RADIO "MAGIC":
WOMEN, CULTURE
AND COMMUNITY ACCESS BROADCASTING

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Abstract

This research is a case study of the participation of women at Plains FM 96.9, one of eleven non-profit, community owned and operated community access radio stations in Aotearoa/New Zealand. Located in Christchurch city, Plains FM broadcasts community-produced programming in twenty different languages to the Canterbury region. As a community access station, it is committed to meeting community development objectives through the provision of access to the airwaves for groups that are underserved by mainstream media.

In this thesis, I locate Plains FM within the wider historical and discursive context of the Aotearoa/New Zealand mediascape and draw upon theories of communications, community development, social movements and feminist post-structuralism in order to examine the transformative potential of the station and the ongoing complex challenges that it faces. Drawing on analysis of interviews with fifty-one women at Plains FM, I explore the ways in which diverse women participants make sense of the station, their involvement within it, and its impact upon their communities. In particular, I highlight women participants' construction of Plains FM as a vehicle for access into the public sphere and for reworking hegemonic boundaries of inclusion/exclusion in both the media/broadcasting and social/cultural realms. I also explore the ways in which boundaries of inclusion/exclusion are negotiated within the station itself and highlight some of the challenges the station faces in its attempt to be an inclusive, diverse and empowering organisation.

While this study focuses on one community media venture within a specific historical and discursive context, it contributes to the international body of theory of alternative media practice by offering rich insights into the symbolic challenges that community access media can generate and the complex process of attempting to create and sustain an alternative community development-driven media operation.
Acknowledgements

Researching and writing this thesis has been one of the most personally challenging and stimulating journeys on which I have ever embarked. At the best of times and the worst of times (the nail-biting anxieties and “are we there yet” moments) along the way I have been blessed with wonderful contributors, supporters and travelling companions.

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A Personal Preface

February 1998
I am a teacher of English and Media Studies, recently returned to my job at a large rural secondary school after a year’s leave studying journalism at university. Fuelled with enthusiasm from the break and eager to enhance my Sixth Form Certificate Media Studies programme, I ask the Christchurch community access radio station, Plains FM, to help me set up and run a short term radio station from the school. Plains has recently begun offering a service using their ‘mobile studio’ where, instead of teachers like myself taking media students into their Christchurch studio to make stand-alone programmes, students develop their own station and broadcast for several days from the school grounds. The scheme offers students several advantages. There is no travel involved to complicate their bussing home routines, they are more able to immerse themselves in making radio and to ‘own’ the results of their efforts, because they do all the technical production rather than relying on a Plains staff member. Working from school also makes it easier to involve the rest of the school and the local community as interviewees, sponsors and, most importantly, as listeners. After all, why make radio programmes no-one will hear?

March 1998
Working on-campus has its challenges, especially as preparation time is tight due to the structure of the academic year and other bookings for the mobile studio. I have to find a secure and relatively soundproofed room to serve as a studio, locate somewhere high on the roof to attach the station aerial and someone to erect a plinth to support it, guarantee the $800 station fee, structure the four hours of class-time per week to accommodate each phase of our station’s development, organise individual training sessions for students to learn the technical production skills with Plains FM staff, and negotiate student absences from other classes with teaching and management staff. The students have to agree on a name for the station (no easy task!), promote it, gather sponsorship and advertising to pay for airtime, develop programme concepts and an overall station schedule, make advertisements and programme trailers, and research, script, produce and present several individual programmes, all in the space of seven weeks. What madness struck me to agree to a schedule that no other school has yet achieved?
There are no suitable rooms for a studio (or rather, the teachers who ‘own’ them don’t want to loan them). Eventually we are given a tiny ‘office’ on the mezzanine floor of the library, totally un-soundproofed with glass windows on three sides, but luckily our station will be on air only after the library empties for the day. Our contract with Plains makes us liable for loss or damage to the radio equipment which must be set up and operational for the two weeks of training and broadcast, but the ‘studio’ door doesn’t lock. At nights the library is alarmed, during class-time teachers are present, but every lunchtime I mount security patrols to guard the equipment from inquisitive fingers. The caretaker erects the aerial plinth (though such a thing is ‘not his job’) but we have problems receiving a signal from the regional transmitter, a situation that requires days of testing and adjustment to remedy. Attracting sponsorship and advertising is difficult, the students are nervous about asking for money, finding refusals ‘embarrassing’. Their initial enthusiasm (‘cool, our own radio station!’) wears off and the whole process seems altogether too much work for some who decide they are really ‘not that keen on media anyway’, they ‘just did it as a filler’, and they no longer want to be radio presenters. Melissa and Louella, the trainers from Plains, miss most of a training session when their van breaks down, then have trouble explaining that radio can (and for this exercise should) be more than just playing music: ‘Why do we have to do research? Why can’t we just be DJ’s?’ Ideas for programmes are slow to emerge (and mine are all ‘boring’ or ‘too hard’). Two students ‘forget’ their first technical training sessions with Melissa, skip a lunchtime catch-up, then panic because they ‘don’t know anything’ two days before their first show. Tensions rise as the countdown proceeds... Why am I doing this???

April 1998

We are on air!

Before their first shows students shuffle their scripts, snapping at each other, obsessively clearing their throats and sipping from water bottles. After each of their programmes they hang back, stage-whispering, laughing, dissecting and critiquing their own performances. As the next programme begins they have trouble keeping their voices down, I chase them outside where they drift into darkness, still talking.

Jenny, Sam and Belinda present a four-part documentary series on 1960s music, and very quickly begin to dance their way through their scripts... Nate, Chris and Martin’s shows
poke so much fun at ‘revered’ institutions and icons they can barely contain their laughter on air... Phil and his (reluctant) friend Tony challenge the prejudices of the rest of the class in a classical music half hour...

Carolyn and Jill, two of the shyest girls in class who blush crimson each time they’re addressed, achieve the station’s greatest coup... a live interview with the region’s biggest hero, Canterbury Crusaders rugby captain Todd Blackadder...

*Everyone* is talking about our station, we are high with the buzz of it all.

On the last night, no-one can believe it is over.

**May 1998**

Looking back on the station, everyone has something to be proud of: a humorous script, some new technical skills, a well-researched programme, meeting sponsorship targets, comments or praise from students, parents or teachers, completing all four programmes, turning up on time every day, using a microphone for the first time, ad-libbing to cover a mistake, creating a catchy advert, working together and not letting one another down...

Allanah is smiling as she says:

> *My mum couldn’t believe it was really me on the radio... she says ‘how can you do that when you’re too shy to talk to anyone?’... I won’t even go into a shop by myself, I always get my sister to go in for me...*

I remember: before she goes to air Allanah feels ‘sick’, paralysed, convinced she can’t do it. Quiet-voiced, matter-of-fact, confident, Melissa from Plains knows she can. Coaxed, pressured, threatened by the others in her programme team, she does. She realises: behind the microphone she feels ‘safe’. She is free to speak because ‘nobody can see’.

The other students notice: with each of her four shows Allanah’s voice becomes less of a ‘phone voice’, more vital, more her own.

**November 1998**

We all agree: the radio station is, by far, the best thing we did all year.
PART 1

POSITIONINGS,

PARTICULARS

AND

RESEARCH PROCESS
Chapter One  Introduction: Positioning Plains FM

At the same time as I was creating a radio station with my students, I was embarking on the preparatory stages of my research into the participation of women at Plains FM. Primarily that involved reading everything I could lay my hands on about community radio stations around the world. As I noticed the positive effects on my students of participating in our school radio station, I wanted through my reading to gain a stronger feel for what ‘community radio’ is, how it works and why it is important. Story after story documented the commitment, the struggles, the disappointments and the hard-won achievements of radio ventures in rural communities, in multi-cultural urban centres, in countries controlled by repressive regimes, and in war-zones (Barlow, 1988; Girard, 1992; Jankowski et al, 1992; Lewis, 1984; Mitchell, 1998; Riano, 1994). The more stories I read, the more it became clear that, despite the vastly different environmental and political circumstances within which these stations operated, the participants had at least one thing in common: they all had a passionate commitment to radio and what radio could do for themselves and their communities. In my experience as a teacher using Plains FM and the mobile studio with my classes, as a researcher and later a maker of programmes myself, I discovered within my local community radio station a similar strength of feeling. One of my objectives in writing this thesis has been to find a way to explore, express and make publicly visible what participants in my study refer to as the ‘spirit’, the ‘kaupapa’, the ‘creativity’, the ‘magic’ and the ‘passion’ of Plains FM.

Bruce Girard, a co-founder of the World Association of Community Radio broadcasters (AMARC), suggests that community radio generates ‘passion’ because of its ‘commitment to community participation at all levels’ and its potential to facilitate the social, cultural and political development of ‘those at the margins of society’ (1992:2). He positions community radio as a ‘third type’ of radio, ‘an alternative to commercial and State radio’ where ‘community radio listeners are the producers, managers, directors, evaluators and even the owners of the stations.’ Consequently, Girard (1992:2) says, community

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1 The passion that participants feel for community radio is the central theme in Bruce Girard’s edited collection ‘A Passion for Radio’ (1992).
2 AMARC is the acronym for the French name of the organisation: Association Mondiale des Radiodiffuseurs Communautaires.
broadcasters who have previously been 'outcasts' of mainstream media 'are transforming radio into a medium that serves their needs – a medium that allows them to speak as well as hear'. In other words, Girard (1992:3) suggests that community radio broadcasters are passionate about their programmes and their stations because they are in control of them, they can use them to achieve their own community-defined goals and needs, and 'as a tool for cultural and political change'. Therefore, through radio 'outcasts' become empowered.

Girard’s comments imply that the questions of who gets to speak, who gets to listen, and what they get to say or hear on radio are important questions about power relations. Power is involved because access to radio, and other broadcasting media, represents access to the public spheres of political, social and cultural debate, where community and societal issues are defined and prioritised and public opinion is formed (Hope, 1996; Hope-Hume, 1997; Meier & Trappel, 1998). Communications media also contribute significantly to the constitution of ‘knowledge’, ‘standards’, ‘social reality’ and ‘normality’ in societies (McQuail, 1994:64), and to ‘identity’ formation (Congden et al, 1992:181). For these reasons, access to media, or the ability ‘to seek, receive and impart information and ideas through any media’, has been designated a universal human right by the United Nations (1948; cited McBride et al, 1980:137). In practice, however, access to mainstream mass media has consistently been proven equitable: some voices and perspectives are privileged while others are marginalised or excluded altogether (McBride et al, 1980; Gallagher, 1981, 1995; Riano, 1994; Walker, 1994; Zanker, 1996). As a result, the ability of some groups and individuals to define and contribute to the formation of what counts as ‘knowledge’, and to public opinion on cultural, social and political issues is restricted, and their voices and views are silenced. It is such silences that ‘community’ or ‘alternative’ radio stations throughout the world seek to redress, by offering ‘a gateway for those at the margins who are otherwise excluded from access to the media’ (Hope-Hume, n.d.).

In Aotearoa/New Zealand, government legislation implies an acknowledgement of unequal access to the media by identifying specific categories of people as the focus of targeted assistance to achieve a voice on the airwaves. The Broadcasting Act (1989, Section 36c) established the Broadcasting Commission, later renamed New Zealand On Air (NZOA), as the official body charged with ensuring ‘a range of broadcasts is available to provide for the interests of: i) women; and ii) children; and iii) persons with disabilities; and iv)
minorities in the community including ethnic minorities’. A later amendment to the act added a requirement ‘to reflect diverse religious and ethical beliefs of New Zealanders’ to this Section 36c brief. One way in which NZOA works towards fulfilling this obligation is by funding community access radio stations throughout the country. Plains FM 96.9: Te Reo Irirangi o te Maania is one such station.

**Plains FM: Particulars**

Plains FM 96.9 is one of eleven autonomous, non-profit, community owned and operated access radio stations in Aotearoa/New Zealand. Officially launched on February twenty-ninth 1988, Plains FM broadcasts to the South Island city of Otautahi/Christchurch (population 310,000) and the surrounding Canterbury Plains. The full name of the station is Plains FM 96.9 Te Reo Irirangi o te Maania. The term ‘Plains’ is a reference to ‘plain’ as in ‘no frills, simple, uncomplicated, straightforward’ as well as a reference to the station’s location within the Canterbury Plains. In the Maori name ‘Te Reo Irirangi’ means ‘voices in the air’ and ‘o te Maania’ means ‘of the Plains’, hence ‘the voices in the air over the plains’. The full station name is often accompanied on official publications by the ‘positioning’ phrase ‘community radio’, although the station is generally known as simply Plains FM (Airtime, 1998:38:1).

Plains FM is located on the campus of the Christchurch Polytechnic on premises rented from the New Zealand Broadcasting School. In fact, the station originally developed out of the Broadcasting School’s practice of gaining the use of temporary frequencies for broadcasting training. In 1986, broadcasting tutor Brian Pauling decided to apply for an extra three weeks licence period in order to find out whether community access radio would work in Christchurch (Cruikshank & Pauling, 2000:5). Thirty local community groups made programmes during the initial pilot access period and became ‘so excited about what they were doing they wanted to do more’ (Cruikshank & Pauling, 2000:6). Having proved that community access could not only work but be ‘phenomenally successful’ (Cruikshank & Pauling, 2000:5), Pauling decided to create a trust to develop a permanent radio station that would be used for broadcast education, community access and

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3 Brian Pauling is referred to in several different capacities in this thesis. He is a founder of Plains FM, a member of the New Zealand Broadcasting School staff and an official New Zealand On Air-appointed reviewer of access radio stations around the country.
distance learning purposes. In 1986, the Canterbury Communications Trust (CCT), consisting of representatives from Radio New Zealand (RNZ), the Christchurch Polytechnic and the Independent Broadcasters Association (IBA), was established. Its first task was to apply to the Broadcasting Tribunal for a broadcasting licence.

The Broadcasting Tribunal issued the CCT with a series of back-to-back short term warrants, which allowed it to broadcast continuously on the 96.9 FM frequency until 1988 when the Polytechnic successfully tendered for permanent use of the frequency under Schedule Seven of the Radio Communications Act 1988 (Pauling, 1997; Wilson, 1994). Initially, the Broadcasting School would take over the station for periods of time for student training, but as more community groups began to use the station for access purposes the shared arrangement became less practicable. In 1990, the Polytechnic successfully bid for a separate frequency (96.1 FM) for student training use and Plains FM 96.9 became more fully community access focused, although journalism students at the Broadcasting School still occasionally broadcast news stories on Plains. The mobile studio initiative that I used with my students was developed in 1996, when Plains FM began to share the use of the 96.1 FM frequency with the Broadcasting School (who only use it for discrete blocks of time during the year).

Although the profile of programmes and groups participating at Plains FM changes all the time, a snapshot of one month’s schedule provides an example of the kind of programming and participation the station attracts. In May 2002, Plains had close to 80 programmes on air. These included thirty-two cultural programmes in twenty languages, thirteen social issues programmes, two programmes by, for and about the lesbian, gay and queer communities, three shows on disability issues (or created by people with various mental or physical disabilities), eight religious programmes, eleven specialist music shows (from Elvis to jazz to pipe bands) and twelve programmes made by students from a variety of educational institutions. In addition, during time not needed for local access broadcasting, Plains aired international news and current affairs programming from the BBC World Service (via satellite), the Women's International News Gathering Service (WINGS) and Radio Netherlands.

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4 Not all programmes air every week so it is impossible to be precise about numbers. See sample programme schedule in Appendix 1.
The diversity of the languages and cultures represented on Plains FM programming is a particularly interesting feature of the station, given the station’s location in Canterbury, which is generally perceived as a relatively monocultural region. The Plains FM programme schedule presents a level of diversity within Christchurch and the Canterbury region that would be unfamiliar to many of their residents. Christchurch has a popular reputation as an English city⁵, based upon its name, its very English river-town style of layout around the Avon River and the extensive Hagley Park, and its large proportion of inhabitants of European ethnicity. Statistics New Zealand (2003a & 2003b) reports that the population of the Canterbury region is around 418,000 people, of which 316,000 live in Christchurch city. 91.8 percent of Cantabrians and 89.5 percent of Christchurch residents identify their ethnicity as European compared with the national average of 80.1 percent. Canterbury has less than half the national average of people with Maori ethnicity (6.8% compared to 14.7% nationally), less than a third of the national average for Pacific ethnicity (1.8% compared with 6.5% nationally), fewer people than the national average who identify as Asian (4.1% compared with 6.6% nationally) and a small proportion who identify with ‘other’ ethnicities (0.5% compared to 0.7% nationally). In comparison with previous census data, these figures reveal that, despite its continued high proportion of European inhabitants, Christchurch demographics are changing as new migrants from a range of countries of origin make their homes in Canterbury. According to Mayor Garry Moore, Christchurch city is now home to people of 180 different ethnicities (Watson, 2003). Many new migrants are experiencing and expressing some difficulties in settling in the Canterbury region (Crean, 2002; McCarthy, 2003a; The Press, 1998) and, as a few well-publicised racist incidents make clear, some established Canterbury residents are experiencing difficulties accepting the changing ethnic, linguistic and cultural profile of their region (Brett, 2000; Keenan, 1997a; Keenan, 1997b; Keene, 1998; McCarthy, 2003b). The changing demographic profile of the local population is part of the social and cultural context within which Plains FM operates and will inform later discussion within this research study (particularly in Chapter Four).

⁵ In 2003, Race relations Commissioner Joris de Bres was reported in Christchurch newspaper The Press suggested that ‘Christchurch had always had cultural diversity but it had been hidden behind a strong English culture and the city’s cultivation of the image of the most English city in New Zealand’ (McCarthy, 2003b).
Community Media: The Global Context

As a community access radio station, Plains FM is part of a loosely constructed international ‘movement’ of alternative grassroots media initiatives that are committed to community access and community participation, and that use media as a vehicle for community development. These grassroots media are called by different names in different locations and this diverse terminology can be confusing. What are called ‘community access media’ in Aotearoa/New Zealand may be referred to as ‘community media’, ‘public media’, ‘citizens’ media’, ‘grassroots media’, ‘alternative media’, ‘radical media’, or ‘média libres’ in other countries. In the academic literature, community media projects and movements have been theorised as ‘alternative media’ (Lewis, 1984), ‘radical media’ (Downing, 1984) ‘community communications’ (Berrigan, 1981), ‘grassroots communications’ (Riano, 1994), ‘democratic-participatory media’ (McQuail, 1994) and ‘citizen’s media’ (Rodriguez, 2001) initiatives. This diversity in nomenclature reflects the ‘difficulty of imposing one label’ (Rodriguez, 2001:12) on a ‘heterogeneous set of media practices developed by very diverse groups and organisations, in specific and different contexts, and employing a great variety of media’ (Paiva, 1983, cited in Rodriguez, 2001:12). While I acknowledge the diversity of these heterogeneous practices, that diversity is not directly relevant to the focus of this thesis, therefore I have chosen to use umbrella terms that emphasise the philosophical similarities rather than the differences amongst these media. I use the term ‘community media’ to refer to the diverse global collection of community/participatory/grassroots/citizens’ media initiatives, and ‘community access media’ to refer to the Aotearoa/New Zealand situation. I use the term ‘community media discourses’ as a broad descriptor to cover the range of terms and theories used in media literature to refer to a broad yet closely related set of communications objectives, principles, theories and practices.

Media theorist Denis McQuail (1994:130) argues that the ‘alternative’ approaches to media epitomised by the international community media movement grew out of ordinary citizens’ dissatisfaction with existing mainstream media models that were seen to have ‘broken faith with the people’. The idea that the media can ‘break faith’ with the people derives from understandings that the mainstream media have obligations or responsibilities towards the public. McQuail attributes such ideas to an historical Anglo-American perception of the need for a ‘free’ press that could operate as a ‘tool for political liberation and
social/economic progress' (1994:123-4). The concept of a free press has its origins in the libertarian ideal (as expressed by philosophers like John Stuart Mill) of the rights and responsibilities of individual citizens to participate in a ‘free market of ideas.’ Open communication of information and the expression and discussion of opinions and beliefs was believed to strengthen a liberal democratic society by allowing citizens to become active and effective contributors to political decision-making processes. As part of this discourse ‘a free press has been seen as an essential component of a free and rational society’ (McQuail, 1983:113). As modern broadcasting developed during the twentieth century the idea of the free press was widened to incorporate new communications media like radio, television and more recently, digital communications.

Because broadcasting media were very quickly seen by many ‘as potentially valuable tools of education and citizen training, capable of universal outreach and service to both mass audiences and minorities’ (Herman, 1995:177), a new ‘social responsibility’ role was added to the concept of media freedom (McQuail, 1994:124). For example, in 1947 the United States Commission of the Freedom of the Press (the Hutchins Commission) specified that a socially ‘responsible’ press should provide a ‘full, truthful, comprehensive and intelligent account of the day’s events in a context which gives them meaning’, they should serve as a ‘forum for the exchange of comment and criticism’ and be ‘common carriers of the public expression.’ They should also offer a ‘representative picture of constituent groups in society’ and present and clarify the ‘goals and values of society’ (Cited in McQuail, 1994:124).

The social responsibility expectations of the media expressed by the Hutchins Commission were enhanced in 1948 by the United Nations’ ratification of The Declaration of Human Rights, which asserted individual citizens’ ‘rights’ of access to media in order to express their ideas and access information. Article 19 of the Declaration states that ‘Everyone has the right to freedom of opinion and expression; this right includes freedom to hold opinions without interference and to seek, receive and impart information and ideas through any media and regardless of frontiers’ (United Nations, 1948; cited McBride et al, 1980:137). A commitment to such human rights to communication forms a cornerstone of international community media discourse and is also drawn upon by some of the women participants at Plains FM to explain the role and importance of the station.
Girard (1992) suggests that community media ventures are of particular significance to 'outcasts' or those 'on the margins' of societies because people within these groups are marginalized by mainstream media. Taking that idea further, media researchers Peter Lewis (1993) and Denis McQuail (1994) argue that being marginalized by mainstream media creates a need and desire for alternative community-based media. Lewis says that alternative media emerged internationally because of the demonstrated inability of both commercial and public service media 'to satisfy the full range of communities of taste and interest' (1993:18). Based on his understanding of media history, Lewis (1993:15) says that 'inadequate or repressive mass media systems... seem inevitably to generate alternative media'. Using a biological metaphor, he describes alternative media as 'antibodies produced as a protection against the neglect, insensitivity and insanity of the conventional media' (Lewis, 1993:15).

Lewis's characterisation of alternative media as 'antibodies' against mainstream media 'neglect' has particular resonance within the Aotearoa/New Zealand context where, since their inception, mainstream broadcasting services have frequently been criticised for being either repressive and/or inadequate (Day, 1994; Smith, 1996). In order to explain the source of such charges and to provide a context for later critiques of mainstream media expressed by women at Plains, the following section outlines some exclusionary aspects of the history and development of broadcasting systems in Aotearoa/New Zealand.

Broadcasting in Aotearoa/New Zealand: A History of Community Exclusion

Early radio broadcasting 1903-1935: the 'plaything of politicians'

Radio broadcasting began in Aotearoa/New Zealand at the beginning of the twentieth century with individual operators conducting experimental transmissions. However, 'within sixteen years' of its beginnings, radio changed from being 'the plaything of inventors to being the plaything of politicians' (Pauling, 1994:7). Because they understood the significance of broadcasting as a political tool, successive governments controlled everything from the allocation of broadcasting spectrum to the content of programmes (Cocker, 1996:113). Then, 'once in power and control of all the levers of broadcasting,' they 'proved extremely reluctant to let them go' (Cocker, 1996:94). Hence, the strongest feature of the early history of broadcasting in Aotearoa/New Zealand was 'politicians'
belief in their inalienable right not merely to determine policy, but to be involved in a day
to day oversight of an area in which they had a vested interest’ (Cocker, 1996:110).

Two aspects of the state regulation of early radio are relevant to this thesis. The first is the
banning of ‘amateur’ involvement early in the development of radio technology which
established radio broadcasting as an exclusive and elite domain. The second is the formal
and informal government censorship of ‘controversial’ radio content, which led to the
entrenchment of narrow and rigid definitions of ‘acceptable’ programming (Day, 1994:36).
Acceptable broadcasting was limited ‘to matters of an educative or entertainment character
such as news, lectures, useful information, religious services, musical or elocutionary
entertainment and other items of general interest that might be approved by the minister
from time to time’ (McKay, 1953; cited in Hope, 1996:16). Wayne Hope argues that in the
conservative and ‘proscriptive’ political climate of the 1920s and 30s, ruling political
parties were fearful of ‘intellectual diversity’ and ‘popular expression,’ particularly through
the rapidly developing new medium of radio broadcasting (1996:15-16). Fears of
American-style free enterprise radio and a developing understanding of the political power
of broadcasting also fed government desires to control radio (Pauling, 1994:6). According
to Brian Pauling (1994:3), the government’s role in early broadcasting was ‘negative’,
because it focused on ‘control’ and ‘regulation’ and imposed ‘an informal set of
conditions’ that effectively restricted and censored programme content.

1935-1961: ‘Public servant broadcasting’

In 1935 the newly elected Labour government decided to buy up the existing private radio
stations and bring all radio broadcasting under government department control (Cocker,
1996:89). In so doing, they developed a ‘government monopoly in broadcasting with two
elements: a national service supported by a receiver licence fee and a commercial system
earning income from advertising’ (Pauling 1994:8). The local commercial stations were to
‘support and complement’ the national system that officials declared would be modelled on

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6 In 1903 the government attempted to control amateur radio experimenters by imposing a fine of £500 for
transmitting a radio signal without permission. In 1912, it banned amateur operators altogether, despite the
fact that ‘the banning of amateur usage was increasingly regarded as a denial of public access’ (Day,
1994:36). It was 1922 before the first licences were granted for radio stations to broadcast actual
programming. Radio stations in the 1920s were separated into ‘A’ stations serving main centres and lower-
powered ‘B’ stations in smaller towns, run by ‘private operators and enthusiasts operating under tight
government control’ (Cocker, 1996:84).
the British Broadcasting Corporation (BBC) ‘public service broadcasting’ model (Pauling, 1994:8).

