

Intersectionality in autonomous journalism practices

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Abstract

Media activists who are women, queer, trans*, Indigenous and/or people of colour are shifting mediascapes through intersectional autonomous journalism practices. This community-based co-research project analyses data from six semi-structured focus group workshops with media activists, who identify a contradictory logic between mainstream and alternative journalism. Two distinct autonomous journalism practices emerge that complement and extend traditional horizontal prefigurative media activist practices through an attentiveness to intersectional identities and interlocking systems of oppression. In rooted direct-action journalism, grassroots autonomous journalists collectively report from a perspective rooted in the concerns of the movement, creating media as a direct-action tactic; whereas in solidarity journalism, autonomous journalists report across movements in solidarity with intersectionally marginalised groups and communities. We argue that, emphasising intersectional mutual aid, relationship building, consent, accountability and content co-creation, these value-based practices have begun to shift dominant media and cultural logics. Finally, we offer critical reflections on some of the challenges inherent in these practices, including a meta-analysis of the intersectional value practices in our activist co-research methodology.

Keywords

Alternative media, autonomous media, community media, direct action, intersectionality, media activism, media practices, new journalism forms, participatory action research, social movements, solidarity

Introduction

In today's highly contested contemporary mediascape, the importance of grassroots autonomous social justice media cannot be over-emphasised. Alternative and autonomous media projects supporting social movement struggles are becoming increasingly pivotal in countering the alt-right messaging that is intensifying hate speech, promoting discourses linked to violent racist, homophobic, transphobic and sexist attacks and producing a violent discursive regime in the mainstream press and public sphere.

Analysing alternative media that counter this tendency, researchers have examined both content and structures of grassroots media projects (Costanza-Chock, 2012; Downing, 2003; Kidd, 2003; Wolfson, 2014), citizen journalism (Rodríguez, 2001), community radio (Bailey, Cammaerts & Carpentier, 2008), livestreaming (Thorburn, 2014), online activism (Bennett & Segerberg, 2012; Gerbaudo, 2012), and other forms of social justice media. In 1999, the formation of online social movement news site Indymedia was a watershed moment in the development of grassroots autonomous media and journalism (Atton, 2003; Hanke, 2005; Kidd, 2003; Milioni, 2009; Pickard, 2006; Wolfson, 2015). Dorothy Kidd (2003: 60) explains how the

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Independent Media Centre (IMC) movement 'is based on a nonhierarchical structure that relies on highly complex processes of networked consensus'. She argues that IMCs have opened up a new communications commons that challenges the enclosure of the communications commons (Kidd, 2003: 51), not just through counterhegemonic content but also via highly collaborative global production and decision-making practices. John Downing (2001: 70) argues that autonomous media are involved in processes of internal participatory democracy, engaging anarchist and anarchist-feminist principles such as prefiguration and horizontalism to contest the status quo. Prefiguration is a mode of organising new political and social structures that engage the politics of everyday life to transform the operation of power (Maeckelberg, 2011). Horizontalism, drawing on social movements in the Global South such as the Zapatistas, is a process that rejects hierarchy and bosses, instead developing directly democratic participatory processes (Wolfson, 2014). These scholars also identify some issues with the purportedly open, democratic processes used by Indymedia and other open source or free software movement participants. Wolfson (2014: 22) points to the predominance of 'white, male, middle-class activists [who] largely lead the Cyber Left', as well as the complexities and weaknesses of globally networked consensus decision-making. Costanza-Chock (2012: 383) argues that, 'Processes that are "open" are thus typically dominated by white straight males, by those with class, race and gender privilege, including access to free time, feeling empowered to speak in public and today, by increased access to digital literacies and ICTs.' However, as Costanza-Chock et al. (2017) have also found, media activists organising in LGBTQ communities use intersectional strategies in their media production practices that engage community and accountability in transformative media organising attentive to addressing issues of race, gender, sexuality and more. Thus an attentiveness to intersectional community media practices may deepen our understanding of power and process in autonomous media.

The Media Action Research Group, similar to the participatory action research methodology of Costanza-Chock, Schweidler and the Transformative Media Organizing Project (2017), researches with queer, trans*, women, people of colour and Indigenous media activists to better understand and support social justice movements and media. Specifically, our research collective identified five intersectional research-activism commitments or pillars as the project's basis of unity: anti-capitalism, anti-racism, anti-colonialism, feminism, and queer and trans* liberation. The first step in the research process was to invite autonomous media activists who specifically identified with these pillars to 'radical media mixers' to discuss their greatest challenges, successes and desires for intersectional autonomous media activism today. Two specific media practices emerged from the mixers: rooted direct-action journalism, or reporting from a location rooted within a social justice movement; and solidarity journalism, or reporting on people or events outside your own direct experience in solidarity across intersections and differences.

