcasting context.

Each of these projects has different techniques for working with people to record and produce personal narratives. For instance, the BBC's projects were both workshop-based and, as Thumim suggests, followed "the tradition of digital storytelling as set out by the Center for Digital Storytelling in Berkeley, California" (Thumim, "Self-representation and Digital Culture" 75). *ABC Open*, on the other hand, is both a mixture of workshop-based storytelling and acquired contribution. It teaches digital literacy skills to its regional participants using available consumer-based technology, thus allowing these participants to acquire the skills as citizen journalists to continue to share stories from their communities. *ABC Open's* emphasis is on providing participants not only with a voice to share stories on the ABC broadcasting and distribution platforms, but also with long term digital literacy and production skills. Although *Capture Wales* was similar in that it facilitated storytelling workshops for broadcast platforms, the contemporary media landscape has allowed *Open* participants to use more accessible technology, and to learn the skills to maintain production, once they have

completed workshops, of their own content in the user-generated “participatory media” culture (Jenkins).

### *HEYWIRE*

*Heywire* is an ABC Radio project and a nation-wide storytelling competition for 16-22 year-olds who live in rural and regional parts of Australia. The ABC provides a website (<http://abc.net.au/heywire>) and invites young people from non-metropolitan areas to contribute short, personal narratives about their lives, in which they describe what life in rural, regional or remote Australia is like for them, and express their views on subjects that are important to them. *Capture Wales* and *London's Voices* provided workshops during which stories were curated and produced. *Heywire*, on the other hand, is not a workshop-based project; it simply provides a website and invites youth to populate it with their own individually-crafted content. Its aims are to provide young, rural and regional people with an opportunity for a voice that is heard (Hirst, “Heywire for Educators”). The commonality between the BBC’s and the ABC’s projects lies in two central elements: that they produce ‘ordinary’ people’s personal narratives, and subsequently broadcast authentic voices.

In her 2009 paper “Everyone Has a Story to Tell”, Thumim notes that both *London's Voices* (LV) and *Capture Wales* (CW) worked on the premise that self-representation delivered ‘authentic, real voices’ to the BBC audience (Thumim, “Everyone Has a Story to Tell” 622). She states: “The implication is that CW and LV each provide the audience with access to the real, and that this is a more authentic reality than that delivered by professionals, precisely because people represent themselves” (ibid 623). In these storytelling projects people produce self-representations through creating short, personal stories—often comprised of anecdotes or memories—spoken in the storyteller’s own voice, and using photographs and short video. Therefore, for an audience, the idea of authenticity is transmitted through the fact these are accounts of real experiences.

The idea of authenticity is equally important to the storytellers themselves. The projects are touted as providing people with an opportunity to ‘tell it like it is’ (*Heywire*) and ‘be heard’. Burgess describes that “(f)or the storyteller, the digital story is a means of ‘becoming real’ to others” (211) and in the projects we discuss in this paper, the desire to represent the self and make one’s own stories and ideas heard appears to be of central value to participants. Interviews with a number of young people who entered a personal narrative in the ABC’s annual *Heywire* competition this year revealed that youth have numerous reasons for sharing stories about their lives. These included wanting to release pent-up emotions; draw attention to an issue they felt was important; and sometimes to challenge the negative stereotypes of life on the land or in small communities by representing the highlights of their lives in rural and regional Australia (Holt). As winning *Heywire* stories are broadcast by ABC Local Radio throughout non-metropolitan Australia, most young storytellers understood *Heywire* as an opportunity for ‘having a voice’ and getting their own stories, ideas and opinions ‘heard’ (ibid).

However, the notion that storytelling projects provide opportunities for capturing and broadcasting an authentic voice largely undermines the fact that the narratives produced within them are considered, deliberate underrepresentations and expressions of self. Thumim argues that processes of mediation necessarily position people in a certain way and the self-representations are therefore both shaped and limited by the parameters of the project (Thumim, "Self-representation and Digital Culture" 78). For instance, the intentions and expectations that participants bring to projects and the institution's objectives and resources impact at all stages of the storytelling process—from the facilitation of storytelling workshops, to the production and broadcast of the participants' personal narratives. As such, to what extent do storytelling projects managed by institutions support people to represent themselves in the way they choose? What is authentic for the storyteller?

ABC producers and editors involved in *ABC Open* and *Heywire* have specific rationales for each project, as well as a particular editorial policy that they must fulfil. What is of interest is how these editorial guidelines help or hinder authentic storytelling and voice. And, just like traditional publishing, does the editorial process further legitimise the voice, or influence it with the institution's and possible audience's expectations? Hancox, drawing from Couldry (374), writes:

digital storytelling means that a whole range of personal stories now are being told in potentially public form using digital media resources. What this means to the creation of digital stories may be, however, an increased emphasis on appealing to a potential audience rather than in fulfilling the intentions of the creator (Hancox 67).