In the BBC tradition, public service broadcasting has three principle objectives: to ‘inform, educate and entertain’ (Smith, 1996:15). It also incorporates eight general principles:

1) **Geographic universality:** the right of the total population to receive transmission signals

2) **Universality of appeal:** catering for all tastes and interests

3) **Universality of payment:** one broadcast organisation funded directly by the main body of users

4) **Broadcasting should be distanced from all vested interests, especially those of the government of the day**

5) **Broadcasters should recognise their special relationship to the sense of a nation’s identity and community**

6) **Minorities (especially disadvantaged) should receive special provision**

7) **Broadcasting should be structured so as to encourage competition in good programming rather than competition for numbers**

8) **The public guidelines for broadcasting should be designed to liberate rather than restrict programme makers**


The above principles outline the *ideal* objectives of public service broadcasting (which of course were/are not always lived up to in practice). These ideals suggest an independent, inclusive and universal media system that caters to diverse tastes and serves minority and majority tastes and audiences. However, Cocker argues that in New Zealand ‘the public service vision was distorted by local peculiarities, especially the censorious approach to the issue of controversy in broadcasting imposed by a close political eye’ (1996:87). The influence of ‘local peculiarities’ in the Aotearoa/New Zealand context (like its rugged geography and small population) meant that government commitment to the principles of public service was selective and uneven. For example, ‘geographic universality’ and commitment to the nation’s ‘identity’ were strong priorities (Gregory, 1985), but the ‘close political eye’ that successive governments kept on broadcasting meant that it was never ‘distanced’ from ‘vested interests’. In Cocker’s view, the ‘politically sullied’ nature of the New Zealand broadcasting services led to a ‘weak’ public service ethic (1996:107),
and therefore what developed in Aotearoa/New Zealand could more accurately be called ‘departmental’ or ‘public servant’ broadcasting (1996:89). Similarly, Hope (1996:19) describes the New Zealand system during this period as a ‘crude state-led model’ in which radio stations operated ‘like lecterns’.

For the purposes of this research three factors related to the development of broadcasting in this period are significant because each contributed to the creation of what many characterise as a repressive and inadequate mainstream media environment (Day, 1994; Gregory, 1985; Hope, 1996). The first factor is the government co-option of broadcasting as a vehicle for the development of national unity, advancement and identity (Day, 1994; Gregory, 1985:18); the second is the strong government control over the flow of news and information through broadcasting; and the third is New Zealand broadcasting officials’ admiration and emulation of the BBC vision of broadcasting as a tool to ‘enlighten’ and ‘educate’ the masses.

In the 1930s and 40s, governments argued that broadcasting could help to ‘develop’ New Zealand into a unified nation. McQuail (1983:84-5) states that a ‘development’ approach to broadcasting operates on the presumption that broadcast media can be vehicles for the development of national unity, advancement and identity, and that such national goals are more important than media freedoms. Gregory (1985:18) argues that the 1935 Labour government led by Michael Joseph Savage ‘saw itself and was seen by many, as leading the country out of the bitterness and conflict of the Depression into a brave new era of social development and unity’. The role of national radio broadcasting was to help to unite the disparate elements of a colonial society into a cohesive nation and to forge a sense of New Zealand cultural identity (Day, 1994:220). However, in order to forge this national identity and social cohesion, controversial opinions, public debate, minority perspectives and cultural differences were excluded from the national airwaves. Gregory argues that, at the time, these exclusions were not challenged or considered important by the majority of the population because government control of broadcasting was ‘considered by many to be a perfectly reasonable application of a public utility to the crusade of state-led nation-building’ (1985:18).
The strong government control over news reporting in Aotearoa/New Zealand was an obvious break with the British public service tradition of media independence. Pre-1935 government moves to censor radio content had set the scene for several more decades of state control of public information and communication. From 1937 until 1949, radio news was produced by an official news service operating from the Prime Minister's office and "was limited to reading bulletins prepared in another government department" (Day, 1994:234). Thereafter, news was the responsibility of the Tourism and Publicity department until 1962 when the New Zealand Broadcasting Corporation (NZBC) finally set up New Zealand's first independent news service. Hope (1996:16) says that throughout this extended period official radio broadcasting "became an arm of the government" in a way that "precluded the idea that information might be disseminated as a public resource for argument and social reflection." Hence, within Aotearoa/New Zealand, official media effectively denied citizens' rights under the Universal Declaration of Human Rights "to freedom of opinion and expression" and "to seek, receive and impart information and ideas through any media" (United Nations, 1948; cited McBride et al, 1980). On the contrary, "talk on radio was strictly controlled", "genuine discussion... was non-existent" (Pauling, 1994:9) and the majority of citizens were positioned as passive audiences waiting to receive the official edited version of local and global events and issues.

The positioning of audiences as passive was also a function of New Zealand government officials' admiration and emulation of the BBC model and the broadcasting vision and authoritarian management style of the BBC's influential head, John Reith (Pauling, 1994:4). According to historian Patrick Day (1994:220), the Reithian approach assumed that "broadcasting's main purpose was to raise people in the scale of civilisation" by "educating" and "enlightening" them (meaning the masses with their 'uneducated taste') in the ways of 'quality' (1994:90). Reithian-style broadcasting favoured an authoritarian top-down model of broadcasting that positions broadcasters as educated professionals and arbiters of 'quality' and audiences as passive receivers of 'enlightenment' and 'education'.

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7 Although Pauling (1994:5) remarks that limited resources, a small population and rugged geography meant that 'New Zealand broadcasting could only poorly copy that which it admired so much'.

In their adoption of these ‘paternalistic’ aspects of the British model (Gregory, 1985:31), New Zealand governments and broadcasting leaders created a situation where imported standards of ‘quality’ and taste were valued over local or popular choices. For example, musical tastes were dictated by what could be considered elitist standards of quality as classical music was favoured for broadcast over American-style popular music, and artists like Elvis Presley were frowned upon. Even as late as the 1960s, popular music ‘discs that contained anything that was determined as offensive were physically mutilated to avoid accidental broadcast’ (Pauling, 1994:9). In their adoption of an authoritarian model, broadcasting officials excluded the general public from any say in what constituted the ‘public good’ in broadcasting, restricted public access to decisions about content and excluded members of the public from participating in radio production. In fact, because successive governments retained control of news production, even professional broadcasters in Aotearoa/New Zealand were restricted in their ability to make content decisions and exercise their creative talents.

The combination of officials’ ideals of ‘nation-building’ and ‘national unity’ with their emulation of selected aspects of the BBC broadcasting style and ‘quality’ standards, led to the exclusion and undervaluing of minority cultural values and expressions. As Zanker (1996:36) points out, the ‘appropriate cultural standards’ that were to construct the New Zealand national cultural identity were ‘largely set by memories of good taste from “the old country” of the colonialists’, Great Britain. For example, despite the diversity of the New Zealand population and the existence of a distinctive New Zealand accent, the only acceptable radio presenters spoke with British BBC accents (Bell, 1996; Horrocks, 1995). Radical or alternative political, cultural and social perspectives, non-English programming and Maori music, language and cultural items were almost unheard on the airwaves (Day, 1994:2; Hope, 1996:19; Zanker, 1996:37). In fact, Hugh Rennie (1992:68) argues that Maori ‘language and culture (were) almost destroyed by decades of exclusion from any distinct radio’ (and later television) services. As Day (1994:315) notes: ‘(b)roadcasting may have been a major influence in the establishment of a New Zealand nationality, but it defined that nationality by declining to focus on the differences among New Zealanders’.

The important point about repressive government control of broadcasting in Aotearoa/New Zealand is that, from the earliest days of radio, the ability of the average citizen to access a
range of information, to express minority or controversial opinions, to engage in public
debate and to participate in radio production has been constrained. Clearly, despite an
avowed commitment to public service, those administering early Aotearoa/New Zealand
broadcasting services considered the communications needs and desires of the general
population to be secondary to government-determined priorities and ideas about the 'public
good' (Day, 1994; Hope, 1996; Pauling, 1994; Zanker, 1996). The authoritarian and
exclusive nature of public broadcasting and its heavy-handed regulation of public taste fed
public discontent with 'public servant' radio and a desire for change (Cocker, 1996).

1962-1980s: 'pseudo' public service and commercial competition
The era of formal 'departmental broadcasting' in Aotearoa/New Zealand ended when the
New Zealand Broadcasting Corporation was established in 1962 (Cocker, 1996:94).
Although the government presented the corporation as a BBC-style public service
broadcaster and allowed it to produce news and current affairs for the first time, it did not
relinquish its power over the organisation. Cocker argues that 'in the new system the
control lines were more subtle,' but 'they were just as strong' (1996:95). Consequently,
during this period, despite some moves to more fully implement the principles of public
service broadcasting (Pauling, 1994:15), in Cocker's view, audiences were once again
offered only 'pseudo' public service broadcasting services that 'struggled to gain the public
attachment accorded a "true" public service broadcaster like the BBC' (1996:113).

During this period, the popularity of commercial stations grew, a television service was
established and the legislative doors were gradually opened for private commercial radio
broadcasting. During the 1970s and early 1980s, there was a significant rise in the number
of both private and state broadcasting outlets (Pauling, 1994:15-16), and significant
restructuring of broadcasting services. However, Cocker suggests that the legacy of public
discontent with state-controlled broadcasting was so strong that when the government did
make some belated moves in this period towards fulfilling public service ideals, they were
regarded with distrust (1996:110). By the end of the 1970s, he says, 'New Zealand's
broadcasting structures were unloved and deemed to have failed' (1996:114).
Consequently, as the pressure for a free market commercial approach to broadcasting

8 See also Pauling, 1994 or Gregory, 1985 for discussion of indirect government control and self-censorship.
increased and culminated in the 1980s with deregulation of the broadcasting sector, Cocker argues that ‘there was little defence of the old structures’ (1996:74). However, he says that when those structures ‘were washed away in the tide of deregulatory policies, swept away with them was the instrument of regulation in the public interest and the unfulfilled ideal of public service broadcasting’ (1996:114). According to Day (2000:xi), deregulation represented a ‘swing of the pendulum,’ from ‘the earlier belief that broadcasting should be publicly owned and controlled... to an equal certainty that the normal status for broadcasting should be one of private control with success measured by radio and television stations’ commercial prowess’.

**1984 and beyond: broadcasting in a ‘free’ market**

Ruth Zanker (1996:40) states that broadcasting deregulation in Aotearoa/New Zealand was part of ‘a larger global wave away from government intervention.’ This wave was driven by neo-liberal arguments that ‘the market should be liberated from heavy handed state regulation to go about the rational business of providing competitively priced range and variety for consumers’ (Zanker, 1996:40). The discourse of free markets in broadcasting transforms the popular understanding of the traditional concept of a ‘free market of ideas’ into a property market where ideas and communication are seen as commodities to be manufactured and sold. Where the ‘free market of ideas’ aimed to provide a forum for open discussion of opinions and beliefs, modern free market discourse advocates freedom of access to participation in the media marketplace, open competition between participants and freedom of choice for individual consumers (Keane, 1991:52-57).

Media researcher Joe Atkinson characterises broadcasting deregulation in New Zealand as a ‘reaction – most would say an over-reaction – to the excesses of regulation’ (1999:19). However, he and other commentators suggest that after deregulation the free market commercial model of broadcasting became as ‘excessive’ as the previous state-dominated model (Atkinson, 1999; Cocker, 1996; Hope, 1996; Smith, 1996; Zanker, 1996). These commentators claim that, since deregulation, the commercial free market ethos has invaded all aspects of the media, including the few remaining public service broadcasting outlets. In their view, the promises of open access and participation espoused by theorists of free markets in broadcasting did not eventuate in practice. Instead they claim that opening broadcasting to private commercial interests has perpetuated or exacerbated rather than
solved problems of access and participation for ordinary citizens, local communities and minority group members.

As Day (2000:xi) points out, success in a deregulated market is measured in ‘commercial prowess’ rather than public interest and access. Commercial prowess for a broadcasting outlet means maximising audience sizes, advertising revenue and profits. In other words, it means performing well in the audience ‘ratings’ in order to ‘sell’ audiences to advertisers (Keane, 1991). Several commentators argue that the increasing focus on ratings by mainstream media organisations, particularly in their news and current affairs programming, has reduced audiences’ ability to access important public information (Edwards, 1992; Atkinson, 1994a; Zanker, 1996). Lealand (1991) argues that a ‘totally ratings-led’ approach to broadcasting in a commercial environment has also reduced programme diversity and the proportion of local programming. ‘More “choice” has meant more of the same’ because, although there are more broadcasting outlets, the range of programme formats is limited as only those with tried and true mass audience appeal make it to air (Lealand, 1991:68-70). International political theorist John Keane (1991:77) argues that such outcomes are typical of ‘unrestrained market competition’ in broadcasting ‘which tends to work strongly against the choices of certain citizens, especially of minorities.’ He says that the dominance of ratings in media decision-making discriminates against ‘non-market forms’ of media, like children’s programmes and that ‘ratings under-represent the opinions of ethnic and regional minorities, gays and lesbians, greens, elderly citizens, socialists and other minorities’ (1991:77).

Deregulation had significant and specific effects on the shape of the radio broadcasting sector in Aotearoa/New Zealand. While the number of private radio stations increased substantially, the market became increasingly segmented as stations ‘branded’ themselves in terms of content and style ‘in order to deliver clearly defined listening groups to advertisers’ (Yeabsley, Duncan and James, 1994:19). The need for economies of scale in a highly competitive market led to the emergence of radio networks that were able to attract a greater proportion of the wider radio market by developing niche stations targeting specific segments of the market. Yeabsley, Duncan & James (1994:20) say that such changes created the potential ‘for neglecting population cohorts with limited direct or indirect spending power, such as children and teenagers particularly from lower socio-
economic groups, beneficiaries, or the retired.' Alan Cocker (1992: 54) argues that because niche stations are mainly niches within mainstream formats of pop music and talkback radio, 'the New Zealand market does not appear to be able to support real diversity in commercial radio.' In his view (1992:54-55), 'there is an international homogeneity about these stations with their rock music formats, “infotainment” news and disc jockey patter' and there is 'little space for experimentation and truly innovative programming' in a ratings-driven radio market. According to Cocker, what New Zealand needs is more local radio that is plural, participatory and geared to the needs of the community, radio which ‘empowers the listeners rather than treats them as market-led consumers’ (1992:58). It is such radio that access stations like Plains FM aim to provide.

From dissatisfaction to action
As earlier comments by Lewis (1993) and McQuail (1994) suggest, public dissatisfaction led to action in the form of the development of alternative media ventures. Alternative media forms began in Aotearoa/New Zealand when the pirate station Radio Hauraki began to broadcast to Auckland listeners in 1967. Its initiative was followed by the development of student radio stations on university campuses and early religious stations in the 1970s (Pauling, 1994). The first community access stations were established in the 1980s, but the real growth and development of the access sector occurred in the 1990s after deregulation. It is possible that deregulation accentuated the need and desire for grassroots community approaches to broadcasting at the same time as it opened opportunities for communities to act upon that need. Those opportunities were provided by two government actions at the time of deregulation. The first was the reservation of radio frequencies for non-commercial use and the second was the establishment of the broadcasting funding body New Zealand on Air (NZOA). NZOA was (and is) vital to the development of access radio because it is the primary funder of access stations. It is therefore a vehicle through which communities and individuals, dissatisfied by their exclusion from mainstream media, can find access to the public sphere.

NZOA: cultural saviour?
NZOA’s key objectives are to promote New Zealand content through the funding of television and radio programming reflecting New Zealand culture and identity, to promote New Zealand music and Maori language and culture, and to ensure that a broadcast programming is available to specific categories of people who are under-served by
mainstream media systems. Section 36c of the Broadcasting Act (1989) charged NZOA with ensuring ‘a range of broadcasts is available to provide for the interests of: i) women; and ii) children; and iii) persons with disabilities; and iv) minorities in the community including ethnic minorities’ 1989, Section 36c. A later amendment to the act added a requirement ‘to reflect diverse religious and ethical beliefs of New Zealanders’ to this Section 36c brief. One way in which NZOA works towards fulfilling its obligations under Section 36c is by funding community access radio stations throughout the country, including Plains FM. In effect, NZOA was designed to fill the gaps left by market run broadcasting, to carry the public service responsibilities of government in a kind of ‘cultural drip-feed’ into new broadcasting bodies (Smith, 1996:109).

Numerous commentators argue that NZOA has had a positive impact on both mainstream and minority broadcasting (Bell, 1993; Horrocks: 1995; Rennie, 1992; Smith, 1996). However, the above criticisms of the Aotearoa/New Zealand mediascape after broadcasting deregulation seem to indicate that it is unable to do enough to counter the effects of the ‘marketisation’ of private and public broadcasting. From the beginning, NZOA’s capacity to intervene has been restricted by its income, which from 1989 until 2000 derived from the Public Broadcasting Fee (PBF) that it collected directly from television owners. Despite significant technological development, huge increases in broadcasting production costs and intense NZOA lobbying, the PBF was never increased after 1989. At the same time, the number of total broadcast hours and outlets (television and radio) increased dramatically. As a consequence, the ‘(p)rofit driven priorities’ of post-reform mainstream broadcasting

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9 NZOA also contracts for the production of television and radio programming from a variety of producers, funds National Radio, Concert FM, and contributes to the funding of Pacific Island radio stations (Maori radio station funding is separately funded by Te Mangai Paho). It also finances increased transmission coverage for radio and television, New Zealand music initiatives, and the development and maintenance of television, film and radio sound archives.

10 In Smith’s view ‘NZOA turned out to be the best creation of broadcasting deregulation’ because it funded ‘a diverse range of programme areas which might not have been ignored, but would definitely have languished’ in the commercialised broadcasting arena (1996:122). Bell states that without NZOA ‘no Maori programming would exist; nor would that aimed at children (especially pre-schoolers) and we would not see programmes on homosexuality, for instance, on primetime television’ (1993:27). She argues that the work of NZOA is ‘maintaining a “holding pattern” – keeping the local broadcasting industry afloat’ in the face of the lack of economic viability for local programming (1993:27). Rennie (1992:71) agrees that only NZOA funding ‘sustained the levels of local programme production, including programmes ranging from mainstream drama, documentaries, and current affairs to minority services such as subtitling for the deaf, rural signal transmission, Maori programmes and news, and regional television funding.'
were able to be ‘tempered only slightly by local content funded by NZOA’ (Smith, 1996:166).

While seen by some as the saviour of broadcasting, others have decried NZOA as elitist, ‘politically correct’ and wasteful (Corbett, 1993:63), and the PBF as an unfair ‘subsidy’ for public broadcasting that should have to survive in the marketplace like all other industries (Smith, 1996:117). In July 2000, the National-led government responded to such criticism by abolishing the PBF. This action removed NZOA’s access to a ‘regular, guaranteed source of funding for public broadcasting’ (NZOA website: FAQ), leaving it dependent for the first time on government allocated funding, and potentially open to political interference with regard to its future funding decisions. Although the current Labour-led government has indicated strong support for public service broadcasting objectives, and demonstrated support for NZOA’s work by securing its short-term funding, NZOA’s long-term future and the level and prioritisation of its funding programmes are unclear. Clearly NZOA, and by extension its mission to deliver the ‘social objectives’ that a ‘purely commercial system would not necessarily deliver’ (NZOA website: FAQ 5), are now more vulnerable to changing government policies and priorities.

The role of NZOA is significant for this thesis because NZOA is a primary funder of community access radio stations. Although a few access stations operated before the advent of NZOA, its existence assisted the development of existing and new stations, and substantially enhanced stations’ abilities to sustain their operations. NZOA sees the funding of community access radio as a way of fulfilling its commitment to the special audience categories identified in Section 36c of the Broadcasting Act (1989) by ‘buying Section 36c programmes on access radio on behalf of Section 36c audiences’ (Smythe, 1999). In particular, it sees access radio as providing programming ‘by, for and about’ minority or special interest groups and ‘provid(ing) alternative interpretations of events for general audiences’ (Smythe, 1999). According to Brian Pauling (1999), NZOA gets value for its investment in access stations, because ‘access radio is the most cost-effective and efficient means of delivering diversity to the community of all the media’. While that may
be so, the increased vulnerability of NZOA funding as a result of the PBF abolition could have significant influence on the future of stations like Plains FM.

Community + Access = Alternative Radio?

Plains FM’s designation as a ‘community access radio station’ positions it as different or ‘alternative’ to the mainstream models of broadcasting that came before it. As I have already discussed, despite international ‘human rights’ rationales for doing so, neither state-run ‘public service’ broadcasting nor commercial broadcasting in Aotearoa/New Zealand included a commitment to ‘community access’. Although drawing on some of the founding ideals of public service broadcasting, the philosophy and objectives of Plains FM and community access radio derive from a different source: international discourses of community/participatory/grassroots/citizens’ media which I refer to by the collective term of ‘community media discourse’.

Community media discourses promote the idea that ordinary people and communities can and should be able to express themselves in the public arena through participation in media production, planning and decision-making, and that they should have open access to information, and to representations of their cultural values and life in the communications media. Foundational principles include a belief in communication as a basic human right for all people, a desire to provide an alternative to mainstream media and to democratise communications processes, respect for and promotion of diversity, and a primary commitment to community and community development.

The concept of ‘community’ is central to the definition of community media within international community media discourse, as the following definition indicates: ‘Community radio means radio in the community, for the community, about the community and by the community’ (TAMBULI Communication Project, Philippines: AMARC website). Bruce Girard, a founding member of the international association of community broadcasters AMARC, similarly emphasises the centrality of ‘community’ when he says ‘the defining characteristic of a community radio station is the participatory

11 This is a point I develop further in Chapter Six.
12 For example the objectives to educate, inform, entertain, and to provide service to minorities.
13 The focus in this quote on the prepositions ‘in’, for’, ‘about’ and ‘by’ is very similar to the Plains FM and NZOA commitment to programming ‘by, for and about’ Section 36c communities.
nature of the relationship between it and the community’ (1992:13). He adds that community radio ‘aims not only to participate in the life of the community, but also to allow the community to participate in the life of the station’ through aspects like ‘ownership, programming, management, direction and financing’ (1992:13). It is through such participation in community radio stations that communities discover and utilise ‘the potential of radio as a means of political and cultural intervention and development’ (Girard, 1992:2).

The concept of ‘community development’ is drawn from the discourses of community work, social work and international aid and development. Community development refers to a process through which the lives of communities and their members are enhanced (Ife, 1995). Key principles of community development are empowerment, community building, inclusiveness, self-reliance, community ownership and management, participation, equity, cooperation, networking and sustainability (Ife, 1995). For community communications theorist Frances Berrigan (1981), the community development and empowerment potential of community media initiatives is embodied in the crucial notions of ‘access’ and ‘participation’. In her seminal work (1981) she uses the definitions of access and participation that were adopted at the UNESCO international communications meeting on ‘Self-management, Access and Participation’ in 1977. ‘Access’ refers to the ‘public service’ use of the media. Access denotes choice: the rights of individuals to have input into content decisions, the availability of a wide and varied range of relevant materials, and the ability to request particular kinds of programming. Access also includes the opportunity for feedback: audience members should have the right to transmit their reactions, comments and criticisms to producers and managers of media organizations and they should be able to participate directly during programme transmission (Berrigan, 1981:18). ‘Participation’ refers to the involvement of the public in media production and management. It implies media users should have access to technical facilities and professional assistance to enable their involvement in programme production. It includes the rights of the public to be involved with programme planning and scheduling decisions, to contribute to media management, administration and financing decisions and to play a part in planning and developing policy for communication systems (Berrigan, 1981:19).
In the Aotearoa/New Zealand sector, the word ‘access’ incorporates a blending of the UNESCO definitions of access and participation (as quoted by Berrigan, 1981). Access is both choice and control over content and involvement of the public in media production, planning and management. According to Brian Pauling (1997:3):

(a)ccess broadcasting can be defined as broadcasting that encourages individuals and groups from all levels of the community to access a broadcasting station and transmit programmes that they have made themselves containing material which they have chosen and over which they have complete editorial control. In a slogan: People making programmes for people.

Despite a slightly different terminology, Pauling’s description of access broadcasting in Aotearoa/New Zealand clearly draws upon the international community media discourses outlined earlier.

Pauling, who is generally regarded as an authority on community access broadcasting in Aotearoa/New Zealand, emphasises that access broadcasting is fundamentally different in from other, more mainstream, broadcasting models. In his words:

The philosophy in access broadcasting is that it is the only radio structure where what happens in front of the microphone is more important than what happens in front of the radio set. The important thing about access is who broadcasts, not who listens. And that is a fundamental philosophy (Cruikshank and Pauling, 2000:12).

The ‘alternative’ nature of stations like Plains FM is predicated upon this difference in philosophical grounding, which is why this research project is based upon a definition of community access broadcasting as primarily participation and access rather than content or audience focused. While the content of programming and the reception of that programming by audiences is interesting and worthy of study, it is not the objective of this study to explore such avenues.

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14 This status is based upon his status as a founder of Plains FM, his wide experience and knowledge of community media ventures around the world and his regular employment by NZOA as a station reviewer and troubleshooter within the community access radio sector.
Plains FM: A “Different” and “Better” Broadcaster?

Plains FM 96.9 is a place where ideas, culture and music take precedence over commercial imperative. Dedicated to reflecting the changing face of New Zealand culture and ensuring that all people have access to a media outlet, Plains FM 96.9 encourages and trains people to participate in the media.

Plains FM programme schedule February 2003

Plains FM promotional and informational literature clearly positions Plains FM as ‘different’ or ‘alternative’ to mainstream public and commercial media outlets. The information booklet for station broadcasters proclaims that the station ‘offers a genuine alternative radio format which truly reflects Canterbury’ (Plains FM, 2000:1; emphasis added). Several of the interviewees in this study also position Plains FM as a ‘vital’ and ‘superior’ kind of ‘alternative’ media venture. Programmer Lydia describes Plains as not only ‘fundamentally different’ but also ‘fundamentally better’ than any of the commercial radio stations within which she has participated. Staff member Nicki positions Plains as ‘one of the most precious media resources’ because ‘you can say what you want to: in your own voice, in your own language, in your own time, through voice or music or information-giving or documentary or skit, or whatever way you want to put your message across.’ Several programmers suggest that Plains FM offers their communities access to information, a ‘forum’ or ‘platform’ for community debate, and opportunities to participate in media production that are unavailable to them through any mainstream media. One programmer, Pauline, goes further, arguing that Plains FM is ‘essential’ because ‘it is the only avenue for the community to be able to put their views across without being edited by a media which is dominated by commercialism and by very, now very few owners.’ In her view, the benefit of community access radio is that:

…it’s something that people can volunteer for and be part of the community and push community interests and diverse interests... I mean that they might not be the popular ones, they might be the minority interests and I think that’s important in a democratic society... which I think this is becoming less and less so in many ways... that we do have that outlet. I think we must, really it is necessary that we do have access radio and community radio...
Pauline positions Plains FM as having a role in transforming the wider community by increasing the ‘democratic’ potential of ‘society’ through the expression of ‘community’, ‘diverse’ or ‘minority’ interests. She also portrays Plains as filling some of the gaps or absences left open by a mainstream media too concerned with commercial interests.

The above comments by Plains FM participants about the role and significance of their station resonate strongly with claims about ‘alternative’, ‘community’ or ‘citizens’ media ventures made by community media practitioners, theorists and researchers from around the world. For example, Clemencia Rodriguez (2001:163), who has been involved in citizens’ media projects in a variety of countries including Spain, Nicaragua, Colombia and the United States, reinforces some of the perspectives of women at Plains FM when she claims that citizens’ media are ‘vital social phenomena’ with the potential to ‘transform’ individuals and communities. Like Pauline above, Rodriguez (2001:163) argues that alternative media projects (like Plains FM) provide ordinary citizens with a way to ‘break into the established mediascape’, a means of ‘elbowing their way into a fissure where their own voices – and whatever they have to say can have a presence in the public realm’.

