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CITIZEN JOURNALISM AT THE MARGINS

Ann Luce, Daniel Jackson, and **Einar Thorsen**

Amidst burgeoning literature on citizen journalism, we still know relatively little about how and why genuinely marginalised groups seek to use this form of reporting to challenge their exclusion. In this article, we aim to address this gap by analysing two UK citizen journalism initiatives emanating from The Big Issue Foundation, a national homeless organisation, and Access Dorset, a regional charity for disabled and elderly people. These case studies are united by the authors' involvement in both instances, primarily through designing and delivering bespoke citizen journalism education and mentoring. Based on over 40 hours of interviews with participants of the workshops and 36 hours of participant observation, we analyse the challenges participants faced in their journey to become citizen journalists. This included: low self-esteem, physical health and mental wellbeing, the need for accessible and adaptable technology, and overcoming fear associated with assuming a public voice. We also analyse marginalised groups' attitudes to professional journalism and education, and its role in shaping journalistic identity and self-empowerment. Whilst demonstrably empowering and esteem building, our participants were acutely aware of societal power relations that were seemingly still beyond their ability to influence. Those who are marginalised are, nevertheless, in the best position to use citizen journalism as a conduit for social change, we argue—though challenges remain even at the grassroots level to foster and sustain participatory practices.

KEYWORDS   citizen journalism; disability; education; homelessness; marginalised groups; non-governmental organisations (NGOs)

Introduction

Despite buoyant declarations that the digital age heralds new opportunities for plurality, the reality remains that not all voices are equal and not all voices are heard. Established media organisations play a powerful role in shaping how society views social inequality, and their problematic representation of marginalised groups continues to dominate public discourse. Marginalised groups have increasingly sought ways to engender new spaces—through, for example, citizen journalism—to articulate both their physical and discursive struggles to break down societal barriers. Yet little is known about how genuinely marginalised groups seek such forms of reporting or communication to challenge their exclusion, and even less about the *process* they go through in order to establish such a presence. This article seeks to address this gap by analysing the distinct challenges faced by marginalised groups who attempt to establish citizen journalism initiatives. Citizen journalism can empower marginalised groups not only in the process of creating journalism, we argue, but also in the process of developing their identity as citizen journalists and the contested spaces they subsequently occupy. To this end, we explore how marginalised groups define their role as citizen journalists and look specifically at the obstacles they face in the process of developing and adopting that new identity.

We analyse two UK citizen journalism initiatives anchored within a national homeless organisation (The Big Issue Foundation) and a regional disabled charity (Access Dorset). These case studies are united by the authors' involvement in both instances, primarily through designing and delivering bespoke citizen journalism education and mentoring. Access Dorset represents a form of grassroots/bottom-up citizen journalism, while The Big Issue Foundation is a charity linked to a commercial magazine of the same name—citizen journalism, in other words, within two very different institutional logics. In this article, we conduct a comparative analysis to identify similarities and differences in the process by which the participants learned citizen journalism skills, the types of stories they were motivated to cover, and the extent to which they connected with or adopted a journalistic identity. We analyse challenges they faced in this journey, including low self-esteem, physical health and mental wellbeing, the need for accessible and adaptable technology, and overcoming fear associated with assuming a public voice. We also analyse marginalised groups' attitudes to professional journalism and education, and its role in shaping journalistic identity and self-empowerment. Those who are marginalised are in the best position to use citizen journalism as a conduit for social change, we argue, though challenges remain even at the grassroots level to foster and sustain participatory practices.

Citizen Journalism and Social Change

In recent years there has been a surge in scholarly literature concerning online journalism and social media. Much of this research focuses on the renewed relationship between professional journalists and their audiences—conceptualized by scholars in varying ways not only as citizen journalism or the industry-preferred "user-generated content", but also as "citizen witnessing" (Allan 2013), "audience material" (Wardle and Williams 2008), "networked journalism" (Beckett 2008), "process journalism" (Jarvis 2009), "participatory journalism" (Singer et al. 2011), "alternative journalism" (Atton and Hamilton 2008), "liquid journalism" (Deuze 2008) and "ambient journalism" (Hermida 2010). Whilst these concepts differ in scope and accentuation, they share a common observation that citizens are increasingly seizing opportunities to participate actively in news work and civic life. For much of this research, the focus is on professional news organisations: how they incorporate demotic voices and eyewitness accounts into news narratives and journalistic practice; and thus how established forms of journalism practice are evolving in light of the enhanced interconnectivity fostered by forms of internet use. In other words the interconnectivity and civic participation in news work is seen as engendered through the remediation of demotic voices across media and communicative networks (Thorsen, Jackson, and Luce 2015).