This article maps out and critically analyses these two autonomous journalism practices to deepen our understanding of the challenges and successes of everyday intersectional media practices, with the objective of supporting the social movements with which we research through the co-creation of knowledge that can be applied in media activism today. We first present our participatory methodology and map out the key concepts of media logics, rooted direct-action journalism, solidarity journalism, and intersectionality. We then present findings from the mixers, where we explore participants' understanding of the contradictory logics of mainstream and alternative media; critically analyse autonomous media practices of direct-action journalism and solidarity journalism; and reflect on ongoing challenges within media projects and our participatory research methodology to draw some tentative conclusions about the potential of intersectional grassroots practices to challenge media and research power.

Methodology

Founded in 2013, the Media Action Research Group is a feminist, horizontal research collective co-researching with grassroots autonomous media activists to co-produce knowledge through research, media production and movement organising for transformative social change. We employ what we call a Participatory Communicative Action Research (PCAR) methodology, based on the anarchist Participatory Action Research methodology used by the Montreal based Collectif de Recherche sur l'Autonomie Collective (Breton et al., 2012a, 2012b) with the broad aims of: documenting contemporary challenges and successes faced by intersectional autonomous media activists; supporting intersectional social movements with research partnerships, sharing and co-developing resources that can strengthen networks, capacities and skills; and integrating grassroots movement practices into research to challenge intensifying neoliberal university research hierarchies.

While the projects with we research are forms of alternative media, it is important to note that within this broader field, our focus is on 'autonomous media', which can be defined as explicitly anti-capitalist grassroots media that are self-organised according to principles of collective autonomy and within broader anti-capitalist and anti-authoritarian movements (Jeppesen, 2016: 385). The media projects with which we co-research have explicit or implicit anti-capitalist politics, and are therefore attentive to issues of power and privilege with respect to social class and other intersectional axes of oppression in the media in terms of both representation and participation. Within autonomous media movements, we pay particular attention to media practices aimed at amplifying the voices of women, queer and trans* people, Black, Indigenous and people of colour (BIPOC). We therefore align our methodology with intersectional antiracist, anti-colonial, queer, trans* and feminist approaches to research in sociology, media, communication and culture (Breton et al., 2012a, 2012b; Cahill, 2007; Costanza-Chock, Schweidler & Transformative Media Organizing Project, 2017; Daring et al., 2012; Eslami & Maynard, 2013; Fine, 2006; Heckert & Cleminson, 2011; Jaggar, 2014; Patai, 1991; Tuhiwai Smith, 1999).

The empirical findings presented in this article derive from focus group interview data from six semi-structured 'radical media mixers' conducted in 2014 and 2015 with over 90 media activists in Vancouver, Victoria, Toronto, Ottawa, Montreal and Halifax. The mixers were participatory workshops using spaces and practices familiar to activists. We started with check-ins, then moved to break-out group discussions using flip-charts, followed by report-backs, with check-outs to conclude. Acknowledging differences in economic access between university researchers and community media activists, we provided an honorarium, food, transportation and childcare funds.

Participants represented a range of intersectional identities across race, indigeneity, gender, sexuality, age, disability, social class and education; they worked in a variety of media genres, including film, video, music, radio, podcasts, print, digital media and hacktivism. The mixers were audio-recorded, transcribed, coded in NVivo, and analysed collaboratively within the research collective through a collaborative, iterative process of brainstorming, writing, analysis, revision and final validation. These findings were in turn validated externally by sharing a working document with research participants and providing various avenues for feedback. This article presents the findings on one of the emergent themes, autonomous journalism practices.

Theoretical framework

Mainstream media: The logic of entrepreneurial journalism

Within the journalism profession today, we see the emergence of two key crises. The first is the reorganisation of mainstream labour under neoliberalism; the second is the withdrawal of audience support through a widespread perception of media bias paired with a trend towards online 'media me'.

Nicole Cohen (2015: 515) argues that, within the field of journalism, paid labour has traditionally been organised according to 'a gendered model of employment based on a male citizen-worker who enjoys "full-time continuous employment" for one employer, works on the employer's premises, and receives employment-based benefits'. Today, journalists are 'facing mass layoffs, the shuttering of print publications, and the emergence of digital-first media organizations' (2015: 513), with journalists being pushed towards precarious freelance labour in a drive toward 'entrepreneurial journalism'. The student must learn not just to be a news reporter, but also to package their own news, sell it to outlets, brand their name and produce multi-platform multi-genre reportage.

This organisational form of new media labour also describes 'the more marginalised, feminized end of the media worker spectrum' (Cohen, 2015: 514), where an enterprising journalist can 'make a name for herself, provided that she attunes herself to market demands and does not require secure work' (2015: 514). Marginalised groups are the most under-represented in mainstream journalism, as both journalists and subjects (2015: 526). 'This challenge is heightened by the spread of unpaid internships, which further entrench class, race, and gender inequality in media industries' (2015: 526), making access increasingly difficult for marginalised journalists and communities.

Within this context, journalism faces a second crisis: the collapse of the traditional audience through a mass migration to the digital 'media me' based on new media's technological affordances and a perceived lack of objectivity in mainstream media. No longer participating in a nationally shared media experience that might bring people together in democratic debate, media audiences choose to remain isolated in an echo chamber of their pre-existing cognitive frames. Thus the individualism necessary to promote the entrepreneurial journalist's brand is the same individualism that drives audiences away from mainstream news media.