The small-scale, local, participatory and non-profit nature of Plains FM positions it as quite clearly alternative to both the authoritative and paternalistic version of public service broadcasting that characterised the early days of radio and television in Aotearoa/ New Zealand and the profit-driven commercialised approach to media that has become pre-eminent since deregulation of the broadcasting sector. Through its focus on community development, access and participation, Plains FM attempts to open up the previously exclusive domain of broadcasting to ordinary people and marginalized communities, showing that anyone can produce radio and that radio can be done differently. Hence it aims to fulfil the key roles of alternative community media as defined by Lewis: ‘expanding the services of mass media, challenging mass media systems and their implications, offering alternatives to mass media systems’ and ‘doing things which mass media systems cannot do’ (1984:1; original emphasis).

**Why Study Plains FM?**

My rationale for researching the participation of women within the alternative media outlet Plains FM is multi-faceted. As one of the earlier community access stations to be
established in Aotearoa/New Zealand, Plains FM has been publicly praised as a fine example of what a community access station should be. In 1998, a NZOA staff member called Plains FM the ‘jewel in the access radio crown’ (Plains FM, 2000). Brian Pauling, the NZOA appointed access radio reviewer, rates Plains as a ‘world class’ ‘top performing’ access station, ‘as good as any observed elsewhere and better than most’ (Pauling 1997:6). Part of his rationale for assessing Plains in this way is that the station fulfils the ‘community access brief’ and the requirements of Section 36c of the Broadcasting Act ‘to a high standard’ (1997:7). Because Plains is so highly regarded as an example of how community access should work, it seemed to present the ideal case study for an analysis of what community access radio is, what it does, and whose interests it serves. In deciding to conduct such a study, however, I considered these questions too broad-ranging for the practical constraints of my project.

In order to narrow the scope of the study, I elected to concentrate on how Plains FM serves one of its target categories of people: women. I selected women as the focus of my investigation for three main reasons. Firstly, as a feminist I am interested in the experiences of women, and how their interests are served by the organisations in which they are involved. Secondly, because women are identified as a target group for access radio because of their inclusion within Section 36c of the Broadcasting Act, I was interested to discover how Plains FM works to include women as participants and how women experience their participation. Thirdly, the selection of women seemed to offer a rich diversity of experience and perspectives because the category of women is boundary-crossing in the sense that many women also fit into other categories targeted by Section 36c. Thus, by focusing on the narratives of a diverse collection of women involved in the station as volunteers, programme makers, or paid staff members, my study investigates how women participants at Plains FM make sense of their involvement at the station, and how successfully Plains FM provides ‘a gateway for those at the margins’ (Hope-Hume, n.d).

Another rationale for my study derives from my observation that many people are uninformed about community access and other alternative citizen-operated media. When responding to questions regarding ‘what my PhD is about’, I have frequently had to explain what Plains FM is and what it does. Clearly many people in Christchurch and beyond have
no knowledge or experience of community access radio and are amazed that such an organisation and service exists in their own town without their cognisance. Alternative media practices also tend to be undervalued within mainstream cultural and media studies discourse because their small scale and their localised reach makes them easy to overlook or dismiss as unimportant (Couldry, 2002; Rodriguez, 2001). Yet, as my experiences and research at Plains FM and the wealth of international community literature make abundantly clear, alternative media outlets are considered extremely important and valuable by those who participate in them (see Girard, 1992; Jankowski et al, 1992). The passion, enthusiasm and value attached to these ventures is worthy of further investigation, not only because of what these media initiatives offer to those involved in them but because of the insight that explorations of alternative media organisations might offer into the workings of wider media, cultural and political systems. By participating in alternative media practice, ordinary citizens are engaging in ‘practices of symbolic production’ that allow them to contest the ‘concentration of symbolic power’ in dominant, centralised media institutions and to name their own realities (Couldry, 2002:25). Following Couldry (2002:29), I contend that ‘alternative media practice is a rich source of insight’ into ‘the symbolic exclusions which operate within the mediated public sphere... and people’s attempts to contest those exclusions and hierarchies, not least by becoming media producers themselves.’ My research at Plains FM explores some of the ways in which Plains FM participants use radio broadcasting to negotiate, resist, accommodate and reproduce boundaries of gendered and cultural exclusion and inclusion within the Aotearoa/New Zealand mediascape and nation.

**Thesis Map**

Australian community media researcher Bob Hope-Hume’s (n.d.) description of community media as a ‘gateway’ into the public sphere suggests the existence of a barrier or boundary of some kind, a wall or fence perhaps, that separates ‘insiders’ from ‘outsiders’. In Hope-Hume’s usage, community radio is the means by which marginalized ‘outsiders’ can finally gain access to the status and power of the privileged ‘insider’. His gateway metaphor resonates strongly with a central focus of this thesis, which is on issues of ‘exclusion’ and ‘inclusion’. Throughout the thesis, I draw on the narratives of women participants at Plains FM to explore ways in which women’s participation at the station enables them to rework hegemonic boundaries of inclusion/exclusion in both the
media/broadcasting and social/cultural realms and, in the process, to transform their own subjectivities. I also explore the ways in which boundaries of inclusion/exclusion are negotiated within the station itself and highlight some of the challenges the station faces in its attempt to become an inclusive, diverse and empowering community development venture.

In Part One, I position Plains FM, the research process, and myself as the researcher. In this chapter, I have provided a context for the research by locating Plains FM within the historical and discursive landscape of the Aotearoa/New Zealand mediascape and the international community media movement. In Chapter Two, I outline the theoretical and methodological perspectives that have informed my research process and the writing of this thesis and I identify my positioning in relation to the research and Plains FM. I also discuss some of the issues, benefits and dilemmas that arose (and arise) from my insider/outsider positioning at Plains as I attempted to study an organisation in which I also participate.

In Part Two, I focus discussion on the voices, experiences and critical perspectives of women participants at Plains FM. I explore the ways in which women at Plains FM position the station, their participation within it and the transformative influence that they suggest it has on their lives and communities. In particular, I highlight the various ways in which the participation of women at Plains has the potential to provide a strategic means to challenge the traditional exclusion of women and minority groups from mainstream communications media and the social/cultural realm of the Aotearoa/New Zealand nation. In Chapter Three, I examine how women are able to resist the traditional marginalisation or (mis)representation of women within media content, and the exclusion of women from media production and decision-making roles, through programme making at Plains. While the focus of this exploration is clearly upon the voices of women participants at Plains, I draw upon feminist critiques of media and community media literature to provide a context for those voices and the insider/outsider issues that they raise. In Chapter Four, I explore how women from minority groups position the programmes they broadcast on Plains FM as a means of resisting the social and cultural exclusions and isolation frequently experienced by members of their communities. I argue that these broadcasters are utilising the 'transformative' powers of alternative media (Rodríguez, 2001) in order to increase the
social capital and enhance the ‘cultural citizenship’ of their communities (Stevenson, 2001).

In Part Three, Plains FM the organisation is under the spotlight, as I pay attention to the ways in which insider/outsider tensions are negotiated at the station. In Chapter Five, I explore notions of ‘family’ and ‘belonging’ that circulate within Plains FM and examine some of the challenges that the station faces in its attempts to create and sustain an inclusive, diverse and harmonious organisation. I discuss some of the problematic aspects of participation at the station and the complex ways in which its participants negotiate ‘family’ problems and conflicts. In Chapter Six, I turn attention to the potential threats to the community development objectives of Plains FM. Using the example of ‘professionalism’ at Plains FM, I highlight a central tension facing all community access radio stations, namely the difficulties inherent in their attempt to balance the sometimes conflicting objectives and priorities of both radio broadcasting and community development. My argument is that this tension poses a threat to the long-term survival of stations like Plains FM and to the community development work that they do. Finally, I conclude my case study of Plains FM by drawing connections between the central themes of the thesis and clarifying the strengths and parameters of the research.
Chapter Two  Researching Plains: Positioning the project

For whom do we speak and to whom do we speak, with what voice, to what end, using what criteria?

Laurel Richardson, 1997:57

Introduction:

In writing this thesis, I am engaged in an attempt to make sense of what happens at Plains FM, a sense that is constructed primarily from my reading of the narratives of women participants at the station and my personal experiences as a researcher and a participant at the station. I am attempting to explore how the ‘magic’ and ‘passion’ of Plains FM is created and sustained, and what factors enable and/or constrain the station’s endeavours to achieve its community development objectives. I am also attempting to ‘give voice’ to the contributions and experiences of women participants at the station in a way that validates their perspectives and work. By opening up ‘what is generally a socially obscured experience to a more public gaze’ (Opie, 1992:64) my hope is that this thesis will generate wider recognition and support for the creative community development work that happens at Plains and a greater understanding of the complex challenges and tensions that the station faces. More particularly, I would like it to be of interest and of use to the women who participated in the research, perhaps as a document that will support their continued access to government funding and policy protection.

Yet, this text has another function as a doctoral thesis to be submitted for an academic degree, a function that influences the structure and presentation of the text and is more likely to serve my personal and academic interests than those of my research participants. While I may wish to ‘give voice’ to women at Plains FM, I must also acknowledge that I am the one writing this research text and I am the one deciding how participants’ words are used in the text, therefore I am engaged in an act of ‘representation’ that raises important questions about power, process and my positioning. For example, how does my personal biography, my involvement at Plains FM and my pursuit of a doctoral degree influence the way I have conducted and written about the research? What sort of “knowledge” status am I claiming for this thesis? What kind of authority or validity can or should it have? How
can readers judge the credibility and ethical soundness of the research on which it is based? This chapter aims to answer these questions by interweaving discussions of my positioning as a researcher with description of the research methods and an exploration of the theoretical and methodological understandings, questions and dilemmas that have inspired, engaged and challenged me throughout the processes of researching and writing this thesis.

**Theoretical Grounding: feminist post-structuralism**

My approach to ‘knowledge’ in this thesis derives from a feminist post-structuralist theoretical framework. I refer here to the concepts and understandings of post-structuralist thinking as utilised and expressed by feminist theorists (for example, Butler, 1990; Davies, 1998; Flax, 1992; Grosz, 1990; Hekman, 1991; Hollway, 1984; Scott, 1992; Valverde, 1991; Weedon, 1997; Yeatman, 1994). Post-structuralist approaches emphasise the connection between language and knowledge, challenging the limitations of traditional notions of language as a transparent and neutral medium expressing factual reality. Central to this challenge is an understanding of language, not in the traditional sense as a simple reflection of reality, but as a system ‘through which meaning is constructed and cultural practices organized’, a means by which ‘people represent and understand their world, including who they are and how they relate to others’ (Scott, 1992:254). Drawing on the theories of Michel Foucault, a post-structuralist approach argues that ‘all language (in use) is discourse’ (Grace: 1999:5), or in Weedon’s words, language ‘consists of a range of discourses which offer different versions of the meaning of social relations and their effects on the individual’ (1987:86).

Foucault suggests that while discourses ‘are composed of signs’ both verbal and visual, they do not simply use these signs to designate things, rather, as ‘practices that systematically form the objects of which they speak,’ they *construct* social and cultural meaning (1972:49). Put another way, discourses are ‘historically, socially and institutionally specific structure(s) of statements, terms, categories and beliefs’ (Scott, 1992:254) that constitute our knowledge about ourselves, others and our world. These ‘practices’ and ‘structures’ are, however, not fixed, but change over time and are continually challenged and influenced by interaction with other discourses. Therefore the meanings they construct are ‘multiple and shifting, rather than unitary and fixed’ (Burman: 1991:327).
Discourses can be constructed and expressed within and through institutions, disciplinary and professional organisations, and social relationships, as well as in written and spoken texts (Scott, 1992:254). They are not however, discrete and separate from one another, because discourses are ‘always part of a wider network of power relations’ (Weedon, 1997:105). Institutions and organisations can constitute discursive fields within which competing practices, meanings and ‘truths’ are constructed and contested. In Scott’s words, discourses and discursive fields ‘appeal to one another’s “truths” for authority and legitimation’ (1992:255). Through these interactions some discourses, and their ways of giving meaning to the world and organising social institutions and processes, come to dominate a particular discursive field. But such dominant positions are only ever temporary, as more marginal discourses, or discourses from other discursive fields, interact with the dominant discourses and constantly challenge their meaning-constituting power (Weedon, 1997:105).

The institution of ‘New Zealand broadcasting’ is an example of a discursive field. Within the discursive field of New Zealand broadcasting, a variety of discourses compete with one another for dominance, at the same time as they overlap, interact and compete with other discourses from different discursive fields (both within and outside the wider discursive field of ‘New Zealand media’). For the purposes of this thesis, three of those discourses of broadcasting are particularly relevant: a public service discourse, a free market discourse and a community access discourse. These discourses represent three different understandings of, for example, what broadcasting is and should be, its purposes, its necessary structures and processes, its potential and desired influence and effects, and what constitutes concepts such as ‘quality’, ‘professionalism’ and ‘best practice’ with regard to broadcasting.

As my discussion of the development of Aotearoa/New Zealand in Chapter One suggests, the relative power of each of these three discourses to impose its ‘truths’ on broadcasting in Aotearoa/New Zealand alters over time, and is affected by the multiplicity of other discursive fields and institutional practices also working to construct the political, economic, social, and cultural climate of the country. Public service and free market discourses have at different times dominated public discussions and common-sense
understandings of broadcasting. Because of their influence on the construction of broadcasting as it is (and has been) practised in Aotearoa/New Zealand, I designate both free market (commonly referred to as ‘commercial’) broadcasting and public service broadcasting discourses as ‘mainstream’ discourses of broadcasting.

The community access approach represents an alternative counter-discourse of broadcasting with far less influence on general broadcasting policy and practice. Community access discourse has gained entry to the network of power relations that constitutes the wider discursive fields of Aotearoa/New Zealand media and broadcasting through the development of community access radio stations like Plains FM and the legislation that requires New Zealand on Air (NZOA) to fund programming for underserved communities (Broadcasting Act, 1989: Section 36c). By embracing an alternative ‘community access’ approach to radio broadcasting, Plains FM and other community access stations have introduced into the mediascape the possibility of doing and understanding broadcast communication differently from ‘mainstream’ broadcasters. A key argument in Chapter Three of this thesis is that, through ‘doing radio differently’, Plains FM participants have the potential to contest dominant understandings of broadcasting and promote their alternative vision of a more accessible, democratic and community development-focused form of broadcasting communication. However, because they always do so in the context of a wider network of power relations, their challenge to dominant broadcasting discourse is not a matter of ‘simple resistance’ because ‘multiplicities, tensions and layerings of meanings’ tend to ‘undercut simple resistance at every turn’ (Kondo, 1990:221). Plains FM participants, like any individuals or collectivities, engage with dominant discourse in complex and sometimes contradictory ways. That is, they both comply with and resist dominant broadcasting norms and conventions.

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15 To use an example from Chapter One, public service discourse dominated much of the history of Aotearoa/New Zealand broadcasting until the 1980s when it lost its dominance to the neo-liberal free market discourse that began to dominate government policy throughout the public sector, including broadcasting. Public service discourse did not disappear from the public arena but had distinctly less influence over government decision-making with regard to broadcasting until recent moves by the Labour-led government to reassert the importance of public service values in broadcasting through, for example, developing a public-service focused charter for TVNZ.

16 The government funding body for access radio and other public broadcasting organisations: See Chapter One.
Discourse and subjectivity:

If discourses are seen as ‘meaning constituting systems’ (Scott 1992:254), then it follows that ‘what an event means to an individual depends on her ways of interpreting the world, on the discourses available to her at any particular moment’ (Weedon, 1987:79). It is through her positioning within discourse that an individual develops an understanding of herself as a subject. Post-structuralist theorists challenge the liberal-humanist portrayal of the individual subject as a rational conscious being with an already existing fixed and unitary ‘true’ self. Instead they argue that there is no ‘true’ inner self ‘untainted by discursive forces’ (Hekman, 1991:59), because individuals are ‘constantly subjected to discourse,’ therefore subjectivity is constructed through discourse (Weedon, 1987:97). However, this subjectivity is not fixed or unitary because ‘(s)ubjects are constituted by multiple and sometimes contradictory discourses’ (Hekman, 1991:59). Through the operation of multiple discursive formations, individuals become ‘both the site and subjects of discursive struggle for their identity’ (Weedon, 1987:97). This struggle requires them, through their thoughts, speech or writing, to ‘commit themselves to specific subject positions’ in order to have some sense of identity (Weedon, 1987:97). Yet, the unstable nature of discourses and the complex relationships between them mean that these subject positions are temporary, and that individuals may ‘embrace quite contradictory modes of subjectivity at different moments’ (Weedon, 1987:97).

For example, whenever we introduce ourselves to another person we claim subject positions that are intended to convey something about who we are and how we locate ourselves in the world. With different people and in different contexts we strategically claim certain subject positions to describe ourselves while suppressing others. During this research, I experienced this process when meeting people at Plains FM or other community radio events. Sometimes, and in some contexts, I positioned myself as a researcher at Plains FM without mentioning my involvement as a programmer for Lesbian Radio (which clearly requires ‘outing’ myself as a lesbian), occasionally I described myself as a programmer without specifying the programme, while at other times I claimed the positions of lesbian, programmer and researcher. My self-representation in these different situations was (and often is) quite contradictory, shifting from a position of ‘out and proud’ lesbian/queer woman (I am what I am and expect people to accept me) to that of ‘closeted’ lesbian (I am not comfortable standing out as lesbian right now). The choices I make about
which position to foreground are context and person specific and often strategic. They are influenced by my feelings of safety or vulnerability at the time, my personal history, and my understanding of the marginal status of lesbian subjectivity within Aotearoa/New Zealand culture.

Hekman points out that discourses involved in constituting subjectivity do not all exert the same degree of force: some are ‘more determining’ than others. In addition, the same discourse operates to different effect on different subjects: ‘the control exerted over some groups of subjects is overt, over others more covert, and thus harder to identify’ (1991:59). For example, discourses of gender (and hetero/sexuality) may operate differently on subjects with different personal histories, and different social, cultural, religious and economic positionings. Dominant gender discourses represent ways of enacting gender that are the most socially acceptable within a specific historical and cultural context. They can be difficult to resist because ‘those individuals who do challenge or resist the dominant discourses on gender and gender identity frequently find that this is at the expense of such things as social power, social approval and even material benefit’ (Moore, 1994:65). Yet, dominant discourses of gender do not represent an accurate picture of the way that actual women and men live their lives: individual subjects (including myself and the women who participate at Plains FM) negotiate, comply with and contest dominant understandings of gender in a range of complex and contradictory ways (Moore, 1994).

The ‘engendered subject’ is also a ‘site of multiple differences’ because ‘all the major axes of difference, race, class, ethnicity, sexuality and religion, intersect with gender in ways which proffer a multiplicity of subject positions’ (Moore, 1994:57). A wo/man is never simply a wo/man, and wo/men are not all (or always) the same. Therefore, although I focus this study on the participation of ‘women’ in various capacities at Plains FM, I do not assume homogeneity amongst women participants. Instead, by attempting to include women participants who claim a range of different additional subject positions as Section 36c programmers, I will highlight the heterogeneity and the complexity of the category of ‘woman’ at Plains.
The role of experience:

Sandra Harding (1987:7) argues that 'one distinctive feature of feminist research is that it generates its problematics from the perspective of women's experiences.' Much of the research data that I have gathered at Plains FM is generated from experience: the reported experiences of women working in various capacities at the station and my personal experience of participant-observation. Through interviews, I sought to elicit experiential accounts from women from diverse backgrounds, particularly women whose communities are often marginalised within mainstream media and the public sphere. I wanted to give these women the opportunity to speak about and evaluate their experiences at Plains. But, given my stated commitment to post-structuralism, can I legitimately rely on reported experience as a source of knowledge?

Harding (1992:178) claims that '(a)rticulating experience is a crucial means of creating knowledge for everyone, and in special ways... for marginalized peoples.' She points out that 'one can learn from experience – and from others’ reports of their experiences too’, but that this does not mean experience grounds knowledge (1992:184). By reporting their experiences women make visible aspects of their lives and social relations that may have been previously unvoiced, but, says Harding (1992), women’s experiences in themselves cannot provide reliable grounds for knowledge claims. The reason for this is that as individuals we are not separate from, or outside of, the social relations that constitute our experience, even though we may not be conscious of the ways in which our positionings within those relations affect our subjectivity.

Maynard and Purvis (1994:6) agree that 'there is no such thing as 'raw' or authentic experience which is unmediated by interpretation.' They state that 'the notion of experience needs to be problematized, since individuals do not necessarily possess sufficient knowledge to explain everything about their lives.' Factors like social positioning and memory will affect the reporting of experience, and accounts of the same event will vary over time. Harding (1992:183) goes even further, saying that our immersion in dominant understandings of gender, class, race and sexuality may mean that '(o)ur experience lies to us'.

Maynard (1994:23) suggests that whenever we talk about an experience we (re)construct it:
Post-structuralist thinking clearly demonstrates that the very act of speaking about experience is to culturally and discursively constitute it. People's accounts of their lives are culturally embedded. Their descriptions are, at the same time, a construction of the events that occurred, together with an interpretation of them.

From this perspective, the interview narratives of women at Plains FM and my personal reflections on the station are culturally embedded constructions of the events and experiences being recalled. None of us can separate our 'experience' of a particular situation from our personal histories and our complex and unstable subjectivities. Therefore, our narratives about Plains represent versions or interpretations of experiences that are specific to our particular histories and to the time and context of the telling, rather than the 'truth' about any particular incident, person or location. One person's perspectives and experiences of the station cannot and should not be generalized to others at the station or others in their programme group or their various communities of interest. Neither can an interviewees' narrative be understood as one person's fixed and final understandings or beliefs about the station, its participants or its operations. The fluid and conflicted construction of subjectivity means that even in one moment an account cannot 'capture' experience. And, because individuals' understandings and positionings constantly change, each person would also have told quite a different experiential 'story' about Plains on a different day, in a different context or to a different person.

Maynard (1994:23) argues that, as feminists, we must respect women's experiences, but we also have 'an obligation to go beyond citing experience in order to make connections which may not be visible from the purely experiential level alone.' That is, we must contextualise experience and use theory to help us to interpret and understand experience. In this thesis, I contextualize the reported experiences of women at Plains FM by integrating theory, qualitative research data and a discussion of the wider historical and contextual factors that contribute to the production of those experiences. I do so in an attempt to 'go beyond citing experience' and to widen the focus of discussion from the concerns of a small community radio station to encompass aspects of the politics of media, community and nationhood within wider Aotearoa/New Zealand society. This is not done to generalize from the experiences of women at Plains to all women, to all women in the media, or to other
organisations. From a post-structuralist perspective, generalization is impossible because accounts of events and experience are always ‘partial and located, screened through the narrator’s eye’ (Kondo, 1990:8).

**Diversity and the representation of Others:**

Harding (1987:7) points out that ‘it is “women’s experiences” in the plural’ that form the basis of feminist research because ‘women come only in different classes, races, and cultures: there is no “woman” and no “woman’s experience”’. In this research, I addressed diversity within the category of ‘women’ at Plains FM by including women from a range of different programme groups. In the selection of interviewees and archival material to use in my written text I aimed for a range of ages, ethnic and cultural backgrounds, and duration of involvement within the station. I also chose to include women from the spectrum of roles within the organisation. However, the social, cultural and language diversity of my interview sample led me to the epistemological dilemma of how to approach ‘difference’ in my study. Two questions arose. Firstly, what right do I have to research and represent the experiences of women from very different language, cultural, social and religious backgrounds? Secondly, how can I work to avoid imposing my interpretations and definitions on my participants, thereby appropriating their experiences and speaking for them?

In answer to the first question, I draw on the knowledge that any researcher attempting to study the community of workers at Plains FM would face the issue of difference because the station is deliberately and proudly diverse in language, culture and identity. I also draw on Kitzinger and Wilkinson’s advice that it is impossible and unhelpful to research and speak ‘only for ourselves’. First of all, how do I define who is Like and who is Other? After all, ‘Others are constructed – by those who do the Othering, by those who reflect on that Othering, and by the Others’ own representations of themselves’ (Kitzinger and Wilkinson, 1996:15). Secondly, ‘the effects of speaking for ourselves are often the silencing of Others, the erasure of their experience, and the reinscription of power relations’ (Kitzinger and Wilkinson, 1996:12, original emphasis). In the case of Plains FM, not to represent the diversity of the station community within a research study would be indefensible.
The issue of how to represent Others is more complex, because ‘representation is never merely descriptive: it also serves a constitutive and regulatory function’ (Kitzinger and Wilkinson 1996:15). In addition, ‘there are many dimensions of power and powerlessness along which Otherness can be constructed, and it is clear that these multiple intersecting discourses of Otherness can position researcher and researched in shifting ways’ (Kitzinger and Wilkinson 1996:15). I experienced this shifting of positioning and power relations in various ways during the process of interviewing for this study. Although the interviews were semi-structured and flexible, I selected general questions, and decided which answers to follow up or leave. When interviewing people from non-English speaking backgrounds (half of my interviewees), I was in a position of considerable advantage, given that the interviews were conducted in English. I also conducted the analysis of interview transcripts, approaching it via my own interpretive framework, selecting, sifting, rejecting and sorting material as a result of my understanding of context and theory. Because ‘researchers and research participants have...different frameworks for interpreting the experiences under study’ (Coyle, cited Kitzinger & Wilkinson 1996:22), I can have no guarantee that my interpretation will find favour with all of my participants.

However, at other times, I felt vulnerable as an interviewer. From a position of relative inexperience as an interviewer, I approached seasoned broadcasters (almost all of my participants) with some trepidation (would the tape levels be adequate, were my questions direct enough, how were the batteries lasting?). My knowledge of the station and the intricacies of programme production were, initially at least, also relatively rudimentary. Although these vulnerabilities eased as I became more confident with interviewing, others arose. Occasionally, differences between myself and the woman I was interviewing became uncomfortable as I wondered if my interviewee would be as open with me if she was aware of my values, beliefs and particularly my lesbian lifestyle. I did not initially feel that it was necessary for me to ‘come out’ as lesbian to those I interviewed because I reasoned that my lesbian identity was not germane to my positioning as a researcher. However, at times during interviews, particularly when interviewees were explaining their strongly religious beliefs, I suspected that those women would not have communicated so openly with me had they known about the ‘lesbian’ aspect of my identity. The comments of some made it clear they were assuming our common heterosexuality, an assumption that made me uneasy but which I did not challenge. I felt particularly uncomfortable when one interviewee, who
had expressed what sounded to me like very fundamentalist Christian views, asked if I was married and whether I had children, and even more uncomfortable when I answered those questions without stating that I do have a female partner. I felt torn between wanting to be open (and proud) about my life and identity and wanting to be accepted by the interviewee, whom I had warmed to and whose narrative was providing me with rich and moving research data. At the same time, I felt frustrated that my sexuality should even be a consideration and annoyed with myself for letting the fear of prejudice influence the level of reciprocity I felt I could have with my participants. It became clear to me that my positioning as a lesbian could not be separated from my sense of myself as a researcher because of the conflict I experienced in such situations. In retrospect, my annoyance with myself had (and has) a lot to do with my discomfort about not having the kind of coherent unified self that I no longer believe in!