Another part to this body of research documents citizen journalism that emerges outside mainstream media, either as alternative, counter-hegemonic or community-driven initiatives. For Deuze, this

> is not about people interacting and collaborating with each other through news organizations (or brands), nor about citizens interacting or co-creating with journalists. It is about citizens engaging in peer-to-peer relationships with each other, independent of—and perhaps most often in direct opposition to the mainstream news industry. Deuze (2009, 257)

Here, the emphasis is often on a shared geographical specificity, with studies documenting forms of community-driven or hyperlocal journalism that emerge due to the "public's

dissatisfaction with legacy media" (Metzgar, Kurpius, and Rowley 2011, 782) or through the collective desire to challenge their marginalisation. In various contexts—from across the world—we have seen how different forms of citizen journalism have helped marginalised communities gain public voice and empowerment, be it racial minorities (Gabriel 2016), feminist movements (Valle 2014), indigenous communities (Davies 2014) or, increasingly, globalised social movements (DeLuca and Lawson 2014). This important work is documenting the challenges faced by groups who live at the margins of society, and how citizen journalism might facilitate participatory forms of communication aimed at transformative social change, whilst at the same time energising the social cohesion of those marginalised groupings.

As with citizen journalism and mainstream news, a common denominator to many of these initiatives is technology, which has lowered the barriers to participation in news for many people facing marginalisation. Though it is still the case that certain marginalised groups are disproportionately likely to face issues concerning access and accessibility (e.g. exclusionary Web design and unaffordable connection costs) that mean that digital technology has often reproduced some of the environmental barriers that traditionally exclude disabled and homeless people from several aspects of social life (see Goggin and Newell 2003; Vicente and Lopez 2010).

Many questions still remain when it comes to the types of citizen journalism that emerge at the margins, the spaces such journalism inhabits, its relationship with mainstream news and the journalistic identities that are cultivated. Again these questions of identity are often explored through the prism of professional journalists, rather than those of the participating citizens. Professional journalists have often sought to preserve their status by explicating how their work differs from that of amateurs, articulating their opposition to or superiority over citizen journalism, for example, either on philosophical or practical grounds (Lewis et al. 2010; Wall 2015).

Increasingly, professionals are defining their journalistic authority—what demarcates them from amateur or citizen journalists—in terms of "expertise and duty" or institutional collectiveness as opposed to individual autonomy as identified in the past. In other words, "legitimacy claims [are commonly] based on the collective nature of the journalistic endeavor" (Örnebring 2013, 35).

These boundary struggles are a common feature of contemporary journalism studies, concerning "who counts as a journalist, what counts as journalism, and what is appropriate journalistic behavior" Carlson (2015, 2). For Zelizer (2009, 31), different voices can offer more complete ways to understand what journalism is. While she speaks of the role of the journalist, educator and scholar in her work, the same sentiment can be useful here when looking at citizen journalism: "no one voice in journalism's study is better or more authoritative than the others; nor is there any one unitary vision of journalism to be found."

"User-generated content", meanwhile, as the industry-preferred term for citizen journalism, "represents *both* an empowerment of citizens *and* an 'interactive illusion'", according to Jönsson and Örnebring (2010, 141, emphasis in original), "the paradox being that it is difficult to achieve empowerment within the institutional and organizational logic of mainstream media".

This is a sentiment echoed by Bock (2011, 2), who found that citizen journalists, while having access to the public sphere, "do not have the power of news organizations behind them, nor can they claim the authority of membership in a socially recognized interpretative community".

Citizen journalism is, in other words, potentially transformative for *both* civic and newsroom cultures. Citizen journalism is not just contentious in relation to the professional versus amateur debate therefore, but also invites broader conceptual considerations of the term—such as the role of *citizenship* within citizen journalism (Campbell 2014) or what motivates such journalistic practices (Kim and Lowrey 2014). Furthermore, we know more about citizen journalism by some marginalised groups than others. Whilst many of the challenges might be shared—such as prejudice, discrimination and social isolation—we cannot assume that they are experienced the same way, nor should we assume the same or similar forms of citizen journalism either emerge or can be applied to different contexts.

Representations of Disability and Homelessness

As with other marginalised groups, research has shown that historically there has been "a problem of disability representation" (Wilde 2010), typified by little cultural recognition of disabled lives and lack of inclusion—both quantitatively and qualitatively—in cultural industries as producers and as audiences. Historically, dominant media representations of disability across both popular culture and news have been criticised for being too simplistic, crude and one-dimensional (Cumberbatch and Negrine 1992; Shakespeare 1999); reinforcing stereotypes of disabled people as weak (Ellis 2008; Wardle and Boyce 2009); treating disability sport as little more than "human interest" (Berger 2008); and encouraging audiences to view athletes, actresses, television personalities, and so on, through their impairment, rather than as people; thus erecting barriers to empathy and reinforcing a perceived distance between the audience and the objectified disabled character (Gerodimos et al. 2013). Longitudinal studies of disability representation in the United Kingdom suggest that progress is being made, but that many obstacles still remain (Claydon, Gunter, and Reilly 2015). In UK newspapers, for instance, whilst there appears to be increasing visibility of disabled people in the last 10 years, it has also become increasingly politicised, often implying the perceived "burden" that disabled welfare claimants are alleged to place on the economy (Briant et al. 2011).