This neoliberal logic is precisely what autonomous journalists challenge. As Atton (2006: 16) suggests, 'alternative media practices have not simply broken with mainstream practices, they have often sought to radically redefine them'. While committed to telling the truth, autonomous journalists emphasise different values in reporting, resulting in not just different content or outcomes, but different *types* of outcomes that challenge the field of journalism to rethink its conception of ethics in reporting.

Rooted direct-action journalism

We define the term 'rooted direct-action journalism' as reporting on issues of concern from within a specific community or social movement from a supportive perspective, challenging the traditional media framing of protest. Harlow and Johnson (2011: 1359) have found that, 'Mainstream media often discredit and marginalise protest actions, with journalists relying on a "protest paradigm" that focuses on tactics, spectacles, and dramatic actions, rather than the underlying reasons for the protest.' This results in a news cycle that obscures social issues, disrespects civil society actors and sows distrust among social movement participants, who may then refuse traditional media interviews.

Challenging this paradigm, autonomous journalists are social movement actors themselves, and report on issues motivating the protest, critically analysing the movement's claims from within a sympathetic media frame. Citizen media site Global Voices, for example, reported from the perspective of Arab Spring protesters:

Global Voices was significantly less likely than the NYT to rely on a spectacle frame; its authors instead framed their posts to emphasise the injustices being committed, to provoke sympathy for the protesters, and to legitimize and validate their causes and actions. Further, protesters were portrayed positively almost all the time. (Harlow & Johnson, 2011: 1368)

The provision of insider perspectives can shift important cognitive frames. During the 2012 Quebec Student Strike, The Media Co-op produced reportage 'from a perspective rooted within the social movement itself' (Jeppesen, 2016: 391), as did Concordia University TV (CUTV), which 'engaged in the direct-action of the strike, providing a direct report from the streets' (2016: 396). In other words, these autonomous journalists were protesters, taking on the same types of risks, such as tear gas, kettling, arrest and police violence. They reported from an intersectional anti-capitalist perspective, and generated trust among student strikers, their supporters and the mass audience that regularly watched the coverage. Student and other autonomous journalists thus corrected for the mainstream media protest paradigm by providing insider perspectives. Costanza-Chock, Schweidler and the Transformative Media Organizing Project (2017: 177) have found that, 'Media work is most powerful and effective when it is deeply rooted in the struggles, narratives, and actions of the community.'

Three key dimensions of rooted direct-action journalism emerge: a shared sociopolitical project between journalists and social movement actors based on and generative of trust; an insider understanding and representation of intersectional issues that results in more powerful and effective reportage; and alternative value-practices shared among journalists, interview subjects and communities.

Solidarity journalism

We define solidarity journalism as a practice of autonomous journalism that constructs relationships of mutual support across communities of difference who share a political vision, accounting for ways in which journalism creates relationships among community members with a focus on collective autonomy. It provides media space for intersectional communities with systemic barriers to accessing storytelling spaces, or who are frequently stereotyped, misrepresented or invisibilised in public discourse. Solidarity journalism, moreover, is premised on creating relationships accountable to communities through an ethics of care in reporting.

While mainstream media are bound by journalist ethics, these guidelines seldom include an ethics of care – particularly between journalist and audience (Pech & Leibel, 2006). If they did, 'The result would be an institution committed not only to providing information to its community, but also to doing so in such a way that its practices promote solidarity and mutual concern among community members' (2006: 142). Journalists must therefore not just 'care about' issues, but also 'care for' audience members (2006: 143), moving towards a motivational displacement from self to other, whereby the reporter sees and understands the needs of another and feels compelled to act in their interests (2006: 144). 'Caring for' is based on the premise not that people are isolated rational beings capable of objectivity in journalism and rationally engaging in deliberative discourse (2006: 146), but rather that people exist inherently in relation with and are therefore accountable to others. Journalism practices must develop ethical relationships of care through considering the impact of news media content on audience communities, and support the development of an ethical community-oriented self among readers (2006: 145).

Pech and Leibel (2006) suggest that the role of journalism is to provide information, conceptualising this as a linear relationship as articulated in the mathematical model of communication (Shannon & Weaver, 1949). However, this erases the agency of media subjects and audience, whereas media content both shapes and is shaped by not just encoding but also decoding communities (Hall, 1980). Pech and Leibel overlook media practices within autonomous media, whereby solidarity journalism already defines its own accountability to the public good, via the knowledge, media and communication commons, as mentioned by Kidd (2003). We must thus examine ways in which communicative action for autonomous journalists nurtures relationships among media producers, subjects, audiences, owners and content, emphasising ethics in the process of news gathering, framing, representation and audience

interaction. While Pech and Leibel (2006) focus on relationships between journalists and audience, we also examine relationships of solidarity between journalists and communities being represented. Once the flawed paradigms of journalistic objectivity and the mathematical model of communication are abandoned, relationships of solidarity can be observed between the reporter and interview subjects, extending this solidarity implicitly to the community in which the subjects are rooted. This calls for a shift in the imagined audience beyond the presumed normative or universal reader through an understanding of intersectional marginalities and oppressions.