Despite my occasional vulnerability in the interview situation, when it came to the analysis of interview transcripts and the writing of this research, I was aware of my position of power relative to those I interviewed, and concerned about how to minimise the exploitative potential of that power. Acker, Barry and Esseveld (1983) have also struggled with this issue. They are committed to conducting research in a non-exploitative way that minimizes the tendency of research ‘to transform those researched into objects of scrutiny and manipulation’ rather than subjects in their own right (1983:136). But at the same time, they question whether objectification can ever be eliminated when the researcher wants to move beyond letting participants speak for themselves:

*The question becomes how to produce an analysis which goes beyond the experience of the researched while still granting them full subjectivity. How do we explain the lives of others without violating their reality?* (1983: 142)

For Acker, Barry and Esseveld the answer is complex. They say that ‘an emancipatory intent is no guarantee of an emancipatory outcome’ because of the inevitable existence of a power differential in the relationship between the researcher and researched (1983:145). Researchers can never completely eliminate their power in the research relationship as long as they are responsible for analysis and hold ‘the power to define,’ but they can work to minimise it through adoption of an emancipatory methodology (1983:142). It is through discussion of methodology that I explore issues of power in my research.
Lather (1991:78-80) argues that feminist researchers ‘must practise in our empirical endeavours what we preach in our theoretical formulations.’ Like Kondo (1990), she suggests that theory, methodology and research practices cannot be separated, and all are political. For Lather that means that feminist research should be non-oppressive and work to empower participants. She stresses the importance of ‘research designs that allow us as researchers to reflect on how our value commitments insert themselves into our empirical work’ (1991:80). In order to avoid ‘the dangers of imposing researcher definitions on the inquiry’ our ‘own frameworks of understanding need to be critically examined as we look for the tensions and contradictions they might entail’ (1991:78, 80). The way to do this, in her view, is to be self-reflexive throughout the research process and to attempt to deconstruct one’s own research study through self-questioning (although she recognises the riskiness and partial nature of this endeavour due to the limits of consciousness and self-presentation of meaning). The important thing for Lather is that research should ‘search for pattern and meaning rather than for prediction and control’ (1991:72). Lather supports Acker, Barry and Esseveld’s idea of an ‘emancipatory methodology’ (1983:142). They too stress the importance of a reflexive approach, precisely because it is ‘impossible to create a research process that completely erases the contradictions in the relation between researcher and researched’ (1983:150). If the contradictions cannot be erased, they must at least be made as visible as possible in the research report. In the remainder of the chapter, I highlight some of the contradictions within my research processes by interweaving discussion of methodology with reflections on my personal positioning vis-à-vis the research site, specific details of the research methods used in the study, and exploration of some ethical and practical dilemmas that arose during the research.

**Researcher positioning**

My research at Plains FM is a qualitative case study of the participation of women at community access radio station Plains FM in Christchurch, Aotearoa/New Zealand. I did not approach the research context as a total ‘outsider’ because the ‘case’ that I am studying is an organisation with which I have had personal involvement for almost a decade. Prior to beginning this research, my involvement at Plains FM consisted of using the station as a resource for my Year 12 Media Studies teaching programme. Each year from 1994 to 1996, I would bring students into the station to pre-record half-hour radio shows. Then in 1998,
my students used the mobile studio facilities to run their own radio show at the school (see Preface for detail). My positive personal experiences of the station initially piqued my interest in it as an organisation and led me to make Plains FM the focus of my research, which began in 1999 as a Masters degree project and then expanded in 2000 into a PhD study.

Becoming more involved in the station as a researcher stimulated my interest in becoming a programmer at the station, which I did in 2000 as part of a newly constituted Lesbian Radio programme group. My decision to become involved as a Lesbian Radio programmer while conducting research at Plains was carefully thought out and not without some misgivings. At the time, I had recently completed my interviews with programmers and was feeling inspired by their enthusiasm to have a go at radio for myself. I hoped that we could make Lesbian Radio a useful information and community support vehicle for local lesbians and have some fun with the medium. I also thought that becoming a programmer would enhance my research because I would become more fully immersed in the life of the station, experiencing the process of becoming a broadcaster for myself and learning more about how it operates on a day-to-day basis. However, I also saw potential drawbacks. Becoming a broadcaster for Lesbian Radio meant being publicly identified as lesbian within the station and I was conflicted about whether I wanted to 'out' myself to the wider station community, and particularly to those women I had interviewed who expressed conservative religious views. My uncertainty about being 'out' derived partly from my awareness that two lesbian interviewees had reported 'homophobic' reactions from other station participants and partly from my sense of vulnerability as a researcher dependent upon the willingness of station participants to be interviewed. While the interviews were completed, interviewees had the right to withdraw their consent at any time and in my worst-case imaginings they would do so, thereby reducing the richness and

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17 My involvement as a programmer for the Lesbian Radio show began in April 2000, when I attended a meeting called by Plains FM staff for interested members of the lesbian community to discuss the possibility of re-creating a lesbian programme. At the time, Lesbian Radio had been off air for several months since the previous programme group had collapsed due to lack of programmer numbers. Making a decision about whether to start a new programme was of some urgency because the previous group had disbanded without resolving their finances, leaving a significant amount of Community Organisation Grants Scheme (COGS) funding for programme airtime unspent. That money had to be used for the purpose for which it was granted or returned. Those present at the meeting decided to form a new group that would train up to become radio producers and use the COGS finding to re-start Lesbian Radio. After three months of broadcaster training, our group launched the new version of Lesbian Radio on air in July 2000.
diversity of my study. Withdrawals would have posed dilemmas for me because the station’s small size and the time constraints facing many of its women participants meant that substitute interviewees would be difficult to find. On the other hand, I reasoned that being ‘out’ as lesbian and researcher might enrich my study in that it would ‘test’ some of the station’s ideals of equality, celebration of diversity and inclusiveness. That is, while the withdrawal of interview consent would provide me with headaches, it would also constitute ‘data’ of a different sort if it came about as a reaction to my positioning as a lesbian researcher.

Research details
At the outset of my study I was unaware of the wealth of archival material gathered by the station during the build-up to its tenth birthday celebrations in 1998. When I approached station staff after receiving ethical approval for the research, I was pointed in the direction of the archival audio-tapes as a starting point. The archival interviews, which were conducted by station archivist Jan Hardie, provided my first key source of data. They were a valuable source of information and questions about how people at Plains understand, experience and speak about the organisation. Interviewees included past and present staff members, station volunteers, programme-makers and other contributors to Plains FM, like members of the governing body, the Canterbury Communications Trust (CCT) and the programmers representative body, the Community Broadcasters’ Society (CBS). Each interviewee signed a consent form that registered their agreement to be interviewed and to their interview being used for broadcast and research purposes. Because the women interviewed had agreed to the publication of their narratives, I have not changed their names when quoting from their archival interviews. I listened to and transcribed all thirty-five of the archival interviews that were conducted with women participants. These archival interview transcripts provided the material for initial data analysis and the development of new research questions and directions.

My participant observations at Plains FM during the period 1999-2003 were recorded within fieldnotes and provided a second key source of research data. Early in 1999, I spent time observing the broadcast of live shows and sitting in with the station’s programme

18 Because of my focus on women’s participation, I used only the thirty-five interviews that had been conducted with women participants.
director as she interviewed prospective programme makers prior to their training as new broadcasters. Although I tried on several occasions to observe the training sessions with one new programmer, several unforeseen incidents led to the sessions being cancelled. My efforts to observe the training process were also frustrated by the fact that very few new women were coming in to the station at that time and not all of them were comfortable having an observer present. However, once I became involved with Lesbian Radio, I experienced radio training myself as a programmer. Programme director Nicki Reece and Volunteer co-ordinator Lesley Evans conducted several training workshops with Lesbian Radio that included an introduction to the station (history, governance, objectives, staff roles, policies and rules), programme structure, planning and production, programme ideas, interviewing skills, and the production of programme trailers, voxpops, interviews and stings. 19 In 2001, I and one other Lesbian Radio group member also trained to 'panel' for programmes, that is, to operate the technical equipment to broadcast live shows. As part of sustaining our Lesbian Radio group, I participated in fundraising efforts and the organisation of 'have-a-go' days to attract new members. I have also been a regular programme maker since July 2000, although my participation has been as a programme producer and presenter rather than a panellist. The experiences of training to be a broadcaster and being part of the creation of a new radio group and programme at Plains offered me invaluable insights into the processes, the enjoyments and the stresses of programme production, particularly by a voluntary community group.

During the research period I also participated in fundraising events for the Women On Air programme, attended station events like the birthday party and awards ceremony, and attended two national conferences of the Association of Community Access Broadcasters (ACAB) in 1999 and 2001, and one of the Community Broadcasters Association of Australia (CBAA) in 2001. The conferences were useful for the opportunities they offered to be part of workshops and keynote addresses on current issues facing access broadcasters in New Zealand and Australia and to network and discuss those issues with other community radio people. All of these participant-observations provided me with

19 Programme trailers are short (usually 30 second) advertisements played several time during the weekly programme schedule to promote an upcoming programme. Voxpops (from the Latin vox populi, meaning the voice of the people) are brief recorded comments or opinions from ordinary people on an issue. Stings are brief recorded sound items used regularly in a show, like a voice and music intro to a community notice slot within the programme.
opportunities to absorb some of the language, culture and concerns of the Plains FM organisation and the wider community access radio sector as I tried to understand what community access represents to its practitioners. As I attempted to open my mind to participants’ perspectives, I was consciously attempting to listen carefully and ask questions as a way to reduce the power of what I already ‘knew’ about Plains.

I used open-ended semi-structured interviews as my third key source of data for analysis. Because I wanted women’s narratives and perspectives to be the focus of my study, all the people I interviewed are women. Initially, I interviewed three paid staff and an ex-staff member in order to get their perspectives on some of the themes that emerged from the archival material. I also asked them specific questions about the role of women within the station, the level of access for women and the importance, or otherwise, of programming ‘by, for and about’ women. I then interviewed twelve women programme-makers. Practical constraints meant I could not interview every woman participating at Plains. Of necessity, I had to decide upon criteria for selection of a sample of interviewees. The first choice I made was not to interview station volunteers because many volunteers had been represented on the archival tapes and I wanted to include voices that had not already been interviewed. In particular, I wanted to increase the diversity of the voices as the archival sample did not include many programmers from minority ethnic, linguistic and cultural communities. The second choice was to try to include women who were, or had been, involved in programmes by, for and about women. Then, because my central concern was to study the participation at Plains of women whose voices are usually excluded from mainstream media, I focused the rest of my interviews on those women from ‘minority’ communities who are specified within station literature as priority participants for the station because of their inclusion within Section 36c of the Broadcasting Act. The latter were mainly women involved in programmes aimed at particular ethnic communities, who work either on their own or within a group of other women and/or men.

I used the station’s promotional material to identify women who produced and/or presented programmes and approached the station manager for information and advice.

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20 Particularly time constraints on station participants and on my project and language barriers
21 This included website pages, Airtime magazine and station programme schedules.
about approaching these and other women who fitted my brief. On the advice of the station manager, prospective interviewees who were not already known to me were contacted first by letter and then by telephone. Of the sixteen women approached, two felt that their use of English language (and my inability to speak their language) would be inadequate for an interview situation. Another felt she was unable to offer anything useful, and a fourth did not offer a reason for not participating.

I conducted fifteen interviews in total, involving sixteen women. The broadcasters I interviewed had been involved in eleven different programmes on Plains FM. They represent a diversity of ethnic and cultural backgrounds and broadcast in nine different languages. In all but one situation, I interviewed only one woman from each programme. The interviews were loosely structured around the key questions I had prepared, with flexibility to follow the interests of participants. Interviews varied in length from twenty minutes to an hour and a half and all were recorded on audiotape. Questions varied according to the role of the interviewee within the organisation. For example, in staff interviews I asked more questions about the structures and practices of Plains FM and how they are, or could be, utilised to increase the access of women to the station’s resources, whereas I asked programme-makers more about their particular programmes and target audiences. I asked two women questions about their experiences of working in commercial radio and the similarities and differences between that and their experience at Plains FM.

When introducing the interviews I let women know that I was interested in ‘women’ as one group identified by legislation as needing special encouragement to make programmes, but that I was aware women fit into most of the other Section 36c categories as well. I wanted to make it clear that I was interested not only in programmes ‘by, for and about women’ and specifically ‘women’s issues’ but in the broader experiences and perspectives of women working in any capacity at Plains. This was in an attempt to overcome the assumption by some that I was only interested in ‘feminist’ or ‘women-only’ programming (which I had not stated). I found that such an assumption led to a very narrow and limited discussion whereas I was attempting to keep the focus of inquiry as wide as possible.

22 The broad interview schedules used for staff and programme makers are included at the end of my study as Appendices Five and Six.
All interviews were fully transcribed and returned to interviewees, to enable them to check for accuracy and either amend, remove or make additional comments on aspects with which they disagreed or had had further thoughts. While the return of transcripts to interviewees offered them the opportunity to check and comment on their narratives, it also demanded an extra time commitment from already busy people and caused some discomfort and dismay, particularly for interviewees whose first language is not English. The complete transcripts are unwieldy and their structure emphasises the lack of grammatical tidiness in informal, conversational language. This was 'embarrassing' or 'hysterical' for two of my native English-speaking participants, but appeared to be even more problematic for those with English as a second language. One of these participants rang to check that the interview was what I wanted, thinking that she had 'done it wrong' or 'talked too much.' Although I could reassure her because she rang me, I wondered about the reactions of others who did not call. Given these difficulties and my awareness that interviewees showed different levels of interest in reading their transcripts, I would think carefully about the usefulness of returning transcripts in a future project.

Some qualitative researchers advocate the writing of all aspects of interviewees' speech, including pauses, space fillers (um, ah, you know), word repetitions and non-verbal elements into the research text (Opie, 1992). While I did include these elements in my transcriptions of interviews, and I acknowledge that such elements more closely represent the interview conversation as it was spoken, I have chosen not to include these elements in this text. I excluded them partly because, in my view, they are not necessary for an appreciation of interviewees' understandings of their participation at Plains FM and partly because of interviewees' negative reactions to their full transcripts. Several interviewees' asked for their transcripts to be 'tidied up' and the ums and ahs removed. In the interview extracts I have used in the text, pauses in speech are represented by three dots (…) and four dots (….) are used to represent a place where a section of the transcript has been omitted.

My fourth source of data for analysis was station literature, including a range of informational and promotional pamphlets, station schedules, policy documents, the station magazine Airtime, various updated versions of the information document given to all new broadcasters, ‘Information and Policies for Broadcasters’, the station’s webpages, training
documents and summaries of broadcasting laws. These documents were of immense value for their insight into how Plains FM positions itself as an organisation both to its participants and to the general public.

After the first stages of data analysis, I approached the station staff to request a session in which I could present some of my analysis to them, discuss it with them and ask them further questions about some of the themes and issues that I had identified. The session, effectively a semi-structured group interview, took place on 16th January 2001 and lasted approximately an hour and a half. It was tape-recorded and fully transcribed. Staff members at Plains FM also gave me written and oral feedback on the final draft of this thesis at a meeting on 31st July 2003. Their comments were helpful for clarifying and double-checking details and arguments that appear in Chapters Five and Six, which focus on some of the ongoing challenges and dilemmas facing the Plains FM organisation and operations. The meeting also offered staff members the opportunity to discuss and contest some aspects of my analysis. Where appropriate, I have incorporated their comments and suggestions into the final draft of the thesis. A few points of contention raised at the meeting are flagged in the text or footnotes to Chapters Five and Six.

Data analysis

The question of how I should analyse the qualitative data derived from all of these sources of information posed somewhat of a dilemma for me as the research progressed, primarily because of my increasing exposure to feminist post-structuralist theories. My original intention was to analyse my interviews using a ‘grounded theory’ approach to identify key theme categories, patterns and questions for further research (Strauss and Corbin, 1990). According to Strauss and Corbin (1990:23), ‘a grounded theory is one that is inductively derived from the study of the phenomenon it represents. That is, it is discovered, developed, and provisionally verified through systematic data collection and analysis of data’. What appealed to me about grounded theory was that ‘one does not begin with a theory, then prove it. Rather, one begins with an area of study and what is relevant to that area is allowed to emerge’ (Strauss and Corbin, 1990:23).

However, by the time I had conducted the staff/programmer interviews, my exposure to feminist post-structuralist theoretical frameworks made a ‘grounded theory’ approach seem
less appropriate. In particular, I felt uncomfortable about the ‘grounded theory’ idea that theory is ‘discovered’ and that it should be generalizable and reproducible (Strauss and Corbin, 1990: 23,31). At this second stage of the research process, I began to contemplate adopting a ‘discourse analysis’ approach to my interview transcripts. According to Burman (1991:335), by examining language in use, discourse analytic research ‘tries to elucidate webs of meaning and the relations and consequences of competing meaning frameworks.’ Adopting a discourse analysis approach at Plains FM would enable me to explore the ways in which language and discourses are employed by station participants to make sense of the station and its work. It would mean approaching interviewees’ narratives with a different set of questions that would explore the discursive resources that station participants deploy to make sense of their own positioning and the station’s positioning within the mediascape, the Canterbury region and the Aotearoa/New Zealand nation. For example, what discourses do Plains FM participants draw on to make sense of Plains FM and their participation in it? What subject positions do these discourses make available to participants? What are the dominant discourses circulating within Plains FM? How do the discourses in circulation at Plains FM draw upon, interact with, contest, resist or re-inscribe dominant cultural discourses? An exploration of these questions would offer the opportunity to explore the extent to which participants at Plains draw upon the three discourses of broadcasting outlined earlier and the various subject positions that these discourses make available. It would also allow me to read for and against the discursive grain at Plains, that is, to look for the common or dominant features of interviewees’ narratives and to identify the contradictions, tensions and conflicts within and between participants’ narratives. Such an exploration would lead to a theoretically rich analysis of the discursive work being done by participants as they construct their experiences of Plains FM.

However, as Weatherall, Gavey and Potts (2002:536) point out, a discourse analysis approach requires the researcher to approach interview transcripts as texts to be systematically analysed or deconstructed, and participants’ discursive utterances as ‘articulation(s) of broader systems of meaning’ rather than ‘reflections of themselves and their experiences’. Weatherall et al argue that conducting discursive analyses of participants’ narratives frequently generate representational and ethical concerns for
of feminist researchers. Representational issues arise because the researchers are primarily focused on cultural analysis and their interpretations of interview transcripts ‘might seem to have little direct value or relevance to the lives of (the) participants’ or may even appear to be ‘interpreting (participants’) words in ways which are challenging, disrespectful or implicitly critical’ (Weatherall, Gavey and Potts, 2002:533). Ethical concerns arise because of the difficulty (or perhaps impossibility) of obtaining fully informed consent for such analyses (Weatherall, Gavey and Potts, 2002). Research participants, particularly those with little exposure to the academic and theoretical contexts within which cultural research is conducted, often have expectations of the way in which their words will be represented in research texts and these may be very different from the intentions of the researchers. Thus, Weatherall et al (2002:536) suggest that discursive analyses ‘may be interpreted as silencing participants’ “voices” and implying that the researcher’s view is somehow more authentic than or superior to that of the researched’. This apparent ‘silencing’ opens feminist discourse analysis to some of the same critiques that feminists have levelled at traditional research approaches (Weatherall, Gavey and Potts, 2002).

The sorts of ethical and representational cautions sounded by Weatherall, Gavey and Potts contributed to my thinking and decision-making about the kind of analysis I should employ for this particular project. In the end, several crucial aspects of the research led me to make the decision to adopt a descriptive content analysis of my research data that grounded my theory development in the reported perspectives and views of my participants, rather than employing a discourse analytic approach. The first reason for this decision is that my original motivation for conducting the research was to help to give public ‘voice’ to the generally unseen experiences and contributions of women participants at Plains FM and to the struggles and challenges faced by the station. In employing a descriptive analysis, I am heeding David Silverman’s (2000:825) warning that a researcher’s ‘analytic position’ should be ‘appropriate to (his or her) practical concerns’ and that ‘some ambitious analytic positions’, like discourse analysis, ‘may actually cloud the issue’ when the research is focused on social problems or concerns. As discussed in Chapter One, Plains FM operates, at least in part, as a vehicle for addressing social concerns about the lack of access to public information and expression for minority and special interest groups within the Canterbury community. At the time of this research, the stories and perspectives of the many diverse women involved at the station, and their understandings of the station and the work that it
does, have not previously been collected and publicly told. In my opinion, a descriptive analysis of their narratives offers the best opportunity to open those stories and perspectives to public view, whilst at the same time acknowledging that any account (experiential and research-text) will always be partial and constructed, rather than the ‘truth’ about the organisation and its participants.

My second reason for adopting a more descriptive method of analysis relates to the question ‘who is this research for?’ From the beginning I have been committed to making this research accessible, not only to fellow academics, but to members of the general public who may not know of the work that is done at Plains FM, to the women who participated in the project and to anyone involved in community media and community development ventures like Plains FM. Community access radio is about demystifying and democratising the processes of radio production and broadcasting, opening the airwaves and their communicatory potential to those generally denied such access. Consequently, it is important to me that this research project makes every attempt not to re-inscribe exclusion through the use of complex theoretical jargon and an analytic method that may feel exploitative of those who participated in it. A descriptive analysis that respects the perspectives of participants without reifying them as ‘truths’ about Plains FM or community media seems most in keeping with the culture and political philosophy of community media ventures and movements.

The third reason for favouring descriptive over discursive analysis relates to the ethical concerns raised by Weatherall, Gavey and Potts (2002). In my initial approaches to research participants and in my interview consent forms I had presented the project as a forum for the expression of participants’ experiences and perspectives of Plains FM. This expectation of the project was implicit within the initial information sheet presented to participants. On the basis of this information and the accompanying consent form that they signed, participants would reasonably expect their “voices” and “stories” to be represented in a recognisable way within the research report. Given this initial representation of the project, a shift of focus from advocating “voices” to treating participants’ narratives as “texts” for analysis would be ethically problematic. Hence, following Silverman

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23 This aspect of community radio is discussed in detail in Chapters Three (in relation to women/gender) and Four (in relation to minority/special interest groups and communities).
while I acknowledge that there are ‘more complex way of addressing (my) research data’, for the above reasons I have made a conscious choice to adopt a descriptive form of analysis guided by a constructivist form of grounded theory (Charmaz, 2000).

Kathy Charmaz (2000:510-11) advocates for constructivist grounded theory as a ‘middle ground between postmodernism and positivism’, a ‘more open-ended practice of grounded theory that stresses its emergent, constructivist elements.’ In her view, it is possible for researchers from a wide range of traditions to use the analytical strategies of grounded theory ‘without embracing the positivist leanings of (its) earlier proponents’ (2000:510). Grounded theory can be utilised in a ‘flexible’ manner that ‘furthers, rather than limits, interpretive understanding’, and need not be ‘formulaic’, ‘rigid or prescriptive’ (Charmaz, 2000:510). The flexibility and constructivist approach suggested by Charmaz accommodated my post-structuralist leanings, thereby allaying my concerns about grounded theory and making it useful and appropriate for this study.

Charmaz (2000:509) notes that grounded theory analysis of data is an evolving process: ‘Throughout the research process, grounded theorists develop analytic interpretations of their data to focus further data collection, which they use in turn to inform and refine their developing theoretical analyses’. Each stage of my data collection and analysis provoked more and different questions that refined my research direction and informed the next stages of fieldwork and analysis. Before I personally conducted any interviews, I began my analysis by coding the transcripts of archival interviews with the following broad questions in mind: What are these women saying about Plains FM and what happens at Plains FM? How do they describe the station and what it does? How do they make sense of their own and others’ participation at Plains? What do they think is achieved at Plains? To what extent do they benefit from the station’s existence and operations? In my initial reading of the transcripts, I looked for common themes in the narratives and for words or images that women used to describe and make sense of the station, its operations or its participants. I identified ten coding categories that I wanted to investigate further: Belonging/family/community; Celebrating diversity; Community development; Station environment; Personal development; Plains FM’s place in the mediascape; Spirit of access radio; Women broadcasting; Financial issues; and Anomalies (which included all questions, contradictions, comments that seemed to go ‘against the grain’, points for
clarification). I created computer folders for each of these coding categories in which I collected relevant extracts from narratives, examples, sub-headings, notes, queries and possible cross references to other codes and relevant literature. I then used the material in these coding folders to refine my research focus and develop interview questions before embarking upon the first series of interviews with staff members at Plains.

Two aspects particularly struck me about the archival interviews. The first was that, despite the diversity of the station’s participant groups, the majority of interviewees expressed very similar views about the station and described it using very similar language. Very few interviewees made any reference to instances of conflict or discord within the organisation, and any that did positioned it well in the organisation’s past. The strongly positive and harmonious positioning of the station in these archival narratives may have been influenced by the fact that the archivist/interviewer had a long-term association with Plains and was known to many of the interviewees. The interviews were also conducted, and the archivist appointed, as part of the station’s celebrations of its tenth year of operation. The focus on ‘birthday’ and ‘celebrations’, and the fact that snippets of the interviews were to be used on air to highlight the birthday celebrations, may have suggested the type of material wanted in the interviews and possibly even affected the selection of participants. Because of the similarities across the interviews, the archival material seemed to me to convey what Plains FM wanted to say about itself. The strong emphasis across the interviews on a harmonious ‘Plains FM family/community’ seemed to represent the station in a very positive, almost idealised, way that led me to develop questions for my interviews about tensions or conflict within the station. It also alerted me to pay particular attention to tensions, conflicts and contradictions within and between interviewees’ narratives at later stages of analysis.

The second striking aspect of the archival interviews was the infrequent reference to gender. Very few of the thirty-five women mentioned gender at all, and only five women positioned gender as integral to their involvement at Plains. Noticing this absence made me more aware of my own assumptions in approaching the research. As a feminist researcher interested in Plains FM partly because of the prominence of women on the staff and in the station population, I had expected gender to be foregrounded in women’s thinking and talk about Plains. Finding that it was not made me question my own ideological positioning and helped me to generate additional questions to explore in later interviews with staff and
programmers: how relevant is gender to community access and participation at Plains? Does their gender affect individual women’s experiences of Plains? What factors other than gender affect women’s participation at Plains? What is the significance of programming ‘by, for and about’ women?

In qualitative research, ‘the researcher – rather than the survey, the questionnaire, or the census tape – is the “instrument”’ (Richardson, 1997:88). As the research instrument, a researcher utilises a certain interpretive authority during data analysis and when writing the research text(s). Ann Opie (1992) warns that researchers must engage in careful and reflexive ‘textual practice’ in order to minimize the risk of appropriating participants’ narratives. In particular, Opie (1992:59) argues that analysis is more empowering for research participants when researchers highlight ‘difference’ within transcript texts by paying ‘attention to the paradoxical, the contradictory, the marginal, and by the foregrounding (not suppression) of these elements’ in the research text. By highlighting difference, complications and contradictions, researchers avoid the temptation to create ‘an interpretation which implies a single or unified representation’ of people, phenomena, places or events that ignores the unstable and complex positioning of participants (Opie, 1992). In this study, I have actively set out to explore the tensions, contradictions and ambiguities within and between interviewees’ narratives in order to complicate my discussion of the station’s operations and the challenges it faces in achieving its goals. In my analysis of interviews, I have paid attention to the compliant, the resistant and the marginal, and tried to incorporate those into my written text in a way that respectfully and fairly represents the diverse voices of my participants.