Much of the academic literature describes homelessness in terms of disability, and subsequently so do homeless charities (Homeless Link 2014; Crisis 2011; Shelter: The Housing and Homeless Charity 2016; Homeless Hub 2016; Bhugra 1996; McNaught and Bhugra 1996). According to Nunez (1999, 289), "Homelessness remains one of the most misunderstood and the least documented social policy issues of our time." Homeless people suffer similar marginalisation through mainstream media as other minority groups. News coverage of the homeless is highly selective, "often maintaining oppositions between 'those' homeless people and 'us', the housed public" (Hodgetts, Cullen, and Radley 2005, 20). Homeless people tend to be portrayed either as subjects of ridicule and punitive control, or as people who need sympathy and support (Hewitt 1996; Franklin 1999; Hodgetts et al. 2005). Schneider, Chamberlain, and Hodgetts (2010, 165) determined that readers are "exhorted to be sympathetic to the plight of homeless people, while at the same time 'they', homeless people, are presented as needing to be controlled and regulated in order to maintain social order". Representation of homelessness in the media suggests that one category of homeless have brought this on themselves, having freely made bad choices along their life path, while another group is a victim of circumstances beyond their control. Neither depiction actually allows for an alternative discourse, nor

does it allow for homeless people to frame or share their own experiences, relationships or public images. Min (1999, viii) argues that "It is essential to allow the homeless to describe their conditions in their own discourses to provide a more accurate and balanced depiction of the homeless." Yet, Hodgetts, Hodgetts, and Radley find this sentiment "misguided":

> Groups who are marginalized cannot simply locate themselves within their own discourses. Homeless people face the dilemma of being compelled to act in accordance with the expectations of more powerful groups who name and define "the homeless". (Hodgetts, Hodgetts, and Radley 2006, 499)

Campbell and Scott, meanwhile, contend that citizen journalism is one potential way in which such a voice can be realised, since

> It also seeks to encourage members of excluded groups into dialogue about their health amongst themselves, as well as giving them a voice in public debates about how to tackle obstacles to their well-being, and involving them in efforts to challenge and renegotiate the way they are represented. (Campbell and Scott 2011, 277)

Couldry (2010, 2) states that when we give value to voice, discrimination against "frameworks of social economic and political organization that deny or undermine voice, such as neoliberalism" can be challenged. Marginalised voices, such as those who are disabled and homeless, might therefore be empowered through a form of counter-hegemonic vocalisation when embracing the role of citizen journalist.

Despite such proclamations, citizen journalism in relation to disabled and homeless people as marginalised groups have yet to be articulated or even studied in any depth. According to the most recent Journalists at Work Survey in the United Kingdom, conducted by the National Council for the Training of Journalists (NCTJ 2013), only 8 per cent of all journalists have a health problem or consider themselves to have a disability. Journalism, in other words, has historically not been a field associated with disability.

Yet, what would happen if marginalised groups such as disabled and homeless populations were provided with the tools and skills to become *citizen journalists*? What types of citizen journalism would emerge at the margins? How would those marginalised groups engage with citizen journalism education and what kind of journalistic identity(s) would emerge? Finally, what are the challenges of delivering citizen journalism education to these groups? In posing these research questions, this paper aims to further our knowledge of how citizen journalism is imagined, practised and learned by those at the margins of society.

The Cases: The Big Issue Foundation and Access Dorset

Created in 2010, and based in Dorset on the south coast of the United Kingdom, Access Dorset is run by disabled people, older people and carers. Through its own membership and informal partnerships with 20 other like-minded organisations, the charity currently incorporates more than 5000 people in the region. The organisation was established to help remove the physical, attitudinal and community barriers faced in everyday life by its members. Central to this mission was the ability to participate in and influence public discourse on issues that affect them. For Access Dorset, citizen journalism was seen as a potential solution to issues of peer support, civic engagement and public voice.

Produced by and for its user groups, ADTV (http://accessdorsetcentre.org) is their citizen journalism project, providing Web-based peer support, information and lifestyle videos about their life experiences, events, social action projects and independent living.

The Big Issue was first published in the United Kingdom in 1991, inspired by the US street magazine, *Street News*, that had emerged in New York only two years prior. Initially a monthly publication, it soon reverted to its currently weekly format. It also spawned regional, national and international editions, that joined a number of other contemporary street newspapers across the world—a phenomenon that has become especially popular in parts of North America and Western Europe (Torck 2001; Howley 2003). The Big Issue Foundation, meanwhile, is a national charity established in 1995 to offer further support to the homeless people earning a wage as magazine vendors for its flagship publication, *The Big Issue*. In 2015 they secured funding from The Big Lottery Fund to offer a citizen journalism training course in Poole, Dorset. The programme's goal was for vendors who were currently selling the magazine to be availed the opportunity to now become freelance journalists for its blog and potentially also its magazine. As well as learning some foundation principles of journalism, participants would also learn transferable skills to help them get into employment.