Three key dimensions of solidarity journalism emerge here: co-construction of media content in solidarity with interview subjects; ethical media practices in news gathering and reporting generative of a radical ethics of care; and intersectional horizontal relationships of equality between journalists and the overlapping representational subjects and audience communities.

Intersectionality

Our outreach criteria were developed using an intersectional approach to transformative media organising similar to that of Costanza-Chock, Schweidler and the Transformative Media Organizing Project (2017). We understand intersectionality based on our experiences of the ways in which it has developed in both academic and activist uses. Patricia Hill Collins and Sirma Bilge (2016: 2) offer the following definition:

Intersectionality is a way of understanding and analyzing the complexity in the world, in people, and in human experiences. The events and conditions of social and political life and the self can seldom be understood as shaped by one factor. They are generally shaped by many factors in diverse and mutually influencing ways. When it comes to social inequality, people's lives and the organization of power in a given society are better understood as being shaped not by a single axis of social division, be it race or gender or class, but by many axes that work together and influence each other.

While intersectionality is an excellent analytical tool for understanding complex experiences of multiple systems of oppression, we also emphasize intersectionality as the basis for liberatory anti-oppression practices through media and social movement organising (Breton et al., 2012a).

The contradictory logics of alternative and mainstream media

Many of our co-research participants emphasised the contradictory logics between mainstream media and autonomous media. Some had the education, skills and experience of professional journalists, but felt alienated by mainstream media; others felt university journalism programs were so flawed that they preferred to avoid them altogether; and those who studied journalism had experienced many tensions.

Many participants reflected on struggles to engage in autonomous media practices, not wanting to replicate the oppressive logic of mainstream media. One participant noted that 'the journalistic media is a white male commercial institution and even if you're in alternative media, you're still gonna reproduce the logic of that to a certain extent' (HAL1-6). This echoes Cohen's (2015) findings that traditional news media encode a logic providing full-time employment for white males, and feminising and/or racialising precarious journalism employment. For our participants, this contradictory logic was evident in 'entrepreneurial journalism', where students must develop their own brand while remaining neutral. Therefore, many media activists felt uncomfortable with 'JSchool':

There's this perception that all these often middle-class, white journalism students don't have a bias. And that's a huge problem. I talked to [a university journalism program administrator who said], 'We're trying to do outreach, but there it is, we're really failing at getting Afro-Caribbean youth and native communities represented in journalism school and you see that in coverage.' (TOR4)

This admitted inaccessibility results in mainstream media being dominated by white middle-class journalists, which impacts media content: ‘You see that in coverage.’ Another participant expressed misgivings about studying journalism, preferring to be an activist and produce her own media. Participating in a short-term job skills program, she gained technical radio production skills; however, many journalism skills were pre-existing, such as in-depth community knowledge, relationships of trust and a facility with Mi’kmaq language – skills valued in autonomous media, and explicitly devalued in mainstream media. Another participant noted that CBC has discouraged Indigenous journalists from reporting on Indigenous issues because ‘they were too connected to it’ (TOR4), and noted that a white journalist would never be discouraged from reporting on issues affecting white people.

Thus our participants used an intersectional analysis to describe ways in which the mainstream media logic presumes white middle-class journalists are objective, whereas Indigenous people, people of colour, women and other marginalised groups are subjective. Moreover, this subjectivity is understood as a negative characteristic rather than a subject-position that could improve the insights and perspectives of journalists, and thus the quality of journalism. However, ‘The idea of value-neutral knowledge has come to be seen not only as empirically unlikely but perhaps even conceptually incoherent’ (Pech & Leibel, 2006: 141). Autonomous journalists foreground accountability and transparency through the subjectivity of intersectionally marginalised perspectives in media projects and representations.

While there are contradictions and tensions between autonomous and mainstream media, they are not two separate spheres; rather, there are several dimensions of crossover or hybridity. First, some mainstream journalists rely on alternative journalists for stories. For example, during the 2010 anti-G20 protests in Toronto, mainstream journalists would hang around the Alternative Media Centre waiting for a scoop. Similarly, during the Quebec 2012 Student Strike, CTV journalists had trouble finding student protesters to interview, due to a lack of trust, so they interviewed the live-stream video reporters working for CUTV, generating a hybrid media form where CUTV live-streamed their reporters being interviewed by a mainstream broadcast news media outlet. Second, sometimes activists from alternative political spaces write for mainstream media, such as a noted reporter who is

part of activism, he hangs out at the same places, he knows activists and he’s a perfect example, he gets stories out. So to me, if he wasn’t linked to activist communities, because he is already, his reporting wouldn’t be as good, or wouldn’t have all the information. (MON-01)

Being rooted in ‘subjective’ activist communities is not detrimental but generative of better informed and thus higher quality reporting. A third dimension of hybridity is through media activists who leave autonomous media for mainstream media positions. One participant laments the ‘brain drain’ (HAL2-17) from autonomous to mainstream journalism once people have developed their skills. These journalists bring their radical ethical practices with them to their mainstream positions, thus potentially shifting the mainstream media logic and continuing the project of contesting media power.