**Questions of power, ethics and authority**

Richardson (1997:86) argues that ‘writing matters’ in research: ‘We can never fully know the consequences our work will have on others. We cannot control context and readings. But we can have some control over what we choose to write and how we write it’ (1997:117). It matters what we write about our participants and ourselves because ‘(a)ll writing creates a particular view of reality; all writing uses grammatical, narrative and rhetorical structures that create value, inscribe meaning, and constitute the subjects and objects of inquiry’ (Richardson, 1997:58). In writing our research, we are therefore ‘using authority and privilege’ (Richardson, 1997:58). The challenge for researchers is to reduce
the negative consequences of that privilege for research participants. According to Richardson (1997:93), self-reflexivity helps to mitigate that privilege because it 'unmasks complex, political/ideological agendas hidden in our writing'. Yet at the same time, she notes that:

*What to write about yourself in a research text is a puzzling postmodernist problem. The problem as I now see it is to discover and write about yourself without "essentializing" yourself by the very categories you have constructed to talk about yourself and without "valorizing" yourself because you are talking about yourself.* (1997:107)

In thinking about what to include of myself in this research text, I have been aware that 'the boundaries between self-indulgence and reflexivity are fragile and blurred' (Coffey, 1999:132). This research is not about me, but to exclude my voice would be to 'hide' my authorship and influence on the text. My challenge has been to work to achieve an appropriate balance between my voice and the voices of the research participants, whose perspectives I primarily wish to recognize and valorize. In the end, I have written myself into the text at times when I perceived particular points of connection, difference or inequality between myself and those who participated in the study 24, and when I have experienced ethical tensions over what to do or how to write in a specific instance.

Richardson (1997) suggests that the question of ethics is crucial within any research proposal. In her view (1997: 106), researchers must ask 'what consequences does our work have for the people we study; and what are my ethical responsibilities for those consequences?' These questions are of particular relevance when conducting qualitative research because qualitative methods require researchers to engage on a very human level with participants. For example, as Richardson (1997:115) notes, it is impossible 'to situate ourselves as participant-observers in the lives of others and not affect them' in some way. Relationships form during the research as trust is built through interaction. Yet, after the fieldwork is over the research texts that researchers produce can have 'unintended, often hurtful, consequences for those who have trusted us,' (Richardson, 1997:115). Keeping an awareness of these potential consequences in mind, responsible researchers must attempt to act and write in ways that minimize harm to their participants (Richardson, 1997).

24 Of course, these perceptions may or may not be shared by the participant in question
Throughout this research project, I have been concerned to proceed in ethical ways in order to reduce the potential for hurtful consequences to participants from my research process and writing practice. In 1999, the project was scrutinised and approved by the University of Canterbury Human Ethics Committee. In my approach to the research site and to potential interviewees I attempted to convey information about the project aims and methods in as clear and accessible a format as possible, so that participants could make informed choices about their participation. However, the concept of ‘informed consent’ is problematic (Weatherall, Gavey and Potts, 2002), particularly where research participants have limited or no previous knowledge about how academic research is conducted and the kind of texts that might be created using their narratives. The awareness that most of my participants are in this position has made me particularly aware of the need to consider the consequences for them of my data gathering, data analysis and writing practices.

The issue of confidentiality provides an example of the differences in understanding between myself and some of my participants with regard to how the research would proceed and what would come out of it. Several interviewees said that they did not think they needed to be anonymous, and they thought that others would also want their real names included in the research text/s. The rationale for this position seemed to be that they were proud of their work at Plains and wanted it to be acknowledged publicly through my research. Their perspective on the issue of confidentiality seemed to assume that whatever I wrote about Plains FM would be positive and congratulatory, something that I could not guarantee. While my experiences at Plains prior to the research had been positive and I have a strong admiration for the work that is done at the station, my research aimed to explore all aspects of the participation of women at Plains, including positive, negative, enabling and limiting elements. My analysis of interviewee narratives indicated a strong theme of ‘community’ or ‘family’ at the station that emphasises harmony and unity and seems to position criticism as disloyal. Particularly during the writing of this text, my own positioning as a long-term participant within the station has led me to feel moments of conflict between being ‘true’ to my analysis of the interview narratives and being ‘loyal’ to

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25 See information sheet and consent form in Appendices Three and Four
26 I discuss this theme in depth in Chapter Five
the station and its participants. In other words, at times I resisted the inclusion of some aspects of my analysis because I worried that it would hurt or offend people I like and respect and because it was not the reading of the station that I think was expected of me.

My solution to this conflict has been to include only material and examples that I believe add to an understanding of the challenges facing Plains FM and to focus on the roles of contributors (as staff members, station volunteers, programmers, for example) and the themes or issues circulating within the station rather than personalising the discussion. I have also attempted to depersonalise the contribution of individuals and minimize the likelihood of harm from the way I have used their words by keeping the identity of individual participants confidential and not quoting fieldnotes directly within this text. However, as Tolich and Davidson (1999) suggest, confidentiality is problematic within the context of Aotearoa/New Zealand, never mind in a case study of a small community organisation. Because Plains FM is small, the risk of the contributions of individuals being recognised is greater than in a larger institution. This became particularly true because individual participants communicated with one another about being interviewed and some elected to be interviewed at the station. I initially contemplated using a pseudonym for the organisation itself, but rejected this idea because of the impossibility of disguising the station. There are too few access stations in the country, and none with the management structure employed by Plains FM. I believe it would have given participants a false sense of security to give the impression that the organisation could be anonymous, therefore I opted to identify it.

To help protect individual confidentiality, I sent complete transcripts of all interviews to the participants for checking. I highlighted any passages or comments that I thought might identify them and asked for their responses to those passages, and for comments on any concerns. I also rang some interviewees to discuss particular aspects of the transcript that I thought might be problematic. In one situation, I agreed to show the participant a draft of my analysis of a particular section of her transcript before I included it in the thesis. In the event, I did not include the problematic section because I felt that the point she was making could be expressed by using another less revealing example.
Because several people play such a distinctive and individual role in the station I realised that it would be impossible to present their contributions in the form of individual narratives or 'stories'. Instead, extracts from their interview transcripts are interwoven with theoretical discussion rather than presented as discrete narratives. All interviewees are referred to by pseudonyms, although in some situations where an individual's comments could potentially lead to their identification I have left the pseudonym out. In a few cases, individual women are referred to in the text by both their real names and a pseudonym because they were interviewed for the archival project and by me. Although this has the potential to be somewhat confusing, it seemed to be the only way to prevent their identification. For the same reason, in other situations I refer to participants only by general descriptors such as 'staff member', 'volunteer' or 'programme maker' to try to conceal identities (one example is my discussion of the staff group interview). Despite its problematic nature, I also use the term 'Pacific women' to refer to broadcasters from specific Pacific nations. While these women predominantly refer to themselves by their specific nationality, rather than the term 'Pacific woman' (or 'Pacific Islander', the term used by one woman), I have chosen only to refer to them by the broader term because it would be impossible to maintain confidentiality if I mentioned the name of the Pacific nation/community to which they belong.

Conclusion:

Richardson (1997:57) argues that 'wherever text is being produced, there is the question of what social, power and sexual relationships of production are being reproduced' therefore it is crucial to ask 'how does our writing, including this writing, reproduce a system of domination and how does it challenge that system?' These are questions to which I have given some thought, particularly as I have struggled with my desire to produce both an academically credible doctoral thesis and a written record of my research at Plains that will be accessible to diverse station participants and interested community members. It is perhaps impossible to reconcile both goals, because writing a doctoral thesis requires me to

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27 The problematic nature of the descriptors 'Pacific' or 'Pacific Islander' lies in their use as umbrella terms to describe a collection of very different cultures and ethnic groupings. The use of these terms could be seen as a denial of the diversity amongst Pacific nations. Following MacPherson, Spoonley and Anae (2001), I use 'Pacific' rather than 'Pacific Islander' to avoid the sometimes derogatory associations with the latter's historical usage in Aotearoa/New Zealand.
observe certain conventions of academic writing and to locate my empirical research within a theoretical framework. To the extent that this document adheres to the conventions of academia and becomes the means by which I am enabled to enter an elitist academic domain, it can be said to reproduce a system of domination. However, at the same time, I attempt to challenge some of the exclusionary aspects of that system by writing reflexively, by adopting an accessible and non-jargonistic writing style, and by drawing upon a feminist post-structuralist theoretical framework to set limits on the knowledge claims that can be made for this text. This thesis does not claim or attempt to present 'the truth' about Plains FM or any of its participants, or to represent any of the arguments or theories that it contains as 'truth'. It does not attempt to generalize from the experiences of Plains FM participants to other locations, organisations or people. It does not 'attempt to become definitive,' rather it presents outcomes that are 'contingent and incomplete' (Opie, 1992:59). As Richardson (1997: 87) suggests, post-structuralism 'frees' me 'from trying to write a single text in which everything is said to everybody.'

What then does this thesis do? It presents a close-up view of Plains FM and the work it does that draws heavily on participants' experiences and understandings of the station. It examines some of the common themes and tensions apparent in participants' descriptions of Plains FM and explores some of the contextual factors that enable and constrain the work and experiences of its participants. It locates participants' narratives within a wider historical and social context and draws upon communications theory, community development theory, social movement theory and feminist theory to make some sense of women's participation at Plains. By exploring the ways in which women at Plains FM position the station, their participation, and their communities, this thesis provides a vehicle for their voices and unique experiences to enhance the range of participant perspectives within the international body of literature and theory about community media initiatives. Hopefully, this document will also contribute to a greater local awareness of the station's work, of the value and significance that Plains FM holds for participant communities and of the station's contribution to the social and cultural life of the wider Canterbury region.
PART 2

THE PLAINS FM

"MAGIC":

TRANSFORMING

RADIO
Prelude Plains FM: “A Birthing Place”

_Plains FM gave me dreams... and dreams came true_

Yuko: Programme maker

One of my first information-gathering tasks at Plains involved listening to and transcribing audio-taped archival interviews with thirty-five women participants at Plains FM. As I worked my way through their narratives I was continually struck by the emotion expressed in these women’s ‘stories’ about the station. At least two women cried during their interviews as they described the importance of the station in their lives. Others conveyed, through tone of voice and choice of imagery, an intensely personal relationship or connection with the station and the people within it. Several interviewees talked of how much they ‘love’ being at the station. Ruth, a broadcasting tutor who was involved in the station in its early days says:

_I love walking through the door of this place because you don’t know who you will see in the corridors. You know, some days it smells like primary school children... and I love those days... and it could be people who are in the square dance club, it could be people in the Elvis Presley club, it could be people from the Pacific Island communities..._

Station volunteer, Jane, enjoys her time at the station so much that she says, ‘I so often feel like when I’m here I don’t want to go home. I just like to hang around and chat to people and watch what’s going on.’ An ex-staff member became so attached to the station that leaving her job felt like ‘finishing a relationship’ or ‘losing a family’. Overwhelmingly, both my personal interviews and the archival interviews led me to understand that, although they experience participation at the station differently, many women at Plains FM feel passionately enthusiastic about the station. I began to ask, what is it about Plains FM that generates such passion?

In _A Passion for Radio_, Bruce Girard (1992) asks the same question about a diverse range of international community radio initiatives and offers some possible answers. He suggests several reasons why people become passionate about community radio. One reason is that ordinary community members are able to become involved and invested in community stations in ways that are impossible with mainstream media. Girard argues that community
radio 'fulfils an essential role' for groups like 'women, indigenous peoples, ethnic and linguistic minorities, youth, the political left' who are underrepresented within and by mainstream media. When these groups become community broadcasters, they transform radio 'into a medium that serves their needs' and the needs of their communities (Girard, 1992:2). Their programming is infused with a passion that 'arises out of a desire to empower listeners by encouraging and enabling their participation, not only in the radio but in the social, cultural and political processes that affect the community' (Girard, 1992:2). Girard suggests that passion for community radio is about inclusion of those who have traditionally been excluded, it is about empowerment and it is about ordinary people making a contribution to community life and using radio as a 'tool for cultural and political change' (Girard, 1992:2). All of these ideas and more are expressed within the narratives of women at Plains FM. The women in this study position Plains FM as a 'people-place', a place of 'diversity' and of 'belonging', a place of 'opportunities', 'development' and 'empowerment', a 'creative' place where they can try new things, learn new skills and develop new relationships and social networks. The images and words women use to describe Plains and their experiences of Plains are powerful and personal. They focus on processes of growth and change, and they are heartfelt. Clearly, to these women, making radio at Plains is about more than just broadcasting, it is about how broadcasting can transform their lives and the lives of their communities.

Several station participants express their passion and enthusiasm for Plains through the use of 'birthing' or childrearing imagery. For example, staff member Charlotte comments:

You never know what’s going to happen next... because somebody comes in the door, you’d never know that they had a terrific skill, or a passion, or a knowledge in their head until you’ve talked to them for a little while and you realise 'here’s a wonderful new programme - this is fantastic!' and then we can help them get it on the air...so there’s newness and there’s surprise here because it’s a birthing place of all sorts of things...

Charlotte uses the image of 'birthing' to describe the atmosphere of 'surprise', 'newness' and creative energy that she experiences when participants at Plains develop their ideas, 'passions' or 'skills' into programmes.
Another staff member Nicki also suggests that ‘ideas’ and ‘passions’ are ‘birthed’ at Plains, as broadcasters who ‘come in very, very shaky’ gain the courage and the skills to broadcast on air. She suggests both the vulnerability and the excitement of the birth process when she says, ‘it’s like birthing a baby really, when you birth your idea and put it into the public arena... it’s very exposing.’ Both Charlotte and Nicki imply that the staff function as midwives who facilitate the birth of ideas by assisting programmers to enter the public arena. Use of the word ‘birthing’ evokes a powerful image of new broadcasters moving from a place of containment and constriction into a wide, open world where they can stretch their creative muscles, exercise their voices and express their ideas. The birthing metaphor also encapsulates the element of surprise mentioned by several participants, because one never knows how a particular ‘baby’ will turn out. Nicki says that the best and most satisfying thing about Plains FM is:

...seeing the evolution of a broadcaster from the first time they enter the door to maybe six months down the track and seeing huge development in that person’s skills... and that’s so rewarding, unbelievably rewarding, because it affects their lives in such a huge way... their self-esteem, their skills, feeling part of a place, it’s magic! It makes me cry, it’s so special to me, this place...

What is important to Nicki is the ‘evolution’, the ‘development’ she notices in new broadcasters as she sees their wider lives being transformed as a consequence of their participation at Plains. For her, the ‘magic’ of Plains is apparent when participation at the station helps broadcasters to increase their ‘self-esteem’, feel more ‘part of’ the Christchurch community and to develop skills and confidence that they can transfer into other areas of their lives.

The image of Plains as a ‘birthing place’ colourfully conveys the strong sense of new opportunities, development and transformation that many women seem to experience at the station. The use of childbirth and childrearing imagery also feature in the archival interviews when station participants position the station itself as a child. An ex-staff member describing the turbulent and exciting early years of Plains says ‘we would have been the toddling stage at that point probably, lots of people having tantrums and learning to walk and being messy with their food.’ The station archivist Jan also several times
engaged interviewees in dialogue comparing the development of Plains FM with that of a child. For example:

...and then Jonathon Hunt 28 when he came for the second birthday party he talked about the terrible twos and then by the time 91, 92 came along it was like some personality was starting to develop in the child if you like...

The idea of Plains as a living, growing child is supported by the annual practice where station staff and the CBS organise a ‘birthday party’ for Plains, complete with cake, candles and congratulations for the progress made and the work done by programmers and volunteers during the year. This discursive positioning of Plains FM as a child with childlike developmental processes suggests that the station is a dynamic entity that is constantly growing and maturing. It also suggests that some station participants claim a certain parent-like investment in the creation, growth and development of the station. In other words, as Girard (1992:2) suggests, ‘passion’ is also generated out of ‘community participation at all levels’. Because community broadcasters at Plains have contributed to the station’s maintenance, they feel a certain ownership of Plains FM as ‘their baby’, and they feel passionately proud and protective of it.

Japanese programmer Yuko offers another perspective on the birthing image when she suggests that Plains FM is a place where ‘dreams’ are born. She indicates that Plains not only offers its participants dreams they may not have imagined before, but it also helps those dreams to come true. Yuko became a volunteer at Plains while studying English in Christchurch and initially saw her involvement in the station as a way of improving her English skills and meeting ‘kiwi’ people. However, working at Plains opened her eyes to the possibilities of using radio as a vehicle for community change. Within a short period of involvement Yuko was producing her own programme ‘introducing Japanese culture and lifestyles and customs and language’. The programme, which was broadcast in English, aimed to challenge some New Zealanders’ ‘anti-Asian’ attitudes and ‘bias’ against Japanese people and to promote understanding between cultures. Born out of her own ‘hard’ experiences of coping with ‘cultural differences’, ‘discrimination’, and even ‘hate’, Yuko’s programme allowed her to celebrate her culture and demonstrate her belief that, despite different cultural backgrounds and language barriers, people ‘are just the same’.

28 Minister of Broadcasting at the time.
When she talks of dreams being born and dreams coming true, Yuko seems to refer to both her personal skills and confidence development (which she hopes to use to pursue a media career in Japan) and her sense that, through her programme, she is able to participate in community transformation through the development of cross-cultural understanding 29.

Yuko suggests that her ability to contribute to cross-cultural understanding through programme making is nurtured or enabled by the cross-cultural understanding she herself experiences at Plains. Using metaphors of ‘home’ and ‘family’, she suggests that the multicultural environment at Plains helps her to feel ‘relaxed’ enough to be able to take the risk of birthing her ideas and dreams:

They have a lot of different cultures and people so they know how we feel and, you know, all the discrimination and also the different language and stuff, so I find it’s really at home and family... it’s relaxing and I think that’s the best thing about Plains.

For Yuko, the diversity of cultures represented at Plains and the feeling of empathy expressed in her statement that ‘they know how we feel’ contribute to her ability to relax in the station environment and her appreciation of the station. She experiences Plains as a refuge where she and others can escape and feel safe from the ‘discrimination’ and stereotyping they experience in the wider community. From this place of safety she suggests that she and others can use radio programmes to facilitate community change.

Yuko’s comments about the environment at Plains are supported by other broadcasters who emphasise the warm, supportive and welcoming atmosphere at the station and its impact on their ability to make programmes and feel part of the station. Pacific programmer Sina says:

I think its wonderful environment in the Plains... everything, like the atmosphere’s good, the workers are good, are friendly and understanding, are easy going. They come down to meet you, to meet your needs and lift you up.

29 Yuko’s ambition to work in media may well have been enhanced by her participation at Plains. Several other women have used their voluntary broadcasting at Plains as a stepping stone to paid employment or to gain entry to formal broadcasting training, because it enhanced their skills and knowledge of broadcasting and offered them valuable hands-on experience.
Because of the workers and the station environment, she says, ‘people feel free to come in’ and ‘feel welcome.’ In her view, creating this safe and welcoming space is ‘a wonderful thing’ that community radio has done for the Christchurch community and its minority group members. In her words:

*Look, look at all of us, the communities, the minority groups in New Zealand.*

*We feel recognised, we feel empowered to be ourselves... and, you know, sharing information, sharing cultures, sharing knowledge and sharing friendship.*

Sina’s narrative emphasises the ‘fellowship’, the ‘sharing’, the recognition of minority cultures and the empowerment that she sees happening at Plains FM. Once again, she suggests that Plains FM is a vehicle for community change.

Both Yuko and Sina suggest that the transformational ‘magic’ of Plains FM can be experienced at both the individual and the community level. Sina says that programmers ‘personally... learn a lot’ through broadcasting at Plains and they ‘help to improve the community’ through collecting and disseminating ‘empowering’ information. The potential to empower her Pacific community is what motivates Sina to broadcast. Several other interviewees also emphasise their desire to make a contribution to their communities. Broadcaster Dianne says that one of the most enriching aspects of her participation at Plains was ‘feeling like I was doing something important.’ Ex-staff member Judy also felt that her work was valuable ‘even though it wasn’t acknowledged that much outside in the community.’ She says ‘I felt that something was going on here that I was part of, and I felt that I was doing an important job.’ All of these comments support staff member Charlotte’s suggestion that one reason people come to Plains is to ‘make a difference’ to their community.

In the next two chapters, I draw upon the narratives of women broadcasters to explore in detail the idea that Plains FM has the potential to ‘make a difference’ to individuals, groups and communities. That is, I aim to examine what specifically is being ‘birthed’, ‘developed’ and ‘transformed’ when women and minority communities use community access radio as a vehicle for the public expression of their own voices, perspectives and objectives. To that end, in Chapter Three I examine the ways in which women broadcasters
at Plains FM are transforming the medium of radio and themselves by reworking established media and cultural conventions and resisting their gendered exclusions. In Chapter Four, I focus on the use of Plains FM by broadcasters from minority communities within Aotearoa/New Zealand. I explore the ways in which their community programming enables minority group broadcasters to negotiate a public identity and a form of cultural citizenship for their communities that contests the exclusions inherent within dominant discourses of New Zealand identity and nationhood. My central purpose in both chapters is to illuminate the ways in which the participation at Plains FM of women broadcasters with diverse backgrounds, interests and perspectives can be understood as politically and culturally empowering. This discussion sets the scene for a later analysis of the constraints and obstacles upon the empowering potential of Plains FM.
Chapter 3 From Consumers to Producers: Women Broadcasting at Plains FM

Speech needs to be authorized only where silence is the rule.

Bat-Ami Bar On, 1993:97

Speaking out is a synonym for taking control.

Michel Delorme, in Girard, 1992:x.

Introduction

During the process of running a radio station with my Media Studies students, I noticed that becoming a radio broadcaster seemed to be a particularly liberating experience for some of the young women in the class. Most of the males in the class of sixteen were already reasonably confident speakers and communicators and that confidence generated an ebullient style of radio announcing. The nine female students had variable levels of self-confidence and several were initially consumed by nerves. Three of those students, Carolyn, Jill and Allanah, underwent a dramatic change in their self-presentation during the broadcasting period. Typically, all three were painfully shy, rarely speaking and interacting with others in the class unless directly addressed. When asked a question by me or another student, Carolyn and Jill, in particular, often only blushed deeply and muttered a few painful words. Yet on radio, they capably presented four programmes and conducted a live interview with a famous local ‘hero’ in difficult circumstances. Allanah was quite open about her terror of the microphone and her absolute delight and pride in her own performance after completing each of her four shows. It seemed as though all three young women found their voices on radio and surprised themselves by being able to use them effectively. While the radio experience did not strip them of their shyness and they still found it difficult to speak in other arenas, it did offer them a tangible example of their own communicative abilities and potential.

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30 Refer to Preface for a description of this process.
31 The interviewee was very late, arriving from rugby practice with barely enough time to get to the studio. Carolyn and Jill had spent the previous half-hour of waiting anxiously preparing back-up material in case he did not show. Apparently, he had not understood that the show was live to air so had not hurried to get to the school.
My observation of the transformation in Carolyn, Jill and Allanah and my discussions with them afterwards highlighted for me the significance that a safe vehicle for public expression can hold for women. In my years of teaching in a coeducational school I had expended significant energy on devising ways to encourage the reserved female students in my classes to speak out more confidently. Nothing I had tried previously matched the success of the radio station. The positive effects of our school-based radio adventure on the very shy female students led me to wonder about the transformative ‘magic’ of radio and to consider the gendered implications of women’s participation at Plains FM. Why do so many women participate at Plains FM compared with other radio stations? What are they gaining from the experience? How are they using radio at Plains? What are the consequences of their becoming radio producers? What is the theoretical significance of their participation and their creation of programming ‘by, for and about’ women?

This chapter focuses on answering these sorts of questions about the gendered aspects of women’s participation at Plains FM. In particular, it explores women’s reported experiences as radio producers at Plains FM and the ways in which Plains FM offers women a ‘gateway’ into the public sphere. By becoming media managers, trainers and producers, I argue that women at Plains are resisting their traditional marginalisation or (mis)representation within mainstream media, and their positioning as passive media consumers. As programme producers, Plains FM women move from being represented or misrepresented by professionals in mainstream media to being able to self-represent. Through broadcasting at Plains FM, women with diverse backgrounds and interests claim a space and a voice in the public sphere of political, social and cultural debate. As I will show, the significance of becoming active media participants is that women rework and resist conventional boundaries that define media ‘insiders’ and media ‘outsiders’ and cultural and media industry discourses that define women’s lives, actions, voices and abilities as ‘inappropriate’ for broadcasting. Plains FM women broadcasters subvert traditional notions that women, and members of minority communities, lack the right, the talent and/or the motivation to define or contribute effectively to public issues, knowledge production and popular culture through participation in broadcast media.
Theoretical Context: Women, Media and the Public Sphere

The significance of communications media for the lives of ordinary citizens derives from the fact that they are 'for the great majority of people' the 'major source of information about the world, beyond that of family, friends and acquaintances' (Congdon et al, 1992). The media therefore perform an important role in 'mediation of social relations' because they produce and disseminate 'knowledge' that 'enables us to make some sense of our experience of the social world' (McQuail, 1994:64). Through the media we receive reports about events and situations we cannot witness in person, we are exposed to messages from (usually powerful) individuals and institutions in society (like advertisers, politicians, bureaucrats, educators, 'experts'), and we are presented with a 'symbolic environment' that purports to reflect our social reality. However, as McQuail (1994:67) points out, the role of the media in mediating our experience or perception of social reality is complex because the media are 'institutionalised - subject to rules, convention, economic and political influence, formal and informal control' and they 'also have their own non-communication objectives'. He states (1994:67):

> Within the space that reality is played out, as it were, the media institution (comprising a complex sphere of social action and organization) provides media audiences with information, images, stories and impressions, sometimes according to its own purposes and logic, sometimes guided by other social institutions. It is unlikely that mediation can ever be a purely neutral process and probable that it will have consistent biases. These will reflect especially the differential power in society for gaining media access and the influence of 'media logic' in constituting reality.

What McQuail suggests here is that the 'knowledge' we receive from the media in order to make sense of our world is at least partly shaped by the 'rules', 'controls' and external influences on media organisations. Of course, from a post-structuralist perspective, the mediation of social relations can never be 'a purely neutral process' because the 'social realities' and 'knowledges' (re)presented by various communications media are discursive constructions. The symbolic environment constructed by the media is influenced not only by the institutionalised 'rules', 'conventions' and various forms of 'logic' driving media access and production, but by other dominant societal institutions and discourses (like those of the family, religion and market-driven economics). In addition, through their
production of news, advertising and fictional programming the media contribute to the (re)construction and perpetuation of dominant societal discourses, like those of masculinity and femininity. As I will discuss with regard to women, the institutionalised ‘biases’, ‘logic’ and ‘conventions’ that contribute to media representations of what constitutes a ‘woman’ and a ‘man’ also contribute to a gendered ‘differential power in society for gaining media access’.