The initial Access Dorset cohort of 12 people, aged between 28 and 77, were chosen by the charity to participate in the project, and represented a mixture of disabled people and older non-disabled people. Those who were disabled had a range of hereditary and acquired disabilities, and all participants brought different challenges as well as different ideas as to what they wanted to pursue in terms of stories. The group contained a number of people whose work had taken them into public life, such as a local councillor, community worker and disabled activist. Approximately half of them had some media experience, but as the subject of a story or as a source, not as a producer or journalist.

The Big Issue participants were a smaller cohort of six, ranging in age from 23 to 68, self-referred via local job centres or via *The Big Issue* offices in Bournemouth, UK. The programme was open to anyone who was unemployed, on job-seekers allowance or thought it would enhance their skillset. Only one of the participants was physically disabled (back problems), but others suffered from mental health difficulties that often led to unemployment or only working part-time. None of the Big Issue participants had engaged with the media before.

Access Dorset participants travelled to Bournemouth University for five workshops, each scheduled to last four hours, over a two-month period from November 2013 to January 2014. Workshops for The Big Issue Foundation were held at a local library over a six-week period, starting in May 2015. The sessions for both groups were a combination of both lecture and practice-based workshops. While the delivery pattern of our citizen journalism workshops differed significantly between the two projects, the content we delivered was broadly similar. Workshop material included: how to find stories; determining target audience; how to construct stories; how to interview; how to form interview questions; and how to write journalistically, which also included structure, tone and tenor. With our Access Dorset participants we also taught them how to film and edit, while the Big Issue participants were taught blogging and photography skills by their in-house trainers.

Findings presented in this study are based on over 40 hours of data collected from 42 in-depth semi-structured interviews with the participants from both Access Dorset and the Big Issue both before and after the series of workshops we hosted. Each semi-structured interview was audio-recorded and transcribed, then analysed by the authors. Participants'

names have been replaced by pseudonyms throughout this article to protect their identity. The lead author also conducted approximately 36 hours of participant observations of their experiences during the training and a detailed analysis of the subsequent journalistic outputs. Including such a method means being self-reflexive of one's own biases. As an educated, Irish, former working-class, non-disabled former journalist and now middle-class university lecturer, the lead author was to varying degrees different to the people she was working with. Whilst she successfully drew affinities with the students in the workshops, we recognise that certain preconceptions will inevitably shape the nature of the observations made during the sessions. When it came to analysis of data, our work was grounded in theoretical thematic analysis (Braun and Clarke 2006), meaning the analysis was influenced by the research questions, but there was also an inductive element allowing for themes to evolve during the analysis process.

In the following section, we turn to discussion of two key areas that emerged in relation to engendering citizen journalism initiatives and identities at the grassroots level. Firstly, the challenges faced by disabled and marginalised groups when learning about journalism practice; and second, how citizen journalists shape their own sense of journalistic identity and self-empowerment.

Fostering Participation at the Grassroots Level: Distinct Challenges

The research identified three distinct challenges experienced by the marginalised groups we worked with in the process of learning about citizen journalism and adopting journalistic skills: firstly, low self-esteem, and physical and mental health challenges; secondly, accessible and adaptable technology; and, finally, the fear of reprisal when adopting a public voice.

Low Self-esteem, and Physical and Mental Health Challenges

Low self-esteem, or lack of confidence, was prevalent in participants on both the Access Dorset and Big Issue projects. It was clear they were used to being marginalised and, in some instances, they took on victim-like characteristics. In the classroom, phrases frequently uttered were: "I'm just slow", "I'm not smart", "I'm not capable". The reasons for this low self-esteem varied but mostly centred around living with a disability, the "political" frustrations around dealing with that disability and how they feel on a daily basis. Our participants on both projects expressed that their low self-esteem resulted from being knocked by those in positions of power (government, media, job centres, and so forth): "I lost my confidence a lot", Mary, a participant from Access Dorset told us. She said she was tired of fighting "the system": "I think generally the media have a very slanted view of disability and I think disability in general, in press, is very, what's the word, short changes the majority of us because it's very much slanted to people who abuse the system." Terry, also from Access Dorset, reiterated this point around governmental decisions: "I just get irritated that they keep cutting social care and they're not actually recognising what impact it's having on people."

Briant et al. (2011) found that while the media is reporting more on disability, the categories of description, as Clogston (1990) noted, "triumphing over adversity", "deserving vs. non-deserving", "cheats", and as Haller (2000) noted, "equality issues", are all still quite prevalent as ways to "other" those who are disabled. These categories of description,

Terry says, permeate society: "We have created a society in which we've got the people that do care and the people that don't care. There's people with a social conscience and there's people that haven't got a social conscience." Hannah echoed this and expressed a concern about so-called austerity cuts reflected amongst all participants on both projects:

> With all the austerity measures that have been going on at the moment, with all benefits, the view of disability has slipped dramatically back down again. We are scroungers, we want this, we want that, we want everything, we want it now. But, actually, no, you get off your backside and go and get a job. You ever tried to get a job with a disability? It's virtually impossible, the discrimination that's there is more profound now than ever before because you're up against so many in the job market.