These three dimensions of hybridity illustrate how the autonomous media logic can make inroads into mainstream media. Thus it is important to consider the specificities of this new logic through two key media practices: rooted direct-action journalism and solidarity journalism.

Rooted direct-action journalism: Working within communities and movements

Autonomous media journalists engage three dimensions of rooted direct-action reporting from within communities and social movements. The objective is not just to present more sympathetic representations, but to achieve in-depth, high-quality reporting and improved relationships among reporters, interviewees, related communities, and broader audiences.

Shared political commitments

Nick Couldry (2012: 190–9) argues that there are three virtues expressed through alternative journalism practices that might be considered important to the shifting field of digital media practice: accuracy, sincerity and care. Alternative journalism focuses on accuracy of reporting on social justice issues, but for Couldry the notion of accuracy falls flat if not accompanied by the journalist's sincerity or belief in the perspectives being reported. In other words, for autonomous journalists, there must be shared political commitments with the community being reported on.

Social media can be used as a tool to produce more authentic representations of social movements from the streets through smartphone livestreaming and live-tweeting; however Dencik (2015: 204) cautions that this authenticity should not be attributed to the platforms themselves. Rather, autonomous media practices support social relationships generative of authentic collective self-reporting using a range of strategies that can strengthen social movements. Moreover, this strengthening of movements and communities is linked profoundly to Couldry's third value-practice of care exercised through media, which must account for the impact of representations on everyone to whom that media may circulate, including 'care over the consequences (of what we say and show through media) for the *common* space of communication' (Couldry, 2012: 197), or what Kidd (2003) terms the communications common.

Involved in creating this shared communicative space, our research participants emphasised being part of the social movement reported on. They noted that it was important to be taking the same risks, and working side by side for social change, while also being a journalist and covering the issues being worked on, or being 'on the ground, in the resistance' (HAL2-13). This was perceived as key for reporters building relationships of trust with people in communities and social movements. In fact, many spoke of the impossibility of separating the role of activist from the role of journalist; some even saw autonomous journalism as activism or a form of direct action – thus the term direct-action journalism seems appropriate.

Complexifying issues from an insider perspective

Engaging in the struggle and having shared experiences helps journalists to better understand and report on the complexity of intersectional issues of oppression and action. Movement activists will trust rooted autonomous journalists to create a respectful, accurate, detailed and in-depth representation:

I think one of the most important ways to connect activist media to the communities is to be embedded in them ... [CUTV took part in protests] which put us in the place of the oppression that's happening, instead of behind the police line, where the mainstream media was filming from. (VIC2-2)

CUTV autonomous journalists in the Quebec Student Strike were protesting *as* and *with* students, participating in the student struggle themselves and being exposed to the same risks – such as being kettled, detained and arrested, and even facing police violence. CUTV were therefore rooted direct-action journalists engaged in every element of the protest action 'on the ground in the resistance', and thus were closer to being able to report on the complexities of the story.

Being part of the movement also means that you are able to contact movement insiders to interview them. You can ask appropriate, well-informed questions because you have a deeper understanding of the issues, making the interview more successful: 'you get the right people, and ... [you] ask questions that mainstream won't cover' (VIC1-1). The coverage, contrary to mainstream media logic, is therefore more accurate, bringing new perspectives to reporting and getting closer to some of the complex details of the intersectional social issues at stake. When searching for interviewees, autonomous journalists often avoid corporate, government or university experts, preferring to hear from people with specific experience, such as people who 'spend their lives with a craft or a community project' (VIC1-4). One of our participants

provided an example of coverage of the Haiti earthquake, where mainstream media interviewed Canadians working with the RCMP in Haiti, whereas:

Groundwire [national radio program] took the perspective, 'Let's go talk to the Haitians who want to talk about the history of Canada and Haiti, and the current situation with the RCMP.' There's an inherent value to bring that news back to Canada. (VIC2-9)

This rooted reporting provided a critical perspective on the role of the RCMP in policing Haiti, and its potentially negative impacts on the people of Haiti, both historically and in the contemporary moment. People on the street are refigured by autonomous journalists as experts who can share a critical historical perspective, or other insider experience, resulting in higher quality reporting that can deepen democratic debate and advance social transformation.

Shared values and prefigurative politics

The third dimension of rooted direct-action journalism is the sharing of alternative values and related value-practices in the interview process, which emerge from and shape the logic of autonomous media. There is a commitment to prefigurative media practices that attempt to foster a consistency between the means and ends of journalism, which work to sustain respectful relationships. Research participants discussed ways in which they aimed to prefigure social change, noting it was crucial 'to incorporate your values and your practice' (VIC1-4). In other words, as Maeckelberg (2011: 4) argues, 'Practising prefigurative politics means removing the temporal distinction between the struggle in the *present* and a goal in the *future*; instead, the struggle and the goal, the real and the ideal, become one in the present' (italics in original). Prefiguration requires aligning the real, in other words autonomous media practices in the here and now, with the ideal, their values and principles, in what Jeppesen (2009) calls 'value-practices' – intersectional anti-oppression cultural and media practices shaped and underwritten by specific anarchist, autonomous or alternative anti-capitalist, anti-colonial, anti-racist, queer and trans* values oriented toward collective autonomy, self-determination and radical liberation.