For example, the ABC Editorial Policy takes into account the audience's interests, which would impact the editorial process, as well as the nature of accuracy, which in itself is highly relevant to authenticity:

Types of fact-based content include news and analysis of current events, documentaries, factual dramas and lifestyle programs. The ABC requires that reasonable efforts must be made to ensure accuracy in all fact-based content. The ABC gauges those efforts by reference to:

- the type, subject and nature of the content;
- the likely audience expectations of the content;
- the likely impact of reliance by the audience on the accuracy of the content; and
- the circumstances in which the content was made and presented (ABC, *ABC Editorial Policies* 4).

Further issues arise over how the story may be told, and also how the storyteller defines truth in their storytelling.

In addition to the ABC's editorial policy and the Corporation's particular objectives for the project, *Heywire* also has a strong political agenda, is partially federally-funded, and is run as a storytelling competition; thus, while its central aims are to "provide a positive opportunity for young people's voices to be heard" and, through the website, provide them with a space and platform for representing their own lives and identities (Sadov 3), *Heywire*—by its very nature—effectively amplifies a distinct kind of self-representation and voice. The competition requires particular criteria to be fulfilled, and some voices and viewpoints to be privileged over others. As stated on the website, "(e)ach year, the best stories that have been uploaded to the *Heywire* website are chosen to be broadcast across the ABC on Triple J, Radio National and Local Radio" (Hirst, "About Heywire"). Through selecting some young people's personal narratives as winners, and a select few for broadcast, the *Heywire* project is best supporting the amplification of voice for the storytellers whose narratives best fit their framework for voice. As such, the *Heywire* project is not effectively creating a space for authentic voices to be articulated and heard; there is a competition brief to fill, and personal stories amplified through radio broadcast are those that the ABC deems as an engaging, coherent depiction of lived experience. The institution's understanding and judgement of authentic voice is privileged over the storyteller's.

*Heywire*'s structure as a competition has been central to the project since its inception in 1998; however, the fact it is a competition also appears central in the challenges the ABC faces in terms of giving young, rural and regional Australians a voice, and the opportunity to represent their own lives and identities to others. Since 1998, over 7,000 young people have shared stories about their lives through the *Heywire* project (Hirst, "Heywire for Educators"). Further, in 2013 approximately 700 rural and regional youth shared a personal story on the *Heywire* website. This is the largest number of story contributions that the ABC has received for the *Heywire* competition in one year.

Despite capturing a substantial number of young people's stories and amplifying their voices via multiple ABC platforms, the *Heywire* project is seriously undermining its own potential for giving voice precisely through selecting the small number it deems 'best' as competition winners. The winners Summit attended by the 40 or so young people who win the *Heywire* competition undoubtedly provides these young people with excellent opportunities in terms of youth leadership, voice, and is overall a very wholesome event (Holt; McKenzie and James 25); however non-winners may find their voices disregarded and the personal benefits they may derive from their participation is therefore limited. *Heywire* is an example of an institution's objectives overriding those of project participants. While the ABC evidently envisage that a storytelling competition and winners Summit is the best model for supporting rural and regional youth to have a voice, the vast number of stories on the website suggests that a different model—one that extends opportunities for self-expression and self-representation beyond competition winners to young storytellers more generally—may better provide rural and regional youth with a chance for an amplified voice.

### *ABC Open*

*ABC Open* is a public participation project that aims to engage regional Australians in participatory media by providing facilitation and support for them to share their stories nationally on the ABC website and program broadcast on ABC 24. The initiative has 45 producers in all of the regional stations of the ABC. As the statement for *ABC Open* states:

We all know the media is changing, with more and more people making their own videos, writing stories and sharing photos and ideas through social media. ABC Open is an exciting initiative which provides a focal point for Australian regional communities who want to get involved in sharing their experiences through the ABC via websites, radio and TV (ABC, "About Us").

This simple mission statement suggests that the ABC is aware of the influence of informally or non-facilitated user-generated content, but sees its role as assisting the learning of its audience in digital literacy skills and sharing their personal stories as a way that they themselves can still remain relevant in the changing media landscape. This is in addition to its contribution as a society wide learning institution to provide its audience with skills in which to interact and engage with the media and impart their personal knowledge to others by way of a national broadcaster's platform. As of 27 September 2013, *Open* has received and produced 45,073 contributions.