The narrative that emerged from interviews with our participants showed that their desire to be viewed as individuals first, and not identified by their disability, is paramount. Yet how they are perceived in society, depicted in the media and the political fights they face on a regular basis cause them angst. Many of them wanted to participate in this project to try to change those societal norms, "to empower people to do more for themselves", as Terry told us. But first, they had to empower themselves.

Accessible and Adaptable Technology

The journalism field, historically, is not an industry where people with physical disabilities tend to work. Edwards noted as far back as 1992 that the image of the journalist needs to change, "we should depict successful journalists doing their jobs, including those who use wheelchairs or crutches or canes. This could encourage the disabled young person to look closely at journalism as a career path" (Edwards 1992, 85). Daily (2006) wrote about the challenges he faced and overcame when a student who had "limited mobility with his hands and arms", which required him "to use a motorised wheelchair", joined his broadcast journalism class. His first thought was, "there is no way Steven could complete my course. The physical requirements put on a broadcast news photojournalist can be demanding and it just did not seem possible for him to do even the basic assignments" (242). These were some of the issues also faced by the Access Dorset cohort. Amongst them, four were confined to wheelchairs, and one, similar to Daily's (2006) experience, had limited mobility of both his arms and legs. The Big Issue participants meanwhile were mobile, mainly suffering from mental health disability rather than physical impairments.

Taught sessions for Access Dorset were held on the university campus, using multimedia journalism Mac labs. At the start of these workshops, it became clear that many of the participants not only had limited experience with technology, but even harboured a sense of fear against it. Participants had to be shown how to turn on the computers, and how to open files by themselves. Yet the project progressed quickly to filming using smartphones and tablets (mainly iPads) and editing in iMovie, which were technologies preferred for their usability and portability. Given the initial uncertainty about who was going to participate in the course, it was impossible to conduct an all-encompassing equality impact assessment until the first class. This affected some participants, particularly Terry who had limited mobility. For the duration of the project, Terry worked with one of the other participants, Frank, who did most of the filming and editing on his behalf. Whilst partnering in this way provided a pragmatic solution during the workshops, Terry nevertheless

expressed concern about the perceived lack of planning when it came to accommodating his needs:

> There's no good sorting that out [what adaptable technology he could use] when you're doing the filming. And it would have been better to have more time to actually have gone out and done some filming, instead of being in the classroom; let's get out there and film. That would have been better.

Besides Terry, most other participants were able to use their arms, although they did find they got tired easily. Adapting wheelchairs so that cameras could be mounted proved to be the most significant challenge, shared by several participants. Mary decided to take matters into her own hands towards the end of the project. She contacted an online company that was already making adaptable tripods for iPads on prams, but Mary wanted one specifically for a DSLR camera:

> They said, "yeah, damn good idea. We'll make it, will you trial it for us?" That's the trade off, so they did and developed this attachment. So basically it attaches to this [shows on wheelchair]. It's got three legs that all crinkle around and you can put it in any direction and you just film as you go. So they said to me, "if it doesn't work or you need any other adaption, let us know", so I said, "the only thing it doesn't have, which would make it perfect, is a pan and tilt facility, like you'd get on a big cam recorder". So that's worked really well and by having that I can film very easily on this. I wanted one that anybody could use and that attaches by a big screw on the end of a wheelchair.

As a result, Mary said, "I really found my interest in the technology again. I do like technology, but I just wasn't interested in camera work and I found that again."

Fear of Being Knocked by Those in Positions of Power

While the participants on the Access Dorset course aimed to become hard-hitting citizen journalists, wanting to keep an eye on public policy affecting Access Dorset's user groups, our participants on the Big Issue course went in the opposite direction, wanting to cover soft news: features about local theatre, music, the creative arts and local nature walks. Reflection on our participant observations indicated that fear of retribution was partly behind this distinction; the participants were afraid about the potential negative damage that could be done to them and their lives if they actively engaged in citizen journalism.

John was the most succinct in his explanation: "It's like maybe the fear of if I write this and I expose these people who are very powerful people—they've got a lot of money, you could be, you know, the fly in the ointment for them. You're spoiling their corporation or their profit intake or whatever—they could come after you."

Fear was not only experienced by our homeless participants. Robert, a senior manager with Access Dorset, told us before training started:

> I think a lot of people are very frightened. I'm concerned that they are so worried they won't engage with it [the training] because of the fear that benefits will be cut, or their doctor's surgery will turn them away. People are in a very vulnerable place at the moment and we're asking them to do something quite gutsy in stepping forward and relating what's happening to them.

Feelings of fear and paranoia are real obstacles to gaining public voice for those on the margins of society. Yet from our experiences of working with two groups, two different stories of challenging marginalisation emerged. For Access Dorset, the training element of the project was framed with the clear expectation that they were part of a collective endeavour to pursue citizen journalism on behalf of disabled and older people; and that they could draw strength from their collective identity. Peter expounded: "There are people so scared to speak out because of the effect it might have on their care, benefits and one of the things that we wanted to get across [with ADTV] is that it is alright to complain." This is a message our Access Dorset participants had absorbed, but their problem was bringing new people into the project, either as subjects or citizen journalists themselves. As Frank explained: "I'm trying to convince someone at the moment to make a video but he is a bit, he doesn't want to because it affects his benefits."