The autonomous media value-practice that the people directly affected by an issue should be the ones with access to producing media about that issue, and at the forefront of the social movement itself, was expressed as well:

A lot of the media work I've done has been very personal to me, whether that's within the queer community, or I've done a lot of documentaries around sex work and stuff. That's been a big motivator – wanting to talk about issues that directly affect me. (VIC3-11)

People reporting on issues that directly affect them is contradictory to the mainstream media logic, but key to autonomous journalism.

These three dimensions of rooted direct-action journalism are at stake when people work together to create media that report on and support the social movements in which they are involved. However, if the only reporting is rooted journalism, there is a risk that people in positions of privilege will avoid issues not directly affecting them, rather than doing solidarity media work. Therefore, solidarity journalism is a necessary set of complementary media practices.

Solidarity journalism: Working across intersectional communities and movements

Some research participants noted that there was a tendency to deny responsibility for issues across identities or communities of experience. They argued, however, that everyone in society is accountable for the multiple forms of intersectional oppressions in society, regardless of their own social location. This points to the necessity of finding ways to take responsibility for challenging injustices when we are not directly impacted, reporting as allies in solidarity with communities and movements. If we abandon the notion of objectivity in journalism, then we

can more honestly and authentically engage in reporting across difference, acknowledging the role of the journalist in supporting social justice objectives, such as standing up for human rights, against racism and the like. As Dencik (2015: 206) argues, autonomous media and social media 'have afforded a "new authenticity" of new media journalists towards its public that can potentially allow for the construct[ion] of new solidarities'.

Within social movements such as Black Lives Matter and Indigenous land defence actions like Standing Rock, the people most affected are leading movements, with allies acting in support and solidarity. Autonomous media activists debated and brainstormed how these kinds of movements might be supported by allies. Lisa Droogendyk and colleagues (2016: 316) describe allies, or so-called 'advantaged group activists', as people 'who are committed participants in action to improve the treatment and/or status of a disadvantaged group'. They caution that increased interactions among advantaged and disadvantaged groups can sometimes 'psychologically impact members of the disadvantaged group' (2016: 317), outlining several potential risks. They urge that 'advantaged group allies must effectively communicate support for social change, understand the implications of their own privilege, offer autonomy-oriented support, and resist the urge to increase their own feelings of inclusion by co-opting relevant marginalised social identities' (2016: 315). Three dimensions of solidarity journalism emerged in our mixers: co-creation of knowledge, a radical ethics of care and building intersectional horizontal relationships.

Co-creation of media content with the interview subject

Autonomous journalists engage in specific practices to destabilise top-down power structures and establish conditions more conducive to the co-creation of media content with their interviewees or media subjects. Media practices for the co-creation of content identified by our participants included: collective authoring, social authoring, building relationships with interview subjects and creating consent in interviews. The first practice mentioned in terms of creating solidarity with the interview subject was using the power that accrues to a journalist to foreground the voices of those being represented. This is contrary to the mainstream practice of entrepreneurial journalism that foregrounds the voice and brand of the journalist. Autonomous journalists with the freedom to write in their own voice can use this privilege to provide space and voice to individuals, groups and communities being covered. In other words, in the very moment when autonomous journalists have the freedom to become individualistic, self-indulgent or self-important, the ethical commitment to solidarity with social movements takes precedence.

Building on this concept, a participant discusses the problem of individualistic careerism in mainstream media, suggesting that collective authoring through writing articles or producing radio shows as a group is another way of writing in solidarity, cooperation and collaboration:

The mainstream capitalist world is very individualistic. It's all about us individually rising to the top. And I'm not against us, as individuals, identifying ourselves when we write pieces or when we use our voice on the air, but ... writing together with people, when the piece is done, you can either all sign your names to it, or can just put the *blah-blah-blah* collective, you make up a name on the spot – boom! It has a different resonance. (HAL2-17)

For this participant, collective co-production of knowledge not only generates better thinking, as the ideas people produce build on one another, but also generates a different feeling, a different set of relationships, creating an ethics of care through the co-production of knowledge. Another participant took this a step further, by providing interview questions to their guests ahead of time, which made the guests feel more comfortable about being on the radio show. This rejection of mainstream media's journalistic model, which can intimidate guests because they never know what to expect, favours a horizontal model that shares power and trust, allowing guests to think things through and generate knowledge supported by the radio host. This is linked to an ethics of consent in autonomous journalism:

What does consent look like in an interview? Where it's really about sharing rather than just hammering somebody. I think there's a time and place for different styles but we would also sometimes say afterwards, 'Is there anything you would like us to edit out?' Just really think about the participation of our guests. One really fun way that that came out, was asking whoever's on to pick a track and introduce the track afterwards. And, it seems pretty low level but I think it shared a sense of ownership. (VIC1-4)

The co-creation of content by the interviewer and interviewee in collaboration is put into practice by inviting the guest to shape the show by selecting music, offering opportunities to edit their audio, and fostering consent between the guest and host. Autonomous journalists co-create knowledge and relationships in solidarity with interviewees, through processes of building knowledge through collaboration, consent, trust and mutual respect.