Media and the public sphere

As mediators of social relations, communications media have the potential to ‘perform key functions for the development and reproduction of a democratic public sphere’ (Meier & Trappel, 1998:55). Following Habermas, Nancy Fraser (1990:57) defines the ‘public sphere’ as ‘a theatre in modern societies in which political participation is enacted through the medium of talk,’ it is ‘the space in which citizens deliberate about their common affairs, hence, an institutionalized arena of discursive interaction.’ This concept of ‘public sphere’ connotes ‘an ideal of unrestricted rational discussion of public matters’ which results in the formation of ‘public opinion’ in the sense of ‘consensus about the common good’ (Fraser, 1990:59). Benhabib (1992:86) calls this process ‘discursive will formation’ and says that, in Habermas’s model of the public sphere, ‘participation is seen not as an activity only possible in a narrowly defined political realm but as an activity that can be realized in the social and cultural spheres as well’. Further, she says, ‘public space’ is ‘the creation of procedures whereby those affected by general social norms and collective political decisions can have a say in their formulation, stipulation and adoption’ (1992:87). Fraser (1990:68-9) argues that a public sphere can also work as an arena for the ‘formation and enactment of social identities’, where ‘participation means being able to speak “in one’s own voice,” thereby simultaneously constructing and expressing one’s cultural identity through idiom and style’. Thus, in its ideal theoretical form, the public sphere, or public spheres, provide(s) the opportunity for all people, regardless of their gender or societal status, to contribute through dialogue not only to the definition of public issues and their resolution, but also to develop and express a distinctive social and cultural identity. In practice, however, the dominant public sphere has not lived up to these inclusive ideals.

Habermas (1992:427-9) identifies ‘rights to unrestricted inclusion and equality as an integral part of the liberal public sphere’s self-interpretation’, but he acknowledges that,
from the beginning, the bourgeois and 'patriarchal' character of the dominant public sphere has denied women and people of lower socio-economic classes 'equal and active participation in the formation of political opinion and will'. Fraser (1990:68) adds that 'subordinated' social groups (including workers, peoples of color, and gays and lesbians) have also historically been excluded from the bourgeois public sphere. The consequence of the exclusion or marginalisation of women and other social groups within the dominant public sphere is that these non-dominant groups are either ignored or represented by more dominant others in the discussion and even definition of public matters. They become voiceless, unable to contribute equally and effectively to democratic political process and to the constitution of social and cultural reality and normality. In such a context, because the media 'constitute the material support for the circulation of views' in our technological society (Fraser, 1990:64), the questions of who has access to the media, and how the media work to restrict or expand public spheres of debate, become crucial.

With regard to the question of media access, I have already discussed the historic exclusion or marginalization of minority voices and perspectives within Aotearoa/New Zealand broadcasting. The fact that women were included with minority groups, people with disabilities and young people as a special needs category of people within Section 36c of the 1989 Broadcasting Act suggests the government of the day was aware that access to the media has also been restricted on the basis of gender.

Questions about the gendered nature of access to the media have generated significant feminist and general media research, debate and theory since the 1970s (see for example: Gallagher, 1981, 1984, 1990, 1992, 1995; McBride et al, 1980; MacDonald, 1995; McQuail, 1994; Mediawomen, 1988; Perez-Vitoria, 1995; Tuchman, 1978; World Communication Report, 1989). Feminist criticism has focused primarily on two areas: the representation of women and gender in media content, and the participation of women in media production, planning and decision-making. Specifically, feminists have criticised 'stereotyping, neglect and marginalization' in the portrayals of women in media content (McQuail, 1994:261) and 'impoverished patterns of female participation' in media (Gallagher, 1981:29; see also Gallagher, 1995). Women were and are seen to be either grossly under-represented in both media content and media production and decision-making roles and to be mis-represented or 'symbolically annihilated' (through stereotyping
or a lack of diverse portrayals) in both fictional and news programming (Gallagher, 1981; 1995, Tuchman, 1978; Perez-Vitoria, 1995; McGregor, 1992; Webber, 1992; Spears and Seydegart, 2000). Consequently, the opinions, perspectives and lived experiences of many women are absent from the ‘circulation of views’ that the media facilitate, a situation that reinforces their traditional exclusion from the public sphere.

Clearly, by excluding the opinions, experiences and diverse perspectives of women, and the minority communities to which many of them belong, mainstream media restrict rather than expand the public sphere. But how can the media contribute to a more effective and representative public sphere? Meier and Trappel argue that ‘(m)edia diversity is one of the main preconditions ensuring political and cultural pluralism and effective citizen participation in democratic decision-making’ (1998:38). Media diversity refers to diversity of expression, opinion and culture, which can be achieved through media representation of the spectrum of views, cultures and social realities within communities, through providing access to the means of production, and through media offering a varied choice of content (McQuail, 1992:141-3). Therefore, the media can contribute to an effective public sphere through ‘guaranteeing access to a range of representative political and social views and organizations and securing a flow of reliable information for the conduct of democratic public life’ (McQuail, 1998:110).

According to McQuail (1994) and Lewis (1993), it is the failure of mainstream media to provide the kind of access and representation that facilitates an effective public sphere that leads dissatisfied and disenfranchised audience members and communities to create and participate in alternative media ventures like community access radio. Community access stations like Plains FM were created in Aotearoa/New Zealand precisely to meet the needs of such under-represented groups. By reaching out and offering media access to those groups, including women, who have previously been excluded from media participation, Plains FM aims to increase the range and diversity of voices and perspectives heard on the airwaves. Because of their inclusion within Section 36c, women generally, and women who belong to the other special needs categories (women from minority ethnic, cultural and religious communities, disabled women, lesbian women, young women), are specifically
targeted as potential broadcasters at Plains 32. Consequently, Canterbury women from diverse backgrounds gain access to a means of production that enables them to increase the diversity of local media, and therefore expand the local public sphere. As I will argue, it also offers them opportunities to resist and reconstruct aspects of mainstream media discourses and wider cultural discourses that have previously restricted women’s full access to the media and, in the process, to claim new empowering subject positions.

Women at Plains FM: Resisting Media Exclusion

The remainder of this chapter focuses on the ways in which women at Plains FM negotiate with and rework four specific cultural and media industry conventions that restrict the full participation of women in the media. I argue that firstly, by producing - or teaching others to produce - radio programmes, Plains FM women challenge the tradition that media production is the sole realm of (predominantly male) professionals. Secondly, through becoming programme presenters and speaking publicly on air, women broadcasters challenge the persistent cultural perception that, compared to those of men, women’s voices are ‘inferior’ or unsuitable for broadcasting. Thirdly, by constructing their own understandings of what constitutes appropriate ‘news’ for their audiences and presenting that news in their own language and style, broadcasters challenge the mainstream news media conventions that marginalise women’s lives, perspectives, interests and opinions. And fourthly, by becoming competent operators of technical radio equipment, women at Plains challenge lingering cultural beliefs that women cannot master technology. Drawing upon media/communications literature, I argue that each of these resistances or renegotiations of a hegemonic cultural code or professional media convention contributes to the expansion of the local public sphere and the ‘democratisation’ of the local mediascape. In addition, by drawing on feminist literature, I suggest that by breaking or reconstructing the traditionally gendered boundaries and conventions of the mainstream media and developing new subject positions, women at Plains are acting in ways that also resist and publicly challenge the restrictions of hegemonic femininity. The cultural, social, economic, religious and political diversity of the women involved at Plains challenges the homogenising and stereotypical representations of women that dominate mainstream media content. And by assuming leadership, training and management roles, and/or by initiating,

32 As an example of this, the station publication ‘Information and Policies for Broadcasters’ (2000) specifies that programmes on Plains FM are predominantly ‘by, for and about’ groups named in Section 36c.
organising and presenting programmes for the benefit of their wider communities, women at Plains challenge cultural codes and traditions that position women’s rightful place within the private sphere. Instead, Plains FM women assert their willingness, capability and right to participate, in their own ways, in both private and public realms. Following Clemencia Rodriguez I contend that, through their participation at Plains FM, women are turning the historical ‘symbolic annihilation’ of women’s voices, lives, interests and activities into ‘dissent in the realm of the symbolic’ (Rodriguez, 2001:157) and further, that in the process they are transforming their subjectivities. I begin my discussion by examining how Plains FM women programmers challenge the dominance of vertical models of communication and discourses of professional media expertise that exclude non-professionals from media production, representation and decision-making.

**Breaking the ‘professional’ barrier**

*Ordinary women do not exist in the media*

Patricia Flores, 1999:np

...every community has constructed parameters to define who can become a television star or a radio personality, who is “fit” to be on the screen, behind the microphone, or behind the camera directing a dramatic narrative. These preestablished notions necessarily lead to the exclusion of those who do not fit the bill.

Clemencia Rodriguez, 2001:151

By becoming producers of their own radio programmes, women broadcasters at Plains FM challenge the widely held assumption that the realms of journalism and broadcasting belong solely to ‘professional’ media workers. This assumption arises from the historical exclusion of amateur access to broadcasting. In Aotearoa/New Zealand and most other countries, broadcasting by amateurs was quashed through regulation very early in the development of radio (see Chapter One). Radio broadcasting quickly became the realm of professional broadcasters employed by both public and private outlets. In this context, the ‘parameters’ defining who was ‘fit’ to become a broadcaster were largely determined by those who controlled broadcasting organisations. From the beginning, these parameters
excluded most female and minority voices so that broadcasting professions were largely white male domains. Through formal training and experience on the job, people who worked in the media (as journalists, radio announcers, camera people, sound technicians, actors, advertisers for example) gained the status of professionals with ‘special’ skills and abilities. Media occupations increased their claims to professionalism through the establishment of formal industry training programmes, restrictive entry requirements and the development of discourses of professional expertise, including formal codes of professional ethics and more informal workplace cultures and conventions. Within the broadcasting field these discourses and codes determine, for example, what constitutes ‘quality’ journalism and programming, which people, issues or events are ‘newsworthy’, whose voices and faces are appropriate for broadcasting, how news stories should be told, and how technology should be utilised and by whom. Ostensibly, these professional discourses operate in the interests of the receivers or consumers of media products by protecting the integrity of information and defining appropriate standards and work practices (for example, by protecting privacy, and promoting fair, accurate and balanced news reporting). However, as Rodriguez (2001) points out, such professional media discourses also work in concert with wider cultural discourses to construct parameters defining who can and cannot become a media producer. The result is a kind of professional barrier between media producers and media receivers or consumers.

This professional barrier has distinct advantages for those on the inside of its ‘magic circle’. It enhances the status and ‘specialness’ of media producers and creates a mystique around their occupations. Plains FM programmer Shona, who has also worked in mainstream broadcasting, suggests that as a professional broadcaster she saw herself and was seen by others as having ‘very special skills’ compared to ‘outsiders’ without her media training and experience. She says:

*I'd come in to broadcasting, into journalism from a training course, post-grad training course, and then when I had come in, working in Wellington, you sort of got mentored and taught by all the people there and it had been something you owned, you had this special skill, but ... and that's how it had always been. I think for people on the outside, only people with very special skills could come and work in this medium...*
Another Plains programmer Lydia experienced a sense of being set aside from the ordinary person when she worked in commercial radio stations. She talks about being caught up in 'the glam' and excitement of working in radio and the way that outsiders look up to media people. Here, both women discuss a clear distinction they felt between insiders with 'special' media skills gained through both formal and on-the-job training and mentoring, and those on the outside. They suggest that they were trained to believe that broadcasting work requires special skills, and that this same belief is held both by professional broadcasters (who feel they 'own' special skills) and by 'outsiders'.

This experience of a rigid insider/outsider distinction between media producers and media audiences reveals a vertical or 'top-down' communication model (McBride et al, 1980:167). The effect of this type of vertical communication system on public communication is that the lives, realities and perspectives of the majority of people are (re)presented in media content by an elite group of media professionals, who decide what and whom to include in informational and entertainment programming. Vertical communication models have long been criticised as an undemocratic breach of human rights because the overwhelming majority of people have no access to self-expression through the media; that is, they have been positioned as media consumers rather than producers, and are represented rather than self-representing.

According to media critic Marina Heung (1995:83-4), the vertical 'representational system' of mainstream media is 'oppressive', and a form of 'colonization', because it creates and perpetuates damaging gendered and racialised stereotypes. Following Hagedorn, Heung (1995:83) argues that stereotyping in the media works as a 'colonization of the imagination':

In its most concrete manifestation, colonization consists of actual territorial conquest and occupation; however, the notion also pertains to how dominant systems of representation produce and reinforce mental structures and images to constrain, dehumanize, and disempower particular individuals and social groups.

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33 A vertical model is described by the McBride Commission as a communication system where the flow of information 'runs from top to bottom, where the few talk to the many about the needs of the many from the standpoint of the few' (McBride et al, 1980: 167).
Heung (1995:86) is particularly concerned with racist and sexist media representations of Asian women that she says inflict ‘injuries’ on the ‘professional and personal lives of Asian women’ because the general public ‘accept stereotypes of Asian women as truth and then project them onto us without our consent’ 34. She argues that stereotypical images are damaging not only for the perceptions they engender in the general community, but because they result in ‘internalized colonization’, when stereotypes ‘infiltrate the consciousness of Asian women with dire results for how the same women view and experience themselves’ (Heung, 1995:83-4). Drawing on the ideas of Said, she argues that ‘the power of the colonizer is fundamentally constituted by the power to speak for and to represent’ (1995:83). In order to resist colonisation or de-colonise themselves, she suggests, women, in all their diversity, must assert their right and ability to speak for themselves, proceeding ‘from the knowledge of and the will to subvert, interrupt, and revise established representational conventions’ (1995:86).

Although Heung (1995:83) is concerned primarily with stereotypes of Asian women, her comments and analysis apply equally to other entrenched gendered and racial stereotypes in the news and entertainment media that have the potential to ‘infiltrate and transform the consciousness’ of audiences. Silvia Perez-Vitoria (1995:21) argues that, while representational conventions within mainstream media are constantly changing to incorporate some new possibilities for women, dominant media representations of women still encompass a narrow range of subject positions that represent women as ‘less powerful, authoritative and knowledgeable than men’. Of course, regardless of how ‘sexist’ or ‘damaging’ feminists may consider stereotypes of women to be, audiences do not necessarily passively accept them. The receiver or ‘reader’ of a media text has a collaborative role in any gendered construction, having the ability to accept, reject or modify aspects of the representation (McQuail, 1994:261; see also Ang, 1990, 1996 for more on audience/reception issues). However, the available stock of media representations of women and men does help to construct and perpetuate hegemonic definitions of femininity and masculinity.

34 Examples of these stereotypes include the Asian woman as sexually inviting and adventurous, or conversely sexually submissive, as ‘exotic’, as either ‘demure and quiet’ or as a ‘dragonlady’ (1995:85-7).
While women at Plains do not speak in terms of 'colonisation', they do express their frustration with what they consider to be damaging media stereotypes of their communities, and several also express their desire to 'subvert, interrupt and revise' those representations by speaking for themselves. For example, Pauline Pellet, a producer of *Greys Are Great* identified a key objective of her programme as challenging 'media representations of old people as being sort of whinging, greedy, you know, imbecilic oldies'. Yuko Sato's programme on Japanese culture aimed to challenge 'anti-Asian' biases. Programmes like *Solo Mothers Speak*, *Lesbian Radio*, *The Chinese Voice*, *Understanding Mental Health* and *Inside Out* (aimed at prisoners and their families) all offer(ed) women (and in some cases men) from groups typically stereotyped in mainstream media the opportunity to speak for themselves in ways that challenge(d) those stereotypes. By becoming self-representing, the participants in these programmes resist the colonising power of mainstream media representations and challenge the traditional distinction and power differential between media producers and receivers. In the words of media and development commentator, Pilar Riano (1994:19):

> From a methodological perspective in communication production (media or networking), to place the grassroots at the center implies the dissolution of the control exercised by the "maker" in message construction and narrative language.

Placing the grassroots at the centre and dissolving the control exercised by message makers requires challenging the 'mystique' that surrounds media occupations and media 'professionals'. Believing in the mystique sustains the illusion that broadcasting is a specialized and necessarily elite endeavour. The demystification of the process of broadcasting is a primary objective of community access training.

As an experienced broadcaster and broadcasting tutor, Shona helped to train community access broadcasters in the early days at Plains FM. Here she discusses a series of evening classes that the station ran to train programmers:

> I do remember that the main thing to get across to them was just to break down the whole mystique... it was about saying, well anyone can do it, you just, you

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35 Some of these programmes are no longer on air.
need to learn, but anyone can learn basically and here are some techniques...

and then you need to use your own creativity to kind of shape a programme, or a documentary, and it was quite amazing, watching people realise that they could do it, get over the fear of the microphone and have some great ideas and go out there and do it...

The challenge facing Plains staff and trainers was (and is) to challenge potential participants’ preconceptions by simplifying and demystifying the technology and ‘special skills’ of radio broadcasting, so that community members could (can) see that ‘anyone can do it’. By removing the mystery and challenging the separation of media producers and consumers, Shona says that Plains FM trainers enable people who have never imagined themselves as media producers to get over their ‘fear’ and begin to ‘realise’ their own creative potential as programme makers. Shona’s comments suggest that Plains FM training can make its participants aware of the possibility and achievability of the new subject position of media producer. In the process, Plains FM trainers and programmers disrupt the insider/outsider boundary that maintains the hegemonic power of media professionals and create a more horizontal model of informational interchange that contributes towards the democratisation of communication.

The seminal report of the International Commission for the Study of Communication Problems (or the McBride Commission: McBride et al, 1980:166) defined the democratisation of communication as the process whereby:

(a) the individual becomes an active partner and not a mere object of communication; (b) the variety of messages exchanged increases; and (c) the extent and quality of social representation or participation in communication are augmented.

In the Commission’s view, there is a ‘logical connection between democracy in communication and democracy in society as a whole’ (1981: 166). It also argued that democratic communication and communities require a two-way exchange of messages, universal access to the means of production and to relevant and accessible information from multiple sources, and the opportunity for all individuals to represent themselves publicly in their own way through communications media (1981:166-174). At Plains FM, women increase ‘the variety of messages exchanged’ and the extent of ‘social
representation or participation’ by resisting their previous exclusion from the airwaves and by speaking out for themselves and on behalf of their own communities. They also become ‘active partners’ in communication by selecting and prioritising their own programme content and doing their best to ‘work with the people who you’re representing’ (Niva).

By facilitating a more horizontal and democratic model of communication than mainstream media, Plains FM offers women an alternative ‘way in’ to the public sphere that bypasses the ‘professional’ insider/outsider barrier to media access. However, simply allowing ‘amateurs’ to broadcast is not enough. In order to broadcast confidently at Plains, programmers have to believe in their ability and their right to take up public space through broadcasting. Interviewees’ narratives reveal that this is difficult for many new broadcasters and programme participants because the idea that they, as non-professionals, might have something worthwhile to say and an appropriate way of saying it is so unfamiliar to them. As one programmer Erina says, many ‘people are frightened’ of broadcasting because they have no previous experience of participating in it, and they do not see their voice or experiences as important enough to be broadcast. She says ‘they think they have to have a lovely voice, they have to have a big experience, they have to have big stories’, not realising that ‘there is no reason for not telling what your experience has been because it is valuable to everybody.’

Although all programmers regardless of gender or cultural background must overcome the professional barrier to broadcast at Plains, I would argue that the marginalisation of women within mainstream broadcasting and cultural discourses make the process of overcoming that barrier different for women than men. Women and members of minority groups have historically been grossly under-represented in the ranks of professional media workers, a situation that has confined most of them to the passive role of media consumers (Cramer, 1989; Gallagher, 1981; 1995). Although their level of participation in media professions has increased in recent decades, research demonstrates that women are still significantly under-represented in technical and decision-making roles across the media, and in disc jockey/continuity announcing and programme director positions in radio broadcasting.

36 However, speaking ‘on behalf’ of their own communities (or anyone) is a complex process that can be problematic for Plains broadcasters. This is an issue I address in detail in Chapter Five.
(Gallagher, 1981, 1995; Gill, 1993; Spears and Seydegart, 2000; Lont, 1990; Neill, 1998; Perez-Vitoria, 1995). The under-representation of women in mainstream media jobs suggests that women have fewer role models of female broadcasting competency and that they may find it difficult to visualise themselves as broadcasters. Plains FM offers women participants the opportunity to step across the professional gatekeeping boundary between media producer and consumer. Participation in programme making at Plains enables women to broaden their visualisations of themselves by adding ‘radio broadcaster’ to the repertoire of subject positions available to them.

**Freeing speech: valorising “inferior” voices**

* A woman’s place in early radio was in singing, acting and giving household hints. It was also in research, off-air interviewing, and writing. It was not, however, in announcing, or in reading the news...

Judith Cramer 1989: 214

* What we can agree on as women is that our diverse voices are still granted insufficient authority within the media.

Myra Macdonald, 1995:72

In its station literature, Plains FM promotes itself as a vehicle for self-expression (Plains FM, 2001). Through broadcasting programmes in their own languages and in their own culturally appropriate ways, individuals and communities are offered the opportunity to represent themselves and their communities in the public sphere. Thus, through Plains, groups poorly served by mainstream media gain public ‘voice’, that is they gain the space to speak their ‘truths’ using their own particular vocabularies, intonations, accents and language. In order to become confident broadcasters at Plains FM, women have to resist cultural discourses that position women’s physical voices and what they have to say as ‘inferior’ or ‘inappropriate’ and to believe that they can and should claim public space. When they do so, they challenge the traditional marginalisation of women’s voices within the public sphere.
In a recent article on the future of feminist media studies, Lisa Rakow (2001) argues for the fundamental and particular importance of ‘voice’ and self-representation for women. In her view, ‘the absences, framing, distortions, silencing, parading, and selling of women’s representations’ that feminists have long criticised in mainstream media can only be changed when women are able to self-represent, to speak on air in their own voices about their own concerns (Rakow, 2001:43). The current media system, she claims, creates ‘representations of women for the purpose of selling texts, products, and media, supporting a political, economic, and social system based on the subordination of people of color and white women and the economically disenfranchised’ (2001:44). Rakow argues that it is not enough for media professionals to better represent women and disenfranchised groups, because ‘we need a different system for creating representations, not simply different representations’ (2001:44). In this different system, ‘speech must be freed, freed for each of us to represent ourselves’ and women must ‘insist on our right to be “representors”, not just the represented’ (Rakow, 2001:44). In Rakow’s view, participatory democracy and ‘a just and equitable society’ require that each person ‘have “voice”, the right to speak and to be heard, to represent one’s self and one’s perspectives, to be part of the political decision-making processes rather than being represented by someone else’ (2001:44; original emphasis). Therefore, she says, the ‘major intellectual question’ for feminist media scholars is how to ‘convert a media system of representation of to one of representation by the disenfranchised and subordinated’ (2001:44; original emphasis).

To alter the mainstream media in the way that Rakow proposes would require a fundamental shift in values, institutions, practices and in discourses of professional media expertise. However, such changes are extremely difficult to effect because the institutional values and practices of the media are so interwoven with those of other societal institutions and with wider cultural norms and conventions (McQuail, 1994; MacDonald, 1995). A key barrier to the freeing of women’s speech in the media is the entrenched Western cultural belief in the inferiority of women’s voices. Media analyst Myra MacDonald argues that the ‘casting of women’s voices as inferior to those of men’s’ has its origins in the ‘profoundly ideological’ distinction that developed between the public and private spheres in the bourgeois discourse of the nineteenth century (1995:45,48). As the public world came to be identified with influence, power and masculinity and the private world with moral value, support and femininity, women were effectively excluded from speaking in contexts and on
issues considered to be outside of their domestic realm (MacDonald, 1995:48-9). The absence of women’s voices in the public arena does not mean that women were not speaking or communicating, but it denotes an ‘exclusion from a determined space and a veto: a disqualification to name that which exceeds the area socially assigned to women’ (Mata, 1994:195). In other words, women had cultural permission to speak on domestic, family and moral matters as long as they left the definition and discussion of supposedly more important public and political issues to men.

The different cultural values attached to the speech of women and men are revealed in the words commonly used to describe their communication. Women’s speech is frequently characterised by emotionally charged and trivialising words like ‘gossip’, ‘nag’, ‘niggle’, ‘chatter’, while men’s speech is described neutrally as ‘talk’ (Lochhead, cited MacDonald, 1995:45). The implication of such differentiation is that what men have to say is significant and serious, while women’s speech can be ignored. However, the historical and cultural marginalisation of women’s speech does not stop with what they say, it also attaches to how they say it. Despite empirical evidence to the contrary, women’s physical voices have been discursively constructed as ‘naturally less powerful’ and less suitable for public speaking than those of men (McKay, 1988:188). In particular, the tone, pitch, capacity for volume, and intelligibility of female voices have been considered inferior to male voices, and therefore served as reasons to disqualify women from public speech (McKay, 1988; MacDonald, 1995).

MacDonald argues that against such a gendered cultural backdrop, ‘those responsible for the development of the public media in the twentieth century felt little incentive to include women’s voices’ (1995:48). When women did get to broadcast, they were relegated to women’s and children’s programming areas, commercials and ‘soft’ news, a form of ghettoization which ‘replicated rather than challenged the public/private dichotomy’ (MacDonald, 1995:49; see also Gallagher, 1981, 1995; Webber, 1992, 1993). Handicapped by their late entry to the field, women broadcasters were also forced to accommodate themselves to the skills, values, practices and working-styles already established by male
practitioners (MacDonald, 1995:49)\textsuperscript{37}. Discourses of professional expertise in broadcasting therefore developed prior to the involvement of significant numbers of women and have proved remarkably resistant to change, even as more women enter media professions (Gallagher, 1995).

Historical ideas about the inferiority of women’s voices were carried into mainstream broadcasting cultures as they developed and were also incorporated into discourses of professional media expertise. Anne McKay (1988) argues that although the development of voice amplification and broadcasting technology might have been expected to remedy the so-called weakness of women’s voices and increase their opportunities for public expression, this did not happen. Instead, from the early days of radio broadcasting women’s voices were criticised for being ‘flat’, ‘shrill’ or ‘pitched far too high’ for radio equipment, and therefore ‘inappropriate’ for broadcasting (Cramer, 1989; McKay, 1988). The ‘inferiority’ and ‘inappropriateness’ of female voices for broadcasting is one of the most persistent explanations offered for the absence of women on the airwaves (Cramer, 1989; see also Neill, 1998; Gill, 1993; Kramarae, 1988; MacDonald, 1995). Judith Cramer (1989) says that the inappropriateness of women’s voices was used as a justification for restricting their on-air roles in the early days of radio in the United States. Women’s voices were considered to be ‘neither low enough nor authoritative enough to be giving the news’ or reporting on serious topics, and to be less acceptable to audiences than those of men (Cramer, 1989:215; see also Kramarae, 1988). In the 1950s, women working in US radio often did pre-recorded interviews only to have their ‘poor’ voices wiped from the tape so that the on-air male announcer could re-ask the questions (Cramer, 1989).