In contrast, the Big Issue citizen journalism project—whilst associated with a nationally recognised news brand—was framed more as an individual pursuit. Participants would still learn some foundational journalism skills, but it was up to the individual to decide what they do with them. Crucially, citizen journalists were not assimilated into the organisational or editorial structure of the publication and thus had no support network to fall back on. Once the training had finished, they were essentially on their own. Consequently, feelings of fear, marginalisation and isolation would—in our view—have been harder to overcome.

Journalistic Identities and Empowerment: Our Interests, Our Stories

Our participants see the societal role of journalism in traditional ways as to educate, to inform and to hold power to account. Jean, a participant in the Big Issue workshop said:

> Journalism, I just find it quite surreal learning about it. Because I've always frowned upon the tabloids quite a bit because they're not news. Whereas this [citizen journalism training] is quite interesting, because I'm thinking, actually this is news. And there are some opportunities here and it's going to be interesting to find some genuine reports where we're not going to distort everything; just tell it as it is.

According to some normative accounts of journalism, when a journalist brings his or her own life experiences to a story, the idea of "truth" becomes tainted in the reporting process. Allan argues that,

> we rely on news accounts to be faithful representations of reality. We are asked to believe, after all, that truly professional journalists are able to set aside their individual preconceptions, values and opinions in order to depict reality as it actually is to us, their audience. (Allan 2010, 83)

Our participants were adamant that journalists who write disability stories are out to "make headlines" and "cannot put their opinions to the side". Michelle from Access Dorset elaborated,

> It's difficult not to put a personal slant on something, it's also quite easy if someone says something, you take it in the way you want to hear it. I think to be a good journalist you've got to be able to take your own personal opinions out of it and just report the facts.

Simon and John, both from the Big Issue cohort, agreed that journalism needs to be "without bias or spin". Journalists "give information", according to Simon, while John thinks

that, "journalism is something that should be factual, you're representing something when you bring a story out. I think the story should be the truth, factual and bring awareness or education into people's lives". These marginalised people, in other words, shared a very conventional normative understanding of how journalism *ought* to function, its societal role and responsibilities.

Participants in both cohorts had clear ideas about the types of stories they would write once they were "fully fledged" citizen journalists, with many wanting to counter how they themselves feel they are currently represented in the media. Themes around having an impact, self-representation and empowering others came to the forefront when it came to the Access Dorset participants:

> I think I would like to feel I am improving and enhancing people's lifestyles by offering, not alternatives but perhaps a different thought pattern and changing perspective of those that haven't had to use a wheelchair or have got a disability … because it happened so suddenly, I wouldn't want my today to be their tomorrow. (Hannah)

The citizen journalists typically positioned the ideal journalism they wished to pursue in a normative (though not unproblematic) sense of objective, facts-led and educative. When it came to their actual practice, however, they seemed less concerned by objectivity and more intent on advocacy. For example, Terry noted that he thinks journalists "can do some really good stuff and actually point out issues that should not be occurring, but I always want to do it from the participant's [perspective] because it's their voice, what they're saying. So my role is actually cajoling them to actually tell their story." Similarly, Peter told us that he plans to tell a story, "but there has to be a call for action from that story. It's not just telling a story, it's linking those stories and, at the end of the day, if it does not point towards something, then why are we doing it?"

Themes of self-empowerment came through the interview analysis quite strongly for both cohorts, but with different emphases. Big Issue participants expressed empowerment solely in terms of confidence-building. Here, self-esteem was cultivated through the *process* of producing journalistic output rather than the products themselves (see also Meadows 2013). As David explained,

> I feel like I have developed, I've grown a little bit, like confidence has grown … I didn't have any real expectations, but from now doing it, I've kind of, I've learnt a bit more than I expected and now I do feel a bit more confident if I do pursue it, I could probably be alright.

John also agreed:

> I guess it's broadened my scope a little bit, especially to the fact that now it's given me the confidence to maybe do a bit more than just petition for Greenpeace and Avaaz. I'm now thinking about going out and you know hunting down some of these stories and maybe writing some articles that I could get published.

For Big Issue participants, it seemed the process of learning about journalistic endeavour was the end goal, rather than an ambition to become citizen journalists or for the stories they produced to impact a broader audience.

While our Access Dorset participants expressed the same kinds of empowerment through feeling more confident about their skills, there was also a feeling of *external*

efficacy gained through the impact that their journalism was having. Alongside a number of lifestyle features, the group made a number of hard-hitting videos about emergency medical treatment for older people, inaccessible footpaths for disabled people and attitudinal barriers to disability, all of which were well received in the community. One citizen journalism video about inaccessibility at a local railway station made local headlines, gained the support of local politicians and was even discussed in Parliament. Resultantly, there is a broader sense of empowerment in this group, as Jennifer explains: "Our voices have always been there, but [they are] certainly louder and being more acknowledged, and perhaps it's not just the meaning we're using; it's the respect we're gaining as well."