Relationships of care and accountability to the community

A sense of accountability to the subjects or people being reported on was an important issue for research participants. Many communities have encountered a process of 'Othering' in mainstream media, for example, when white journalists interview people from Black, Indigenous or people of colour (BIPOC) communities, or when heteronormative people interview non-binary gender or queer subjects. Research participants articulated both an awareness of this problematic dynamic, and a commitment to not replicating it. Othering can have negative impacts on the community, not just in terms of the resultant representation, but also through the interview process itself – including silencing, diminishing, misrepresenting and stereotyping.

Specifically in terms of Indigenous representations, non-Indigenous or settler media activists who were interested in decolonising media noted problematic ways in which Western anthropologists had treated Indigenous people, vilifying or exotifying their expressions, experiences and culture, and portraying them in ways that emphasised difference, assuming the settler culture was normative and often also superior. For this reason, media activists noted that sometimes it might be best to step back, as Indigenous communities and journalists would be better able to self-represent in the news, providing a perspective that settler journalists may not be able to understand or convey very well. Stepping back can provide space for Indigenous voices, re-centring the Indigenous community as the subject of their own media representations, including cultural norms, outlooks, values and language, and offering better support by settler media activists and movement allies over the longer term.

A similar solidarity perspective was suggested to account for gender queer media representations: that cis-gender allies should start interviews – especially on radio or TV, but also in other genres – by identifying their own gender pronouns. This strategy develops a new prefigurative social norm that contests the stability of the gender binary by privileging trans*, non-binary, gender non-conforming and queer identities, showing solidarity and support. This strategy develops relationships of care and trust between the interviewer and interviewee. It also demonstrates accountability to the community being represented in the media.

Creating horizontal relationships across intersectional identities

The third media practice is creating empowering horizontal intersectional relationships of equality through solidarity journalism. While it is presumed in democratic societies that people are all equal, this is clearly not the case – there is a growing income gap in most capitalist countries, and an intensifying return to overt expressions of racism, homophobia and misogyny. Addressing these intersectional oppressions, autonomous movements and media activists have developed practices that enact equality, particularly important to those in marginalised groups and with intersectional experiences of oppression. These horizontalising media practices include the explicit framing of the issue of support, stepping back to provide space for others to speak, or sharing skills and resources.

The first practice is to foreground the idea of ‘what it means to feel supported in your community, and feel supported in doing the work that you do’ (VIC2-7). This incorporates representation in images and narrative framing, as well as horizontal practices that build care, trust and support among those involved, including the journalist, the interview speaker, the broader community to which that speaker belongs and the audience. Support should be distinguished from the charity model of help, which may be patronising, indicative of a one-way relationship between the haves and have-nots, and thus retrenching these two disparate positions. Support is a mutual relationship – the interviewee supports the journalist by sharing their experience and knowledge, and the journalist supports the interviewee by co-creating an authentic representation that respects and empowers the speaker and their community. One research participant explained how a group of white autonomous journalists were working on better ways to foreground intersectional representations:

We were all white people, and we were looking to connect local stories to broader issues. And we were interested in being critical of conventional society and the stereotypes that were represented on the radio that privileged white people. I guess a tactic was trying to provide space. (HAL2-16)

Providing space for people to speak is a key media practice of solidarity. This is a way in which people who already have access to creating media, through involvement in a media project of some kind, can use that resource to offer access to people who do not have this privilege or resource, ‘centring those voices of people who ... have some sort of direct experience with the movement’ (VIC1-3). Journalists with privilege stepping back in solidarity makes space for people with direct experiences of oppression and/or within social change movements to participate as rooted, direct-action or community-based reporters. These two autonomous journalism practices are intrinsically linked. One participant discussed such a strategy, which they used to support extractivism movements:

Having a mobile unit that could travel to [anti-pipeline] communities and deliver these workshops and then leave the tools behind so that communities can be doing things like recording their own resistance, and documenting their own resistance. (VIC1-3)

Media activists provided both technology and training to support recentring the community’s voice. They also provided outlets for the radio and video produced to be broadcast through their autonomous media sites. In this way, the digital divide that continues to impact marginalised groups through a lack of resources and skills can be addressed through solidarity journalism practices.

Conclusions

Here we offer several observations regarding some of the contradictions and tensions in these autonomous journalism practices, and suggest directions for further research in terms of the content of our findings and the process of our PCAR methodology.

First, there are critiques of the structurelessness of grassroots media organisations that do not allow for accountability and transparency within groups, or that tend to hide or deny power dynamics. The practice of direct-action journalism is open to this risk, although the media activists we interviewed were also very attentive to this issue and had attempted to develop intersectional feminist approaches that would reveal and address power dynamics. Nonetheless, groups such as The Media Coop, CUTV and other more established independent or alternative media organisations in Canada still have room for improvement around issues of inclusion. Many media activists of colour, queer and trans* people, and feminists have chosen to move on from these established groups to start their own programs or collectives that were explicitly feminist, anti-racist or focused on LGBT*Q issues.