Although radio stations no longer employ such blatant exclusionary tactics, it is clear from numerous research studies that stereotypes and prejudices about the ‘inappropriateness’ of women voices still persist in the minds of many mainstream media employers and affect their employment of women (Cramer, 1989; Gallagher, 1995; Gill, 1993; Neill, 1998). For example, in her discourse analytic examination of interviews with British disc jockeys (DJs) and Programme Controllers, Rosalind Gill (1993) shows how the discursive construction of women’s voices as inferior or inappropriate and their supposed lack of

\textsuperscript{37} I provide a specific example of this point in the next section on mainstream media conventions of newsworthiness.
acceptance by audiences still operates to exclude women from DJ roles. One of the explanations offered by Gill’s interviewees for the small number of women DJs employed in radio was ‘the audience’s expected or apparently “proven” negative reaction to female presenters’ (1993:79). This account, supported by reference to unnamed ‘research’ and ‘surveys’ that ‘prove’ that men and women prefer to hear men on the radio, implied that radio stations are only responding to public preferences in not employing women. Another explanation offered in Gill’s study was that women’s voices are too “shrill”, too “dusky” or simply “wrong” for radio (1993:85). Gill’s study demonstrates that the absence or unusualness of women’s voices on the airwaves is used by those who control entry to the DJ profession as a rationale for the further exclusion of women. In her words: ‘in providing these accounts for why there are so few female DJs now, the broadcasters also provided justifications for the continued absence of women in the future’, thus ‘the ideological effect of these discourses is to perpetuate inequality within radio stations’ (1993:90).

The justifications used by Gill’s interviewees are also identified in other literature (Cramer, 1989; Neill, 1998). Cramer argues that the belief that women’s voices are less acceptable to audiences has helped to perpetuate an assumption on the part of radio station employers that ‘it is possible to have “too many” women on air’ (Cramer, 1989: 223), which means that it is rare to hear ‘two women in back-to-back shifts on commercial radio’ (Neill, 1998:15; see also Kramarae, 1988). In her report on a 1998 study of continuity announcers in commercial radio in Aotearoa/New Zealand, Karen Neill (1998:15) states that ‘radio’s continued use of mainly male announcers has succeeded in fuelling the myth that the female audience prefers a male voice on air’. In fact the research revealed that, although one third of programme directors believed their audiences preferred male voices, the majority of survey respondents (including Programme Directors and radio listeners) ‘rated female announcers higher than male announcers’ (Neill, 1998:15). This result shows once again that entrenched negative attitudes about women’s voices persist regardless of their basis in truth.

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38 Other reasons given for not employing women were ‘women don’t apply’ and ‘women’s putative lack of the qualities and skills necessary to be a DJ,’ possibly as a result of their education and socialisation (1993:77-82).

39 The implications of the lack of women DJs in radio are significant because, as Cynthia Lont argues, ‘DJs are the most influential factor in non-music programming’ on commercial radio, commanding between 50-67 percent of weekday non-music programming (1990:664).
Both the absence of women radio presenters and the negative attitudes about women’s voices within commercial radio were raised by Plains programmer Lydia. In her view, on-air presenting has ‘always been male-dominated’. She says, ‘this is supposedly because of their deep voices, but I think that’s an utter crock’. She also rejects the argument that audiences prefer male presenters:

> It’s interesting too that you’ll have two men presenting a breakfast show, you never have two women - I’ve never heard of that. Again, radio stations will say that that’s what the market wants, but I’ve never seen a radio station try to get two women on air and see what happens. So in lots of ways I think they’re steeped in traditional ideas and conservative in a way... I mean they seem to be dynamic and out there, but they’re conservative.

In Lydia’s view, ‘women’s situation in broadcasting doesn’t seem to have changed’ over recent years and radio stations are ‘lagging behind everyone else’ in their treatment of women, even though their stations often target women audiences. This point is supported by Neill (1998:15), who says that ‘male domination of the airwaves’ continues despite the likelihood that ‘a lack of women on air makes it difficult for commercial radio to convey a female perspective to its female listeners’.

Alternative participatory media endeavours like community access radio present opportunities to circumvent the mainstream media’s lingering prejudices about women’s voices and begin to remedy the ‘absence of women’s words in the public space’ (Riano, 1994:124). Lydia positions Plains FM as a very different kind of radio station for women, saying ‘it gives a voice’ to the ‘different experiences of different women that you just don’t see anywhere else’. Plains FM assists women to gain a public voice by providing encouragement, resources and support for the creation of programming not only ‘for’ and ‘about’ but also by women (Plains FM, 2000:3). An example of the programming that results is The Voice of Pacific Women, a weekly one-hour English-language programme created and presented by women from a range of Pacific nations which went to air in October 2000. In an article in Airtime magazine (2001:3), The Voice of Pacific Women programmers state that they aim to increase the voices and perspectives of Pacific women on air, because their voices are ‘usually pushed to the background’ and ‘undervalued’. The
producers say that they want to use the ‘wonderful opportunity’ to broadcast at Plains FM ‘to raise the profile of Pacific women and to hear them speak from their hearts’ (Airtime, 2001:3).

*The Voice of Pacific Women* is one of four programmes ‘by, for and about’ women at Plains. The others are *Women On Air*, the *Tongan Council for Women* programme (which is having a brief break in 2003) and *Lesbian Radio*. While the latter two programmes are created by women from particular minority communities, *Women on Air* aims to provide access and representation to women from a range of backgrounds. One of its producers says that the programmers are committed to giving ‘a voice’ and ‘space’ to any ‘local women who can’t get a voice on the media’, to ‘local women’s groups’ and to ‘lesbian women and Maori women and women with disabilities’.

While not specifically ‘for’ or ‘about’ women, several other programmes produced at Plains FM are produced and presented ‘by’ women. For example, Jeannie Pera and Leanne Bachop produce *Te Mata I Pao Ia Mai'au*, a music and information programme in Cook Island Maori for the Cook Islands community. Faime Burke presents *Voice of Immigrants*, which discusses ‘the challenges that are faced by immigrants who come to live in New Zealand’ and aims ‘to inform and to bring people closer together’. Irinka Britnell presents *Radio Bridge*, a monthly programme on ‘peace issues and cultural exchange’ (Plains FM, 2002). As one Plains staff member says, all of these programmes produced by women (up to twenty at a time), and the many others produced by mixed gender groups, mean that ‘more women’s voices’ are heard on Plains than on other media in Canterbury or nationwide.

The above examples show that, by utilising the facilities, resources, training and support available at Plains, women from a variety of backgrounds have the opportunity to exercise their right to ‘voice’ and self-representation. As I will show, some women seize that opportunity and achieve immense personal satisfaction from their success. However, as I suggested earlier, the process of developing the confidence and skills to speak coherently and comfortably on air is not necessarily easy. For example, for some women, lack of familiarity and experience with public speaking means that their voice freezes, or initially emerges ‘stammering’ and ‘fragmented’ (Mata, 1994:198). Other women fear making
public mistakes. And, even with the opportunities, support and encouragement offered at Plains FM, some women still do not feel willing or able to speak on air.

The example of Niva, who was one of the first Pacific women to broadcast at Plains, illustrates the way in which participation at Plains FM can be transformative, as women develop their voices and belief in their ability and right to speak on air. Niva is described by station staff as one of the station’s many success stories, because she came to Plains FM as a very nervous broadcasting novice and very quickly began to make successful programmes for her community. One of Niva’s initial challenges was to overcome her ingrained perception of broadcasting as something ‘other’ people do. Becoming a broadcaster meant proving to herself and others that ‘any woman can do it, as long as that woman tell herself that I’m just as good as anyone else’. Here she describes her first experiences of speaking on air as a broadcaster:

  I was really nervous, my first night on programme on air I was really nervous.  
  I stopped, speak, stop, speak and I was sweating... because this is new to me as a woman, and this is not my cultural way of doing things. What on earth am I doing on radio, especially on air?

Other times, Niva worried that by starting her own programme she was being ‘too overconfident’ in herself. She had to overcome doubts about her ability and right to broadcast: ‘I remember one night, halfway through the programme and I asked to myself, what on earth am I talking about?’ In order to become comfortable as a programme maker, she had to overcome her fear that by broadcasting she is overstepping her capabilities (‘too overconfident’) and her accepted cultural and gender place. She also had to overcome her self-doubt and believe she had a right to speak and something valid and relevant to say.

Looking back on her journey, Niva now says:

  I learned from it. I feel good about it as a woman and I have the confidence within myself that I’m going to do a better job of my radio programme. Not only that, I was very proud of it... I was very proud as a woman to go on air, and my voice heard on air, and the voice that I represent, a group of Pacific Island women.
Niva’s experience suggests that finding ‘voice’ is not straightforward or simple, it is an ongoing process involving frequent self-examination, uncertainty, developing self-belief and confidence, learning through doing, and accepting the support and encouragement of others (in Niva’s case, her family, station staff, community members and other Pacific women and men programmers). She describes it as a process with many obstacles in the shape of ‘a lot of hooha, a lot of people criticising’ that require ‘broad shoulders’ to withstand. However, her comments suggest that the difficulties she has overcome on her journey have enhanced her self-confidence and her sense of pride at being one of the first Pacific women to (re)present her community on air in Christchurch.

Niva attributes her impetus to become a broadcaster to her family’s encouragement and belief in her abilities:

*My mother said to me “you’ve been blessed with a gift”. And my children know that too, they knew that their mother can do better, sitting home. They know that their mother has the ability. Instead of seeing their mother sitting home and mope in front of TV and doing housework my children said, “Mum, you can do better than that. Are you going to rot in front of television?” When your children tell you that it gives you a little bit of support, to lift you up, tell yourself ‘oh, it must be true.’ But a lot of our women don’t have that... and I think that’s the downfall of being a woman sometimes, because they don’t have that, little things that count, that makes you feel good about yourself and go and do something.*

Niva expresses a sense of feeling lucky or ‘blessed’ in the opportunities and support that she has experienced that other Pacific women do not necessarily share. Elsewhere she says that many Pacific women ‘don’t feel comfortable going on air’ because ‘they’re not brought up with the media’ and they see it as a ‘European thing,’ or they think it is ‘always men’ who broadcast. However, as a result of her experience at Plains, Niva sees things differently:

*Any woman can broadcast on radio – women have the gift to share, all we want is the opportunity to prove that we are trustworthy. To prove to ourselves that anything is possible.*
The satisfaction and pride that Niva expresses is also a feature of other women’s narratives. Several women talked about the sense of achievement they gained from overcoming their fears of public speaking and the self-confidence they have gained through presenting programmes. One programme maker said that the first time she went on air ‘I was shaking, my legs were shaking.’ Another had been an entertainer for years, and thought she knew all about stage fright until her first broadcast when ‘suddenly the sweat broke out on the brow and the voice sort of went oooh (squeaky).’ Yet very quickly both women were confidently presenting programmes. Another programme maker, Szuwen, says that learning to speak confidently on radio has had immense benefits for herself and the other young people in her programme group who would never have had the opportunity to broadcast in their own country:

Definitely being involved with the radio has enabled lots of people to have more self-confidence, you know, they feel more confident when they speak in public because of their radio training. Definitely for myself, I’ve learned a lot just from being involved in community radio. You would think that it would be fairly easy to just read something off but when you have a microphone in front of you it’s a completely different story (laughs). So it’s definitely improved my own self confidence when I speak in public... and I suppose it’s also improved my social skills, because I have to deal with other people, I have to deal with the staff at Plains, and might bump into other programme makers.

Szuwen’s position is echoed by another programmer, Dianne, who says, ‘I became a lot more confident to be able to go out and be able to speak to people in the community and ask them questions on issues.’

Arguably, Plains has offered the above women an invaluable opportunity to gain a public voice and to represent themselves and their communities on air. Their narratives suggest that through programme making they have claimed a space in the public sphere and resisted notions that their voices are somehow inappropriate for broadcasting. Their participation at Plains FM has opened up new possibilities and subject positions that they now have the potential to draw upon in other contexts. However, as another programmer Cathy’s narrative shows, the encouragement and opportunities offered at Plains cannot always overcome an individual woman’s fear or shyness about public speech.
Cathy is a technical operator for a programme for an ethnic minority community at Plains. She says that ‘fear of talking on radio’ is a ‘major’ obstacle to getting people involved in her group’s radio programme as presenters and interviewees. She says, ‘even though people are interested and have a lot to say, we put them in front of a microphone over the radio and... the fear just clicks in.’ In fact, she says, even though she has been involved in a programme group for several years, ‘I won’t even go on air.’ Instead she sticks to non-public jobs, saying ‘I’m just one of the technical people.’ She explains her position:

I can talk one on one, but you get me um into a station and that, I just, I just can’t. No I just... just not my thing. I’ve never been a up front person. There are people that can front anything and do anything and there are people that can’t. I’m just one of the ones that, that is just a silent worker, always have been a silent worker in the background, not my nature. And I think that ... you’ll find that with a lot of people it’s just not actually their nature and yet I can get up and speak in public and I can see them ... but I don’t know, I just do not like it... it’s not my thing.

Despite encouragement and even ‘bribery’ from station staff, Cathy says she hasn’t been able to say even a brief greeting on air, or voice a pre-recorded advertisement. She does not think her problem is a lack of self-confidence, because she can speak publicly ‘on the microphone’ in other situations where she can ‘see’ the audience.

In the extracts above, Cathy attributes her inability to speak on air to her ‘nature’, and positions herself as ‘a silent worker in the background,’ rather than an ‘up front person.’ Through such statements, she clearly identifies the public figure position of radio with ‘another person’ but ‘not me.’ Later in her interview, Cathy offers another explanation for not taking a presenter role:

I’m not a thinker on my feet. You’ve got to have (a) person that can actually think very quickly on their feet and I’m not that. And I think that’s one of my biggest fears in announcing and that is that I cannot think on my feet. I’m a procrastinator that would ... “oh, I should have said that.”

This time, although she still attributes the announcer role to another type of person able to think ‘on their feet’, Cathy suggests that one of her biggest fears arises from the potential to
make mistakes on air that she would later analyse and regret. She is not clear, however, about exactly what the consequences of such mistakes would be, whether, for example, it is embarrassment or loss of face that she fears, or being frozen on air with nothing to say.

Although Cathy uses a number of personal rationales for why she doesn’t speak on air, at the end of her interview she presents a more gendered possibility when she suggests that other women from her community also have problems with presenting programmes, and comments that ‘many of our announcers are actually male.’ She says that she has had ongoing difficulty finding the ‘right’ woman to front a show, because women in her community are reluctant or not comfortable enough to speak on air. She describes one woman as ‘the only one that I have, female, that is able to comfortably talk about any subject matter that may arise.’ Cathy’s comments suggest that, even at a radio station like Plains FM where women are encouraged to represent themselves on air, not every woman will be able to overcome the fear and comfort barriers to public speech.

**Becoming news “worthy”**

_The main thing women want from the media is to be in it. We don’t just want to be firsts, bests and onlys, sex symbols, wives, mothers or victims. We want to be recognised in both our complexity and our diversity._

Alison Webber, 1992:186

As an avid radio listener who has also worked for a brief time in commercial radio stations in Christchurch, Plains FM programme maker Lydia is critical of several aspects of commercial radio programming. In particular she asks, ‘where are the women?’ in mainstream news broadcasts. As a frequent radio listener, she is frustrated by the way that commercial stations frequently target women audiences yet ignore women in their news and sports content:

_I’ve often thought about that, that they market their music towards women, but when I listen to the content of the news and the sport, where are the women in here? Think about your market! But again women get used to not hearing about themselves... it drives me mad! The content of the news is different, presented differently for different radio stations, for different markets, so I think to myself, when they’re doing their, when they’re putting together that_
news segment of 2 or 3 minutes, why are they not thinking of their market? But it doesn’t seem to make an impact... I wondered, do the women still listen simply because there’s nothing else to listen to?

Lydia’s comments neatly encapsulate the paradox that she perceives in the relationship between commercial radio stations and their women audience members: that even when women are positioned as the primary target market for a station, the lives and achievements of women do not feature significantly in news content. She says, ‘if you go into a radio station they’ll have a picture, a photograph, of somebody who’s in their target market, and a little personal profile of them.’ In most cases, she says, those profiles are of women ‘because more women are at home and listen longer.’ Yet, in her experience, women are ‘pretty invisible’ on radio as both programme presenters and as subjects or sources for news items.

Lydia’s observations are supported by numerous research studies that have clearly identified the under-representation of women in news and sports news content (Gallagher, 1981; Leitch, 1992; Webber, 1992; Koivula, 1999; Spears and Seydegart, 2000). In the year 2000, an international study called the Global Media Monitoring Project (GMMP) monitored television, radio and newspaper news coverage in 70 countries. The GMMP revealed that women make up on average only 25 percent of news subjects in the Oceania region that includes Aotearoa/New Zealand (Spears and Seydegart, 2000). 40 This figure means that women average only 25 percent of the people featured in the news: that is, those who speak or are central to the story on television and radio, or those who are mentioned, quoted or appear in photographs in newspapers (Spears and Seydegart, 2000:15). Both the international and regional statistics reported by the GMMP reveal that under-representation of women in news persists, despite the fact that the proportion of women training and working as journalists has increased in almost every country, including Aotearoa/New Zealand (UNESCO Statistical Yearbook, 1992-1998; Webber, 1993:49; Lealand 1988, 1994; Spears and Seydegart, 2000) 41. Clearly, the increased proportion of women

40 This is compared with a global average of 18 percent (Spears and Seydegart, 2000).
41 Lealand study: In Aotearoa/New Zealand the percentage of women journalists rose from 18 to 46 percent between 1972 and 1987 (Lealand 1988:3). However, the last available figures in 1994 showed women comprising 45.3 percent of journalists, ‘suggesting that the steady increase of females entering the profession may have levelled off’ (Lealand, 1994:2).
journalists entering the profession is not enough to change news media representations of women.

As one of the few Plains FM programmers with formal radio broadcast training and media industry experience, Lydia has a greater than average knowledge of broadcasting systems. Yet she remains amazed that the seemingly pre-eminent commercial radio mantra ‘think about your market’ doesn’t seem to apply to women and news. This disjuncture suggests that some other kind of ‘media logic’ relating to the production of news is operating to exclude women from news programming. Aotearoa/New Zealand media commentators like Judy McGregor (1992), Shirley Leitch (1992) and Alison Webber (1992, 1993) identify that media logic as the concept of ‘newsworthiness’. They argue that women are generally not considered by professional journalists within mainstream media to be ‘worthy’ news subjects.

McGregor (1992:180) points out that news is ‘manufactured’ (or ‘man-made’) and that the likelihood of a particular event, issue or person being defined as ‘news’ is determined by the ‘news values’ that journalists pick up through formal training, informal socialisation and through observation and absorption on the job. ‘Newsworthiness’ determines aspects of news production like the content of bulletins, the priority given to coverage of certain events, people and issues, the sources used to verify or discuss the relevance of news stories, and the ‘angle’ from which a news story is reported (Webber, 1992, 1993; McGregor, 1992; Morrison and Tremewan, 1992). Through their adoption of conventions of newsworthiness, media professionals act as gatekeepers for the flow of information between individuals and groups within society, selecting what is important to include and ‘filtering out’ what is not (Morrison and Tremewan, 1992). A story is more likely to appear in the news if it has local relevance, if it contains a new development like a research breakthrough, if it involves someone famous, if it is about something unusual, dramatic or quirky, if it affects a large number of people, or best of all, if it involves social or moral disorder or conflict (Gans, 1980; Morrison and Tremewan, 1992). Newsworthiness is also determined by the requirements of the medium (eg. television news requires pictures) and by the organisational and time constraints of news-gathering and presentation, particularly in a mainstream commercial context. These requirements and constraints generally lead journalists to favour regular, ‘elite’ or establishment sources of news (like politicians,
police, government officials, business leaders) and to focus on events rather than in-depth coverage of complex social issues (Leitch, 1992; Webber, 1993).

Leitch (1992:177) argues that persistent ‘symbolic annihilation’ of women in news reporting ‘through absence, through oversight and through the sheer invisibility of women’ is a consequence of newsroom cultures within which women are considered less worthy or important news subjects than men:

*The news media claim to report on the important and interesting issues and events of the day. By definition then, the news media consider what women do is substantially less interesting and less important than what men do.*

McGregor (1992:180) states that ‘the selection and construction of the news perpetuates the status quo and confirms gender imbalance,’ because ‘males have determined the criteria of what makes a good news story’ and ‘they also largely control how that story is written and they monopolise the means of presentation’. Therefore, she says, ‘the concept of newsworthiness... is not genderless’ (1992:183). It is also not race, class or status neutral. According to Morrison and Tremewan (1992:119, 122), because ‘the media is firmly centred in Pakeha culture’ and ‘the world of news is largely dominated by white males with status in the establishment,’ newsworthiness conventions in Aotearoa/New Zealand also undervalue (and hence exclude) the lives, languages and perspectives of non-Pakeha people, unions and members of minority groups. McGregor (1992:184) argues that within mainstream media newsrooms, ‘(w)orship of the concept of “newsworthiness” is slavishly adhered to. News values are reverentially obeyed and intoned as a catechism to rebut public criticism about the choice or presentation of a particular story’. Consequently, the ability of new journalists to develop into accepted members of the journalism ‘profession’ is dependent upon their willingness to adopt the religion of newsworthiness and to work according to its conventions (McGregor, 1992; Rhodes, 2001). Yet journalists are often unaware of the bias and lack of balance in the news they produce because the biases of omission inherent in dominant news values become so ‘natural’ that ‘alternative bases of news choices are hardly imaginable’ (Herman and Chomsky, 1988; cited Morrison and Tremewan, 1992:121).
The above observations suggest that the conventions and values constructing the practice of journalism are part of a wider professional discourse, making them more difficult for individuals to influence or change from within the profession. American journalist Jane Rhodes argues that the 'social, political and economic structures of journalism' are 'deeply embedded, perhaps impenetrable,' which perhaps explains why the presence of more women has 'not significantly altered power relations in the newsroom' (2001:50).

Rakow and Kranich state that '(a)ny improvement in women's treatment in the news will require not simply more coverage of women or more women journalists but a fundamental change in news as a narrative genre' (1991:9; see also McQuail 1994:203; McGregor, 1992:189). They argue that mainstream media news constitutes a 'masculine narrative', that favours excitement, confrontation and authority 'cloaked in an ideology of objectivity and truth', within which 'women function not as speaking subjects but as signs' (1991:9, 11). What they mean is that when women appear in the news they are carriers of meaning not makers of meaning, that is, they signify as representations of the sign 'woman' but they are seldom able to speak for or about women. Based on their analysis of television news, Rakow and Kranich (1991:16-17) argue that women in news items function not as sources or newsmakers but as 'signs of the times' that are used 'to illustrate the private consequences of public events and actions' or as 'signs of support' used to 'endorse an action or policy' 42. Those women who are allowed to speak for women are positioned as 'unusual signs' or 'feminists' and are often 'pitted against each another' in news items (1991:19-20). According to Rakow and Kranich (1991:20), for women to speak as active human subjects in the news this entrenched masculine news narrative that 'posits women as objects of men's exchange' needs to change.

What alternative media outlets like Plains FM offer women is an opportunity to resist or subvert the conventions and rules of professional journalism, the intransigent 'cult of machismo' in mainstream media newsrooms and the masculine narrative form of news (Rhodes 2001:52). Plains FM does this by prioritising the participation of Section 36c communities that fall outside of the mainstream definition of important news subjects, and

42 Their research revealed that women appear most frequently in news reports as representatives of 'ordinary women' ('family members', 'victims', 'child abusers', 'cancer patients' for example) and used to make a connection between the private sphere and the public world of politics and authority (1991:15-16).
by enabling women to broadcast as ‘amateurs’, thereby allowing them to sidestep the formal socialisation process that trains professional journalists to accept and perpetuate mainstream news values and to present news stories in a masculine narrative form. Although as media consumers many Plains participants have been exposed to (or even immersed in) mainstream news values, they do not necessarily accept those values or apply them to themselves because, as members of Section 36c groups, they and their communities fall outside of mainstream definitions of important news subjects. Often such groups wish to use other more culturally appropriate ‘values’ to determine programme content. Even when Section 36c programmers do utilise a dominant news convention, for example through selecting people to interview who are ‘first, best and onlys’ in their field of endeavour (Webber, 1992), they are able to subvert its exclusionary power by applying it to previously marginalized subjects. When they communicate with their audiences, Plains FM broadcasters also have the potential to use cultural or gender appropriate narrative styles to tell their news stories.

During training, Plains programmers are also encouraged by staff members to produce content that is different from that on mainstream media and to develop and nurture relationships with their audiences that help them to meet their communities’ informational and cultural needs. Trainers at Plains emphasise community-centred and community-generated programming, encouraging broadcasters to include a range of diverse community perspectives and voices in their informational programming, in a subversion of the ‘elite’ focus of mainstream news media. Although broadcasters must adhere to the station rules and policies agreed to in their airtime contracts, there is no censorship of programme content by station staff. Plains FM programmers therefore have the opportunity to determine their own criteria of news ‘worthiness’ for their programmes, based on their own understandings or beliefs about the kind of information and communication their community or audience needs or desires. Staff member Nicki contrasts the limitations of commercial radio with what she calls the ‘immense freedom’ that broadcasters at Plains FM have to ‘create any sort of news report that they (want) to, and follow their own strengths, go for their own ideas, expand themselves and stretch themselves immensely.’ Interviewees’ narratives and the content of their programmes reveal that Plains FM broadcasters do constantly ‘go for their own ideas’ and that they also present them in their
own culturally appropriate way. In the process, these broadcasters challenge mainstream media conventions by re-defining what constitutes 'news' and changing its narrative form.