That respect, it seems, also carries over into the self-identification as citizen journalists. With the Access Dorset project, prior to the training, none of the participants believed themselves to be citizen journalists. In the post-training interviews, all of the participants said they felt they would confidently call themselves a citizen journalist. Melanie, for example, told us that she tried not to be "put off" by the word journalism, "but citizen I like because I am very political. If anything has got citizen in front of it, I usually say it's a good idea." Terry self-identifies as a citizen journalist and explained this as having a distinct role within the community:

> I go out there, I look at the issues in the community or around my life, try to tell a story and get it out to people so hopefully we can make change. I think coming to Bournemouth University gave me this credibility because Bournemouth University are well-known for what they do in the media. It was a shame it [the training] wasn't longer.

Jennifer also considers herself to be a citizen journalist and she notes the differences she sees between citizen journalists and "real journalists":

> The important parts of it for me are that it's issues that are directly affecting you on a local level, on a personal level and from the perspective of a person living everyday life rather than from the perspective of media trying to sell it. There is a big difference I think between citizen journalists and journalists. Their motivations are completely different. And I kind of feel we have the freedom to do it from angles, it allows us to inform, to challenge, just to share experiences. It doesn't have to be about impact and number of viewers, it doesn't have to be breaking news. It can be just telling a story and the peer support that has is invaluable, it's much broader, freer and much more relevant to everyday people, or the people we are trying to reach.

In contrast, our Big Issue participants overwhelmingly stated that they did not feel like they were citizen journalists. This is partly accounted for by the nature of the course they attended (less intensive, and more introductory), and the fewer opportunities for publishing that were available after the course was finished. But as alluded to earlier, there may also be deeper forces at play here. Whilst our disabled cohort had physical disabilities to deal with, on the whole they were older, more experienced, and with a social network behind them. Together, we would argue these factors helped give them the confidence and direction to pursue future citizen journalism. In contrast, Big Issue participants were generally younger, typically with little or no stable work experience, and lacking social and cultural capital. In our cases, then, homelessness was a more potent form of marginalisation than disability.

Discussion and Conclusion

There are a growing number of studies that demonstrate how journalism education —as an agent of socialisation—has the potential to shape future journalists' practices, identities, role perceptions and understanding of ethics, among other things (e.g. Splichal and Sparks 1994; Hewitt 1996). But the vast majority of such literature is based on analyses of higher education degrees, typically three-year courses. We found that after only five workshops our Access Dorset participants were self-identifying as citizen journalists. Does this mean therefore that journalistic identity can be engendered in such a short time? Clearly, it depends, because as previous research shows (e.g. Becker, Fruit, and Caudill 1987), journalists typically undergo a secondary socialisation process once they enter the newsroom. Where a clear path towards the newsroom—or in our case more akin to a news-making community—is lacking (such as in the case of *The Big Issue*), we found far weaker identification with journalism. Moreover, as the term itself implies, citizen journalism is overwhelmingly practised by amateurs who often drift in and out of journalism practice depending on life circumstances and trigger events (Allan 2013; Kim and Lowrey 2014). Therefore, even where we found clear emerging identities as citizen journalists amongst some of our participants, it is likely that these will be ephemeral as long as they retain their primary occupation.

The types of journalistic identities our participants adopted were equally noteworthy. Amongst professional journalists, identities can range from the subjective tradition pursuing individual goals, to a public service tradition supplying "objective" information for society or a commercial tradition giving people what they want (see Donsbach 2010). On the face of it, our participants saw becoming citizen journalists as an opportunity for them to educate, inform and remain detached from their subject, not unlike the public service tradition. In pre-training interviews, participants held lofty views that they could rise above mainstream journalism; they could be objective and keep their opinions at bay. By the end of training—and once they were more experienced in journalistic practice—many of our participants (sometimes consciously, sometimes unconsciously) positioned themselves as part of the subjective tradition of journalism. Other researchers have highlighted tensions in citizen journalism's inherently subjective or moral nature, versus the objective observer ideal of professionalised reporting (Wiesslitz and Tamar 2011; Cottle 2013). Throughout the training, we saw this tension play out while our participants began to form their own identity as citizen journalists. For our participants, challenging their marginality was a key part of this identity, which was expressed through the desire to tell the stories of disabled people.

In the end, it would be best to describe this identity as somewhat ambiguous; occupying some of the in-between space that lies between professional identities, which are themselves discursively constructed ideal-types whose "meaning" is forever eluding the journalist in practice (see Carpentier 2005; Bogaerts 2011). Accordingly, the *forms* of journalism our participants produced might also be characterised as ambiguous: operating on the boundaries of feature stories, first-person confessionals and campaigning journalism. Here, the concept of liminality comes into focus. Papacharissi (2015, 32–33) argues that "Individuals participating in liminal forms of news storytelling engage in a variety of practices that both reproduce and forget past conventions of news production and consumption." Whilst she is referring to *collaborative* news production, the same ambiguity about identity played out in the two citizen journalism projects analysed here.