Second, solidarity journalism is not without its own risks, as noted by Maeckleberg (2011). Always working with people who have more privilege can have a disempowering rather than an

empowering effect. Activists mentioned not wanting to put pressure on those within the movement to do the journalism work, and argued that solidarity journalists have a responsibility to cover movements outside of their experience or identity as well. There was a balance between foregrounding voices from within movements while not wanting to tokenise people or demand that they write about their own experiences when they were also extremely busy organising their movements. Despite best intentions, people engaged in solidarity journalism can also risk taking up too much space, speaking for others, and misrepresenting movements because of their lack of experience.

Third, as we share values with the participants who joined our 'radical media mixers', our research methodology and the autonomous journalism practices described here demonstrate some parallels, so we offer a brief methodological meta-reflection. We have engaged in rooted direct-action research, co-researching with and supporting social movements. We share political commitments that generate a deeper understanding of the complexity of issues we are researching. Our methodology is prefigurative, researching according to horizontal grassroots feminist-informed activist practices rather than traditional top-down university-based research methods. We engage in solidarity research, creating a relational research ethics of care with participants, building horizontal relationships through participation in media movement activities and co-creating knowledge through an iterative process of questions, feedback and validation. Findings are available to the movements who contributed to them, through blog posts, a conference we organised, workshops, an interactive map and an online curriculum and documentary (these last two are still in development).

This methodology is not without its challenges, however. The student body at our rural university is not racially diverse, so the research assistants working on the project have been predominantly Euro-Canadian, as is the larger research collective. Racism entrenched in the university system in Canada has led a collective member of colour to forgo studying for a PhD. The contradiction between neoliberal university cultures of hierarchy, productionism and confidentiality on employment issues contradicts the grassroots collective culture of horizontalism, time-consuming process orientation, community rather than academic outputs and workplace accountability. The temporary nature of grants, similar to those accessed by media organisations, means we cannot offer permanent, unionised employment, putting employees into perhaps well-paid feminist positions that are nonetheless precarious. There is an inherent power differential in the collective member positions of the principal investigator (PI), who is the employer of the research assistants and postdoctoral researcher. Moreover, as we attempted a collective self-assessment process, we were informed by Human Resources that employment feedback is confidential and cannot be provided in front of colleagues. These and other contradictions have made the activist-based research process challenging.

At one meeting, when we were planning the global interviews and analysis, we were discussing how to distribute the interviews, transcription and analysis equally among all members, challenging hierarchical assumptions that undergrads do transcription, postdocs code data and PIs do analysis. Accordingly, we were thinking that each person would do a set of interviews that they would then transcribe and code in NVivo, and together we would all contribute to the analysis. However, in a go-around, it emerged that nobody wanted to follow this structureless horizontal model. One member was not interested in interviewing people; another had never conducted interviews but wanted to learn by shadowing someone experienced. Some people wanted to do transcriptions; others did not. Some expressed concerns about capacity and preferred to do short bursts of interviews that involved travel; others had more capacity for interviews, but less time or interest in travel. When we shifted to speaking openly and honestly about capacities and interests, we scrapped the original plan to horizontalise the division of labour, and instead all took on work that we were excited about

doing and felt we had the skills and capacities to complete successfully. As we have heard from our research participants, horizontalism without structure or clear roles and responsibilities can breed resentment and a lack of clarity, which can lead to confusion and burnout – problems we may have anticipated by having this frank and open discussion.

Taking an intersectional feminist approach to media activist practices of direct-action reporting and solidarity journalism has great potential to shift the mediascape and challenge established media power, and further research into these practices would benefit both scholars and activists. Similarly, PCAR shows great promise for transforming inequities in university research practices; however, some contradictions between university and activist cultures are not easily reconcilable; further methodological and institutional developments might better support this work. Through these innovative autonomous journalism and research practices, we contend that media activists and activist-researchers alike may continue to challenge intersectional power dynamics, deepen relationships of support and trust among journalists and researchers in activist communities, and strengthen our work towards social transformation.

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MARG was founded by four anarchist-feminist organisers, who are also activist-researchers, upon receiving a five-year Insight Grant from the Social Sciences and Humanities Research Council of Canada (SSHRC) in 2013 at Lakehead University, Ontario, Canada. The co-founders were two professors and two doctoral candidates; we soon added a long-time community media activist and anti-racist organiser, and one of the professors dropped out. MARG has grown and changed over the years, with the current collective comprising the original professor (Sandra Jeppesen) and community media activist (Sharmeen Khan), a postdoctoral researcher (Kamilla Petrick) and two fourth-year Media Studies students (Ellen Craig and Cassidy Croft). In terms of identities, we are four white cis-women and one cis-woman of colour, aged in our twenties to fifties, who identify as queer or heterosexual and share intersectional feminist politics. We have created community media partnerships that prioritise building relationships with intersectional activists, and continue to organise in radical media movements. As MARG members have a range of intersectional identities, we use 'we' or 'they' to signify our belonging in the movements with which we research, and at the same time to acknowledge that MARG members do not claim to represent all of our participants' identities and social locations.

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