Supporting the authentic voice is of great relevance to further investigating the ABC Open initiative, particularly as the broadcaster is empowering 'ordinary people' by teaching them the skills to further tell stories from their communities. The ABC Open project is evidence of how an institution such as the ABC provides a very prominent opportunity for amplifying voices, and contributing to society based and social learning. One can also hypothesise that the authentic voice would be supported in this context, and is an important part of the core values of the projects. In projects initiated as part of the larger ABC Open initiative—such as the "Aftermath: Flood Recovery" project and the "A Day in the Life" project—authenticity would be important in inviting further contributors. Participants need to know from the outset that their voice is respected and valued by the broadcaster, that their story is important, and that the learning experiences they gain for their story contributions count long after the workshop has finished. Additionally, it is important participants feel the story is their own and is authentic for them; their own authorial intentions should be respected so that processes of facilitation and curation do not impact upon and shape their narratives to the extent that they are less authentic to the participants.

Broadcasting and distributing personal stories from public service media institutions suggests both challenges and opportunities with this 'top down' approach to what is typically regarded as 'bottom up' community based participatory storytelling practice that has its roots in community media (Hartley and McWilliam). Community media is generally defined

“as media that allows for access and participation” (Rennie 22) and is a non-profit sector that largely aims to represent marginalised voices and communities, and to contribute to a diverse media landscape. According to Howley, what makes community media distinct is that it offers opportunities for civil society to ‘talk back’ to the larger institutions of public life. Now, though, public service broadcasters such as the British Broadcasting Corporation (BBC) and the ABC are using community media practices, such as grass roots collaborative storytelling, as part of their programming to also amplify voices from under-represented communities. While this kind of work has the potential to broadcast previously unheard narratives to a wider audience, it may also restrict the capacity for community to ‘talk back’ if the institution mediates community-generated content.

The ABC initiated the *ABC Open* project in 2010 and has invited participants in regional parts of Australia to share personal stories. *ABC Open* operates in addition to earlier participatory storytelling projects such as *Heywire*, now in its fifteenth year, which invite stories from rural and regional youth. Both initiatives have particular relevance to the ABC’s Charter and role as a national public broadcaster and the Corporation’s aims to contribute to national identity, reflect cultural diversity and broadcast programs of an educational nature (<http://www.abc.net.au/corp/pubs/ABCcharter.htm>). Particular challenges for public service broadcasters include editorial policies, audience expectations, production and broadcast quality value, and the chance of possibly larger institutional expectations or constraints.

One of the initial challenges public broadcasters face is the curation of community content. The nature of curating personal digital stories for broadcast television, or indeed new media platforms, provides the opportunity to resurrect a popular genre from the 1950s and 1960s—that of Anthology Television—which has a long history of inviting amateurs (Kraszewski 38). Digital stories can be curated from workshops into such a program format. However, curation of stories for broadcast platforms invites questions as to the authenticity and authorship of the storyteller’s voice. Hartley suggests that when such expertise is used with projects like these the results are excellent, particularly in regard to production quality; there is the concern as to whether the facilitation of these workshops is a “bully or a pulley” (Hartley 131). Here, Hartley questions how much the digital story is personal and autobiographical, and how much has been shaped in order to achieve broadcast production values and themes to appeal to a wider audience: how much does the institution shape the stories produced?

Another challenge is the very personal and intimate nature of people’s stories. In the context of public television broadcasting, the BBC *Capture Wales* digital storytelling project facilitators were upfront in arguing that their domain for digital storytelling was not a ‘safe place’ (Meadows and Kidd); *Heywire*, on the other hand, specifies that the project offers a “safe and protected space—a space for young people to interact freely” through sharing stories about their lives (Sadov 3). A key concern with storytellers feeling safe is whether the stories will still contain the same emotional details and depth. In life storytelling projects there are numerous anxieties surrounding storytellers’ safety, and the need to protect them

from harm, as well as the project facilitator's concerns over production quality. Furthermore, as Lambert (2006) notes, although emotional and personal content is an important element of storytelling, it is something that needs to be done respectfully and with a fair degree of common sense. There is a risk of exploitation of the emotional aspects of a story, so such personal emotions have to be treated sensitively and with maturity (Lambert 53). Hence, storytellers need to feel that their stories are valued, and to trust that the personal elements will be treated with respect.

Writing of workshop facilitation, Hancox (2012) suggests trust is paramount in the workshop phases of storytelling. Therefore, establishing trust from the outset is vital for supporting people to express and represent themselves wholly and honestly. The storyteller must feel their story will be treated with care. So, at what point do facilitators need to adapt to their participants' needs, and how does this facilitation process impact on the overall telling of the story? Hancox's recent research makes some interesting points about the ideas the facilitator might have with the outcomes of such a storytelling workshop, and suggests that these ideas may be at odds with how the participants want to tell their stories (Hancox 70).

There is also the concern over the storyteller's intellectual property rights. Hartley suggests that scalability is a problem and that perhaps digital storytelling propagation has not been achieved because public, private and intellectual investment has not been made. Questions therefore remain as to whether the digital storytelling form is better suited to broadcast media, or on a festival circuit (Hartley 123-126).