Of course, developing a new identity—whether it be professional or amateur—can be a transformative experience and, as our findings showed, empowerment was a recurring theme in the interviews. However, for some participants there was a sense of temporality to both their empowerment and engagement with the self-constructed journalistic identity, since they failed to make a meaningful contribution to or connection with the respective projects after the workshops were concluded. Whilst they may not sustain self-identification or external recognition as citizen journalists, or indeed continue to produce journalistic material in future, their sense of empowerment—however momentary—would arguably shape their future lifeworlds. Indeed the concept of empowerment is not a straightforward one. It implies the acquisition of power—presumably from a prior state of inefficacy; power itself being the ability to act or take decisions in ways that affect the self and/or others (Staples 1990). Also if we think of empowerment in the civic sense, it can mean the state where "Engagement in issues becomes meaningful, citizens feel that they, in concert with others, can in some way make a difference, that they can have some kind of impact on political life, even if they do not win every battle" (Dahlgren 2012, 40). It is here that we might ask whether engaging in citizen journalism is inherently empowering. Viewed through the lens of citizen engagement with mainstream news, empowerment can be paradoxical (Jönsson and Örnebring 2010; Gerodimos et al. 2013) because whilst new technologies afford greater opportunities for citizens to contribute to the news, it is still within existing institutional structures that impose their own power relations.

Outside of the mainstream—where our study is located—we find forms of empowerment at a number of levels. Firstly, at a personal level, everyone we spoke to described a growth in self-esteem and confidence through the acquisition of new skills. For some participants who are long-term unemployed, without qualifications and/or socially isolated, this in itself was a significant step. Whilst self-esteem is not necessarily the same thing as empowerment, we found enough evidence that citizen journalism training gave participants a sense of hope and optimism that they could improve their life situation.

Secondly, for our Access Dorset participants especially, there was a process of *civic* empowerment expressed through the feeling that they had a *public* voice and could regain control over their own mediation and representation. Their journalistic culture inhabited both interventionist and adversarial characteristics (Hanitzsch 2007, 372), consistent with other participatory journalism projects of a similar nature. This was significant for them given the hostility many participants felt towards the mainstream media representations of disability and homelessness (Thorsen, Jackson, and Luce 2015). Despite putting their own lived realities at the centre of their stories, they perceived their objectivism as correspondence (as opposed to subjective) and backed up by empiricism (Hanitzsch 2007, 376–377). Civic empowerment was also felt through a greater connection to society and increased social capital, as previous citizen journalism studies have found (e.g. Robinson and DeShano 2011; Meadows 2013). For those who had endured years of societal marginalisation, this could be a potent experience. This worked at an organisational level too. For Access Dorset, an organisation with a local community focus, citizen journalism reconnected them with their core user groups, giving them a renewed sense of authority and purpose.

But whilst empowerment may be felt at an individual level, our participants do not as yet have a clear sense about to what extent citizen journalism is empowering their broader constituency—that is, non-participating members or user groups. Whilst it is clear their

market orientation is one viewing the imagined audience as citizens rather than consumers (Hanitzsch 2007, 374), the citizen journalists have done little to investigate what impact their stories have had on audiences beyond key stakeholders (Thorsen, Jackson, and Luce 2015). This is why we need to clarify who are the main targets of the empowering potential of citizen journalism, especially when considering marginalised groups. In our context of disabled and homeless people taking up citizen journalism, "empowerment" could be connected to the generalised assumption that our citizen journalists, and the groups of people they supposedly represent ("the disabled" and "homeless"), are in a position of social disadvantage, that they are "disempowered", which enough evidence would support. However, there is a need to make a distinction between the empowerment of citizen journalists and the empowerment of disabled and homeless people within society. Whilst this article provides more evidence for the former, the latter remains a question. Indeed, when we pressed our participants during interviews about how they imagined their audience, very few had given the question much serious thought, implying that for them, citizen journalism was a mission of personal empowerment.

Again, this exposes some of the inherent tensions between citizen journalism and citizen empowerment. Whilst scholars observe the limitations that institutional logics impose on audience empowerment through participatory practices in the mainstream media, when genuinely citizen-led journalism projects emerge, it is not always clear whether, beyond the citizen journalists themselves, they empower the people they might aim to represent. Indeed, we found that in spite of the best efforts of citizen journalists, many vulnerable people are afraid of speaking up against social injustice for fear of reprisal. Those who are marginalised are, nevertheless, in the best position to use citizen journalism as a conduit for social change, we argue—though challenges remain even at the grassroots level to foster and sustain participatory practices. It seems possible then, that education in and the practice of citizen journalism is more powerful for progressive social change than its consumption, though this is a claim that deserves further empirical testing.

DISCLOSURE STATEMENT

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