Despite these challenges, opportunities exist for both the storytellers and the broadcasters by way of a co-creative knowledge exchange and a dialogical approach to learning, where participants gain various media production and literacy skills to continue storytelling in their local communities, and PSBs gain local content and voices, as well as newly skilled citizen journalists and storytellers at the coalface of communities. The importance of giving the audience a voice is also of interest, and the motivations for this are often in relation to providing local content. The Australian Content Standard (ACS) "requires all commercial free-to-air television licensees to broadcast an annual minimum transmission quota of 55 per cent Australian programming between 6am and midnight" (ACMA, "Australian TV Content"). Although government funded broadcasters, such as the ABC, are defined as non-commercial, they still need to fulfil a quota of local content. Furthermore, storytelling projects provide an amalgamation between community media practices and public broadcasting platforms for the benefit of the public interest. As *ABC Open* states on their website:

We always want people to feel that they come away with something—a new skill, an audience for their ideas, stories and work, and to feel that the collaboration has been fruitful. ABC Open isn't about getting free content, or taking away resources from the rest of the ABC. It's new funding to help people do what they want to do (ABC, "Frequently Asked Questions").

Thus the broadcasting institution has become an educational institution by providing its audience with various digital literacy skills and giving voice to under-represented communities. In the 1990s, the Mansfield Review asked if the ABC should provide all forms of programming to all potential audiences, or focus on audiences neglected by commercial media. The Review concluded that the ABC should do both (Flew and Harrington 163).

In addition to this, there has been a ‘semantic shift’ from the concept of the ABC as a Public Service Broadcaster (PSB), to that of Public Service Media (PSM), as it embraces online and participatory affordances to further engage its audience (Hutchinson). The creation of digital literacy initiatives such as *ABC Pool* (2003-2013), and more recently *ABC Open* in 2010, reflect the ABC’s move to participatory media projects. In 2008 the Australian Federal Government’s Department of Broadband, Communications and the Digital Economy instigated a public review into the role of national public broadcasters in view of new digital media culture and the role they can play. As a result of this inquiry, it supported the claims of the earlier co-creative participatory project *ABC Pool*. This inception of the co-creative collaborative social media site *ABC Pool* began in various public capacities between 2008 and 2010 (Wilson, Hutchinson and Shea) and has provided a valuable springboard for further co-creative participatory initiatives such as *ABC Open*, which provides the opportunity to amplify the regional voice.

#### CONCLUSION

In all the storytelling projects this paper has discussed, production quality is highly important to broadcasters and produces further tensions for the idea of authentic voice. This is particularly noticeable in *ABC Open* and *Capture Wales*, both of which have produced local content of excellent quality. In both these projects it appears that the process of working with the community is paramount; however, the quality of the content the project delivers is also important, and people’s stories will be edited or ‘polished’ to meet broadcast standards. As Thumim explains, the content produced within institutionally-managed storytelling projects such as *Capture Wales* must meet both the standards of the institution and the expectations of its audience (“Everyone Has a Story to Tell” 630); similarly in *ABC Open*, editing or polishing participants’ stories may seem a necessary part of the project as the ABC audience expects high-quality content from their national broadcaster. Referring to the notion of the bully or the pulley (Hartley), there is a risk here that a story could become a third person narrative rather than a first person story through the polish that broadcast media requires, even in this grassroots context. The broadcaster’s need for quality content can mean that personal stories become less the authentic voice of the storyteller, reflecting more the expertise of the broadcaster as well as their specific intentions for the project.

Through *ABC Open* and *Heywire*, the ABC has created spaces for a particular kind of self-representation and personal story, which is in keeping with their Charter and the perceived needs of the ABC audience. In both these projects, the institution’s need to fulfil particular objectives—such as competition criteria, or the production of story content that is of broadcast quality—means that project participants can exercise only a limited degree of

control over the way their self-representations and stories are amplified through these projects. The research on *Heywire* and *ABC Open* thus indicates that although the idea of providing 'ordinary people' with opportunities for voice is central to each project's rationale, storytelling initiatives facilitated by PSBs cannot capture or broadcast the 'authentic' or unmediated voice of the public; rather, personal stories and voices are necessarily shaped by or tailored to suit the requirements and structures of the institution. This is not to undermine the fact that projects such as *Open* and *Heywire* provide valuable opportunities for the people who participate in terms of learning digital media and narrative skills, and experimenting with modes of self-expression and self-representation. The projects can also empower people to feel their voices matter. However, it is possible that PSBs are structurally unsuited to the task of capturing and amplifying 'authentic voices' since they are inescapably bound by Government and institutional policies and parameters that limit the sort of content they may produce and broadcast within the projects they facilitate.



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