When developing content for their programmes, several interviewees emphasise that their first consideration in the selection, prioritisation and presentation of information is their understanding of audience needs and desires. Pacific broadcaster Niva concentrates much of her programming on information related to everyday living and survival for members of her community. She says:

*I broadcast issues like health, education, employment, all those important issues that are important to (my people). I selected the topic that I feel that this is what my people need. They need to know how to go to get jobs, who to ask for help, they need to know how to go to the hospital to get right information, they need to know where to go to get doctors for help. They need to know that you don't wear jandals in winter, they need to know where to go and do shopping... the place where cheaper... for example, Pak and Save.*

Although some of the issues that Niva covers in her programmes, like health, education and employment, also feature in mainstream media news, her approach to them is significantly different. Rather than presenting the perspectives of health, education or employment 'experts' or the politics or funding of these service areas, she is focused on the practical details of how members of her community can access essential services: 'how to go get jobs', 'who to ask for help', 'where to go to get doctors'. Her priority therefore is to provide accurate and relevant information in a form accessible to those in her community. For Niva, that means broadcasting in her own language and utilising culturally appropriate means of conveying information. Her programme is one of a number of programmes produced by women from communities with large numbers of non-English speakers (or those with limited English skills) who frequently have difficulty accessing services. These programmes are broadcast either in the target community's language of origin or in a mixture of that language and English. Their producers see themselves as interpreters, translators and guides for members of their community, but they do not position themselves as 'experts'. They tend to see themselves rather as enablers, responding to the needs of the community and working for and with the community.
Niva emphasises the importance of an interactive relationship with her community, seeing that as the driving force behind her programme:

*When you do programme, broadcasting for your community, you... I do what they want, not what I want. It's what they want, and that's the important part of being a broadcaster. You work with the people who you're representing, talk to them about it, what is it that they want to broadcast on air? Just ask them nicely, 'Are you happy with the way I do broadcasting? If you're not happy tell me where is it that I've gone wrong? Tell me so I know.' That way the two people work together, to benefit what I did, because I'm not doing it for myself, I'm doing it for these people... Every information your community want you broadcast on air.*

What Niva describes here is a different type of relationship between programme producer and audience than that typical of mainstream broadcasting. Instead of positioning herself in a vertical power relationship with her audience, as the expert or professional who decides what her listeners should hear, Niva invites a more horizontal interactive relationship with her audience. Several other programmers also emphasise their desire for feedback and contributions from members of their community and the different means they use to develop a relationship with their communities. Feedback on programmes often happens informally during social, community or religious events. Some broadcasters try to make their programmes interactive by calling for audience members to ring the programme, while others conduct more formal surveys of their target audience, as programmer Szuwen comments:

*We did a survey last year to see what people would like more in the programme. And we collected the answers from the surveys and one thing the audience wanted more was news. They wanted to know more about what's happening locally, you know, so obviously we tried to strengthen that aspect.*

Importantly, the kind of feedback elicited by these community access broadcasters is qualitatively different from that generated by mainstream media outlets through their audience research. Mainstream media use market research methods like ratings and Target Audience Groups (TAGS), which are ‘fashioned only to produce information about consumers’ tastes and preferences in order to target them more effectively for market purposes’ (Winter, 1994:152). Hence, market research is designed to serve the needs of
advertisers and media organisations rather than audiences. By inviting audience participation and feedback, and by tailoring their programme content to audience needs, the above Plains FM programmers generate their own community-appropriate criteria of news 'worthiness'. They also contribute to the democratisation of communication by developing a more horizontal interactive power relationship with their audiences than mainstream broadcasting has achieved.

Another way that women programmers at Plains resist mainstream media conventions regarding newsworthiness is by producing programmes that present, explore and debate women's issues and perspectives specifically for women audiences. By placing women's concerns, perspectives and communication needs and desires at the centre of their endeavours, these Plains broadcasters give them a value that they do not seem to have in mainstream media and they treat women as speaking subjects rather than objects. The popular two-hour weekly magazine-style programme *Women On Air* (WOA) that has been broadcasting at Plains since 1993 provides a good example. The WOA programme philosophy is to include informational content that is 'for women, by women and about women, about women's rights and women's choices from a feminist perspective.' In contrast to mainstream media representations of feminism as deviant, socially disruptive or trivial (Rakow & Kranich, 1991; van Zoonen, 1992), WOA was established as a feminist programme and is encouraging and inclusive of feminist perspectives and voices. The programmers try to encourage women from diverse backgrounds to participate in the programme by including a commentary slot called 'Womanspeak', by having regular 'Lesbian Issues' and 'Mana Wahine' timeslots and by asking rural women, young women and women with disabilities to contribute interviews or opinion pieces to the show. However, as programmer Monica comments, these contributions vary according to the availability of women to participate.

Monica says that the presentation style of WOA is also deliberately different from the fast-paced, confrontational news and current affairs style of mainstream media. She positions it as alternative because:

*We like to give people space. We're not into confronting much, we're more into giving a voice to people to talk about whatever they're talking about, and so*
it's not a Paul Holmes kind of thing, it's more allowing people to tell their stories.

By allowing women enough 'space' to tell their stories, the WOA team challenge the mainstream broadcasting news convention of restricting interviews and news items to short 'bites' of sound. They also subvert the mainstream media bias toward aggressive, head-to-head interviewing, preferring to conduct interviews as a conversation rather than a challenge 43. Plains FM surveys indicate that, with about 12,000 listeners, WOA regularly attracts 'one of the highest listening audiences on Plains.' Staff member, Charlotte, says 'because nobody else has women's programmes on radio any more WOA really does get women pouring in to say their thing and tell their story and do it on the radio here' (original emphasis). Charlotte argues that 'it is something very special to know that it is a programme specially for women - a place where you might feel more free to say what you really think, or to express yourself more fully' and where the interviewers 'might be more understanding'. She compares this experience to interviews she has heard on commercial radio 'with a man interviewing... and I've groaned because they just didn't understand what the woman was getting at, just from a gender point of view.' Here Charlotte seems to be identifying the kind of gendered bias in the mainstream media that Rakow and Kranich's (1991) research revealed, where women's diverse voices and perspectives are constantly filtered and interpreted through the values and perspectives of white, male media professionals. Women want to speak on WOA, Charlotte suggests, because on WOA they finally get to tell their own stories.

By selecting women as news subjects and prioritising women's needs, endeavours and organisations within their programmes, and by inviting and encouraging women to participate as interviewees, 'experts', reviewers or commentators, women broadcasters at Plains FM assert the 'worthiness' of women's opinions, experiences, perspectives and knowledges and their right to express them themselves in their own narrative style. In so doing, they resist the 'trenchantly conservative and emphatically male' practices, conventions and values that operate to exclude women as news subjects and sources within

43 While it is arguably more acceptable within the mainstream media to avoid confrontational style interviewing in a magazine programme format, it is interesting that when members of the WOA group branched out into magazine style programming for National Radio, their less confrontational style came in for criticism.
mainstream media (McGregor, 1996:194), and contribute to an alternative definition of ‘news’. By producing and disseminating programme content that is unavailable from other broadcasting outlets, women broadcasters at Plains arguably also increase media diversity, thereby contributing to a more representative, and potentially more effective, local public sphere (McQuail, 1992).

_Tackling technology_

_Sometimes, when you don’t know what is happening on the other side you think oh no... it’s like reaching out to the sun, that it’s that difficult. But when you really get into there and familiarise yourself with the environment then you can see that it’s just a piece of cake. And I would love to see our Tongan women come over here and manage to ... that it's so easy to operate the equipment._

Mele, archival interview, 1997

One of the key elements of the ‘mystique’ attached to broadcasting professions, and a persistent barrier to the participation of women within them, is the widespread perception that broadcasters need sophisticated technological know-how and experience in order to broadcast (Riano, 1994). Discourses of professional expertise within mainstream broadcasting construct knowledge about technical operations as one of the ‘special skills’ that mark the difference and distance between broadcasters and ‘outsiders’ (as Shona’s earlier comments imply). As Judy Wacjman points out, ‘claiming expert technical knowledge’ is one means of legitimising or enhancing the status of specialist jobs within any profession (1991:69). However, ‘expert technical knowledge’ traditionally carries gendered implications because historically and culturally, women have been stereotyped as ‘technologically ignorant and incapable’ and they have been under-represented in technical jobs (Wajcman, 1991:137). Within the mainstream broadcasting sphere technical work is still ‘almost exclusively a male preserve’ and many women are ‘actively discouraged’ from pursuing technical jobs in the media (Gallagher, 1995:22). Even within the community radio sector, it is argued that ‘attitudes to the technology’ of broadcasting and women’s lower comfort and confidence levels with technical equipment often present barriers to the participation of women within stations (CBAA, 1998).
The literature on women and technology suggests that it is not broadcasting equipment as such that presents a barrier to potential women broadcasters, but the wider ‘historical and cultural construction of technology as masculine’ (Wajcman, 1991:22). Judy Wajcman argues that many women ‘feel estranged from, and lack confidence with’ technical equipment per se, because utilising technology is predominantly seen as ‘an activity appropriate for men’ (1994:11). She argues that ‘(s)chooling, youth cultures, the family and the mass media all transmit meanings and values that identify masculinity with machines and technological competence’ (1991:151). The ‘mutually reinforcing’ messages of these social institutions and contexts help to ‘foster and reproduce the cultural stereotype of women as technologically incapable or... invisible in technical spheres’ (Wajcman: 1991:150-1). Similarly, Margaret Lowe Benston argues that societal expectations that boys and men will learn about ‘machines, tools and how things work’ lead males to develop a ‘technological worldview’ at a young age, whereas girls and women are steered away from technological knowhow (1988:19). Because most ‘men and women have different access to training, knowledge and confidence around technology,’ they have different abilities to act and express themselves through technological means (Benston, 1988:19). Although other factors in addition to gender (like race, class, education, age) also affect access to technology, Benston argues that ‘as far as social norms go, men are assumed to be inside the magic circle and women outside’ (1988:17). Following Dickson, Benston positions technology ‘as a “language” for action and self-expression’ that most men have a greater ability to access and use than most women (1988:15). Competence in this ‘language’ of technology offers men not only a wider range of action and expression than women, but also a ‘great deal more control over the physical and social world’ (1988:19). Perhaps more importantly, Benston argues that, through socialisation, most men develop a strong belief in their right and ability to utilise technology to control the material world, while most women do not (1988:20). Hence Benston says, ‘power is the most important message that male use of technology communicates’ (1988:20).

Wajcman (1994:12) also emphasises that ‘technologies embody power relations’. She argues that ‘women’s exclusion from, and rejection of, technology is made more explicable by an analysis of technology as a culture that expresses and consolidates relations amongst men’ (1991:22). She defines technology as ‘culture’ because it is ‘always a form of social knowledge, practices and products’ (1994:12). She says that the cultural and ideological
processes that construct hegemonic masculinity 'serve to make “natural”, and thereby help to generate, (the) close connection between men and machines’ and the belief that women are ‘ill-suited to technological pursuits’ (1991:137, 146). It is the seeming ‘naturalness’ of such gendered constructions that makes them so powerful and difficult to resist. If women are ‘naturally’ technically inept then their continued marginalisation within technical realms is perfectly justifiable, and women are unlikely to visualise themselves as technically competent.

However, Wajcman argues that the social and cultural institutions and processes that construct the culture of technology ‘should not be seen simply as external forces’ because women are able to interact with dominant gendered discourses of technology in a variety of ways: ‘(i)ndividuals actively participate in, resist, and even help reproduce by resisting, these social practices’ (1991:151). Wajcman’s comments here suggest that despite its dominance, the gendered culture of technology is not fixed, and women are able to challenge and resist their traditional positioning as technologically inept. Clearly, women do so all the time because, although their participation levels are often lower than those of men, women do work in a wide range of technical jobs (including in broadcasting). Their traditional primary use of household technologies and the increasingly widespread use of computers and other communications technologies, at least in Western countries, means that individual women demonstrate their technological competence in a variety of ways in everyday contexts (Wajcman, 1991). However, the narratives of women broadcasters and staff members at Plains FM suggest that the marginal positioning of women within dominant gendered discourses of technology presents significant challenges to those women attempting to become, or to enable others to become, competent and confident users of broadcasting technology.

In order to become fully independent broadcasters at Plains FM, women must learn to operate the station’s technical equipment, including the on-air studio’s computer and sound mixing desk. For women with little previous technical or computing experience, this means developing and practising unfamiliar skills, as well as increasing their confidence with, and knowledge of, technology. However, before they could even begin to tackle the technology of radio, several interviewees report that they had to overcome their beliefs about the
‘mystical, magical, difficult technology’ of broadcasting, their ‘fear’ of ‘buttons and knobs’ and their anxiety about making very public technical mistakes.

The narratives of several women broadcasters indicate their awareness that ‘fear’ of technology and lack of confidence in their own technical capabilities were far bigger obstacles to their progress as a broadcaster than learning the actual technical processes. For example, station volunteer Jane reports that even after her technical training, she lacked confidence and ‘belief’ in her ability to operate the studio equipment competently:

_I think my belief about how long it took me was what stopped me actually, because I did know how to do it... but I would think that I didn’t know and I would freak out and I’d go “oh, quick, quick”, you know, when one little thing went wrong. I’d run away and say “please come and help”, you know without - I mean, I was afraid of them - and I think that’s the mistake really. I mean it is a very simple process and once you’ve learnt it, you know... believe that you know it and then you’ll do it. Because now I just come in and do it automatically and I’m sure I was able to do it automatically for a long time, but I didn’t believe that I was. I would rely on the others to come and check and they would say, “it’s fine, you’ve done it right, it’s all okay”_ (laughs)

Jane’s comments indicate some of the powerful and limiting consequences of dominant discourses of women’s technical incompetence. From her current position as an experienced and capable broadcaster Jane perceives the technical aspects of radio as ‘a very simple process,’ yet that realisation was hard won. What is significant from Jane’s narrative is that even while she was operating the equipment she didn’t believe she could do it, she experienced panic and self-doubt, and when technical operations ‘went wrong’ she would call for help rather than attempting to fix things herself.

Jane’s narrative suggests that until she gained confidence in herself she needed the security of constant backup and reassurance from station staff. However, her statement that she would ‘rely’ on others to ‘check’ her work also suggests the potential for new broadcasters to become dependent on such support. In the following extract, programmer Mele suggests that she was pushed into realising her own technical capabilities by being effectively thrown in the deep end by her staff trainer:
She was teaching me and then she realised she can teach me forever and I don’t know anything. And then she went home and I arrive here and looking around, Jill’s not here and then I, next minute telephone rang and then she said “Hello Mele, it’s Jill here, well, you are on your own tonight” (laughs) “and don’t worry, I’ll be - just leave the phone beside - I’ll be there to help if anything a problem” and so... and I was surprised that I can do it.

Mele’s ‘surprise’ that she could manage the technical aspects of her programme is similar to Jane’s comments about the importance of ‘belief’ in her own capabilities. Both women appreciated the support of staff while they developed that belief, although in saying ‘she realised she can teach me forever and I don’t know anything,’ Mele suggests she needed the challenge of being left to cope alone in order to recognise her own competency.

Another volunteer, Mary, began working at Plains by assisting other broadcasters with tasks like selecting songs and planning programmes, but was persuaded by a staff member to move into on-air work:

After a while she made me, well she didn’t make me, but she used to say “oh go and have a test to go on air”, but I thought oh no I’m very nervous about technical things, I thought I couldn’t do it...

However, with more encouragement and ‘lots of practice’ Mary did go on air. To her surprise she discovered that she actually enjoys aspects of technical production:

I’ve learnt that I do like a little bit of technical, which I’d felt I’d never want to do anything technical, but I found I do like the technical side of it, up to a point. I’m afraid, I’m a bit of... I don’t have a great self-confidence in any ways in my self and I think that’s a barrier for a lot of things. And I get a wee bit panicky about the technicals at times. And yet I know what to do, but often I panic about ‘am I going to do it right?’ Which I shouldn’t do after all the time I’ve been here, you know?

Mary’s comment ‘I felt I’d never want to do anything technical’ suggests her previous lack of desire and possibly opportunities to develop her technical capability. Her ongoing doubts and panics about her technical competence also clearly indicate that, although her familiarity and confidence with technology has grown, that growth is a gradual and incomplete process. Her narrative indicates an ongoing tension between her ‘panicky’ self-
doubt and her belief that she does ‘know what to do’ and shouldn’t still be questioning or doubting herself. Mary makes a link between her confidence with ‘the technicals’ of radio and her general self-confidence, suggesting that she encounters similar tensions in other life endeavours.

In their interview narratives, Plains FM staff members point out that women who come into the station experience technical training differently, depending upon their own levels of self-confidence and their previous exposure to and experience with technology. They suggest that age, cultural background and education are factors because often older women and women from some immigrant communities have had less technical exposure and experience than younger women educated in Aotearoa/New Zealand, who often have computer and/or media training at school. For example, Karen says that older women (and she includes herself in this category) are more affected by ‘what’s in their head’ when they approach technology, than younger women who can be ‘very confident’. Several interviewees (staff and broadcasters) suggest that some Pacific Island women can be particularly nervous about the technical aspects of radio. However, Andrea says that, because training at Plains is simplified and tailored to individual needs, ‘even a really nervous Pacific Island woman can come in here and can bit by bit learn those skills which she would never ever think that she would be able to do in a month of Sundays in years gone by’ (emphasis added).

Pilar Riano argues that participatory communications endeavours like community radio challenge the idea that communications technologies are ‘inaccessible, expensive, and complex technologies that require professional expertise and male-gendered technological abilities’ (1994:125). At Plains FM, the ‘male-gendered’ component of broadcasting mystique is challenged firstly by the fact that technical training for new broadcasters is often done by women staff, and secondly by the numerous women already using technical skills to broadcast at the station. The supposed inaccessibility, complexity and need for professional expertise are challenged by the station’s approach to training new broadcasters. Programmers and volunteers can choose to be trained in small groups or individually, and the process is tailored in content and length according to their individual needs. Staff members utilise notions of ‘enablement’ or ‘empowerment’ to describe the processes by which they help new broadcasters to tackle their fears of technology. Ex-staff
member Megan says that access radio training style is about ‘empowering’ people through ‘demystifying’ and ‘simplifying’ technical processes. In her words, ‘we took people who were terrified of the medium and we showed them that it was easy’. In the following extract she describes how she tried to make connections between radio work and everyday experiences of competence for older women who were ‘terrified’ of the technology:

Whenever I got older women in there, oh they’d sit down and they’d look at this control panel and I, you know you could swear they wanted to have incontinence trousers on, they really did. And they’d be saying, “I can’t do this” and I said, “well, what else are you doing when you’re washing the dishes?” And they’d say, “I’m washing the dishes.” And I said, “well what else are you doing?” “Well, I’m washing the dishes and I’m cooking the tea and I’m thinking about this problem and I’m doing this and I’m answering the phone”... and I’m going “well, that’s five more things than you need to do here”... so part of it was taking that fear away and focusing people into something they could do...

By equating radio technology with familiar domestic tasks that these women perform competently everyday, Megan is challenging the ‘mystique’ of radio and reminding women of their multi-tasking abilities. She is also conveying her confidence in their abilities. However, as the experiences of Jane, Mele and Mary suggest, these women will only know or believe that the technology is ‘easy’ by using it themselves, and by developing their personal confidence in their ability to use it competently.

Although beliefs about the complexity and mystique of broadcasting technology are not confined to women, Riano argues that ‘the strength of participatory processes in demystifying technology is particularly significant for women,’ precisely ‘because technology operation has been identified as a male domain’ (1994:125; emphasis added). She says:

By using the technology, women realize the simplicity of the technological operation. Once the technology is demystified, women’s shyness in the production process disappears. Women are then able to explore their communicative potential and creativity. (1994:125)
By realising that radio production, which once seemed as difficult as ‘reaching out to the sun’, is really ‘a piece of cake’, women broadcasters at Plains gain important knowledge about the technical realm and about themselves. Once the mystique of radio production is unravelled, women who would never have considered themselves capable of broadcasting have the opportunity to use and manipulate broadcasting technology for their own communication objectives. The significance of this change is threefold.

Firstly, once women can use the technology of radio broadcasting they have the means to access the public sphere and to ‘explore their communicative potential and creativity’ within that sphere. Once they have technical knowledge and confidence, women can take control of the communication process and become independent media producers rather than having to rely on predominantly white male professionals to mediate their messages. Secondly, by becoming independent producers, women at Plains FM enter the ‘magic circle’ of the realm of technical know-how and help to shift the boundaries that have traditionally marked men as ‘insiders’ and women as ‘outsiders’ within the gendered culture of technology. Thirdly, by overcoming (or proceeding in spite of) their fear of technology and discovering that broadcasting technology is ‘easy’, women broadcasters at Plains gain new knowledge that is transferable into other areas of their lives. As Jane suggested earlier, ‘once you’ve learnt it, you know’ that the supposedly mysterious and difficult technology of radio production is ‘simple’. This knowledge, and the self-confidence generated by its possession, can then be carried into future encounters with technology in other contexts. If we accept that ‘technical expertise is a source of men’s actual or potential power over women’ and ‘an important part of women’s experience of being less than, and dependent on, men’ (Wajcman, 1991:159), then the mastery of technology by women at Plains FM is a highly significant and empowering act. By refusing to depend on others for technical support and appropriating the technology of radio broadcasting for their own communicative purposes, women broadcasters at Plains FM not only resist their cultural positioning as technologically inferior and helpless but also contribute to a redefinition of the relationship between femininity and technology.

Conclusion

The narratives of women participants at Plains FM strongly suggest that the station offers women a ‘gateway’ into the public sphere by providing them with an accessible venue,
resources, empathetic and supportive training and subsidised access to airtime. Through their participation as community broadcasters at Plains, women are arguably enabled to 'dissent in the realm of the symbolic' (Rodriguez, 2001), to rework and resist limiting or exclusionary cultural and media discourses. By becoming radio presenters, they have the potential to resist cultural discourses of the 'inappropriateness' of women's voices and perspectives for broadcasting and gain a public voice that enables them to participate in public communication and debate. By training as broadcasters they learn to use broadcasting technology creatively for their own communicative purposes and subvert gendered discourses of technology that dictate that 'men are experts; women are not' (Benston, 1988:24). In the process of broadcasting, they rework the insider/outsider boundaries that determine who is 'fit' to be a media producer. By becoming media producers as well as consumers, women at Plains also develop their understanding of broadcasting processes and have the potential to use their new-found knowledge to critically evaluate mainstream media products (Riano, 1994). All of these outcomes support the view that 'alternative media can be a tool for women's empowerment' (Mitchell, 1998:73).

My argument is that women at Plains are empowered through their creative exercise of agency as they resist, negotiate with and revise dominant media and cultural discourses. I suggest that they transform their own subjectivities by claiming a space and voice in the public sphere, believing in their right to express their views in their own vocabulary and voice, and learning to use broadcast technology. I also argue that their programming enhances and democratises the public sphere by incorporating previously marginalised voices and perspectives and by creating a horizontal relationship between producers and their audiences. It challenges mainstream media conventions by employing alternative understandings of what constitutes 'news' and by using alternative narrative styles to present information and stories. However, I am not arguing that all the programme content on Plains FM is necessarily alternative, empowering of women, or 'feminist'. Women on Air is the only programme that is explicitly positioned by its broadcasters as feminist. 44

44 Programmer Monica says that the programme is 'feminist, but not strongly feminist, by which she seems to mean that, while it is women-centred and based on feminist philosophies, it does not intend to be highly politicised or challenging.
The only other interviewees who expressed feminist views and positioned their programming as political and feminist were Corina and Merrill from Lesbian Radio. Some other interviewees expressed ideas about the place of women within their culture or religion that many women who identify as feminists would find extremely conservative and perhaps contributing to the docility or subjection of women through their reinforcement of traditional domestic and familial roles. While some feminist researchers of community media are primarily concerned with analysing the feminist nature of programme content (Bredin, 1992; Mitchell, 1998; Quade, 1998), that has not been the focus in this research.

Instead, in my reading of Plains FM women’s narratives, I have been concerned with exploring the ways in which women at Plains construct their participation as empowering of themselves and others, regardless of whether or not their programming or their personal views could be described as feminist 45. My rationale for this position is that the empowerment of women happens in a huge range of diverse contexts and ways, and that women can be empowered without being ‘feminist’ or identifying with feminist perspectives. My analysis of their interviewees’ narratives suggests that the empowerment that women experience through participation at Plains FM derives from the new subject positions that open to them at Plains. For many women becoming a radio producer entails the development of a range of new skills and new empowering ways of thinking about and visualising themselves. This point is emphasised by programmer Mele, who says that before she came to the station ‘I never know I can do (radio broadcasting), and there are people who doesn’t know that they have the ability to do it.’ In her view, what Plains does is ‘bring out all the initiatives in people so that they can use it.’ For Mele and many other women broadcasters, participation at Plains FM has been and continues to be a personally enriching, affirming and transformative experience.

45 In my view, it would be highly problematic to even attempt to make a judgement about what constituted feminist programming or views, given that ‘feminism’ is such a contested terrain.
Chapter 4  Information, Identity and Empowerment: Claiming Cultural Citizenship

(A) minority voice — a voice that introduces terms outside of the tensions of a particular dialogue, terms that come from elsewhere — is usually heard only as an irritating mosquito buzz on the periphery, an intrusion that the participants in the main conversation want to silence quickly and with a minimum of rudeness so that they can get on with the real subject.

Eva Hoffman, 1991: 266

Introduction:
In her book *Lost in Translation* Eva Hoffman (1991) creates a poetic and poignant account of her experiences of childhood migration with her family from post-war Poland to Vancouver, Canada. Her storycatalogues a journey through painful loss and dislocation, alienation in her new surroundings, and many years of struggle to come to some understanding and accommodation with the radically different North American culture and value systems. What she evokes so powerfully is the trauma of loss, the loneliness of the outsider, the bewilderment and pain of being unable to comprehend and communicate across cultural difference. Reading Hoffman’s book at the same time as I was writing this chapter was revelatory because she so clearly expresses the difficulty of sustaining a sense of identity as an outsider within the cultural mainstream. This chapter focuses on the narratives of Plains FM women broadcasters who are members of minority communities that seldom see or hear their identity and lived reality reflected in mainstream media and culture. Through their programming at Plains FM, I contend that these broadcasters have the potential to resist the non-recognition of their communities and cultural perspectives in the public sphere, and reject the marginalisation associated with their traditional ‘outsider’ status within Aotearoa/New Zealand. By developing strong social networks, by claiming a voice and public identity for their communities and by reaching out to communicate with the wider New Zealand public, I argue that these Plains FM broadcasters are negotiating a form of cultural citizenship for themselves and their communities within the nation.
Hoffman's narrative added an extra dimension to my thinking about the experience of being a 'stranger', an 'outsider', an 'other'. It also challenged me to reflect upon how my personal history influences my approach to this research. The issues that I discuss in this chapter are drawn from my analysis of the interviews of women at Plains FM, but they are also informed by my own experiences as an outsider, both as a childhood immigrant to Aotearoa/New Zealand and as a lesbian woman, and by my participation as a member of the Lesbian Radio programme collective at Plains. It is with my childhood experience of immigration that I begin.

As a five-year-old, I moved with my family from Glasgow, Scotland to Nelson, New Zealand. Without grandparents, aunts and uncles, and neighbours and neighbourhoods that we knew, my family seemed to be set adrift, bobbing precariously in an unfamiliar environment with uncertain horizons. In the first week at my new school, where I spent lunchtimes being taunted and locked in the toilets by bigger girls, I learnt not to be noticeably Scottish or different, and never to speak out in class (or anywhere impetuously), and I 'forgot' how to read. Within three weeks I learned to speak 'kiwi' at school and 'Scottish' at home, to be embarrassed by my parents’ funny words and accents and their apparent inability to comprehend the new rules and norms of our lives. My most urgent task was to work out how to look kiwi, to sound kiwi, to act kiwi, to be kiwi (while hiding my kiwiness at home). In the mono-cultural Nelson of the late 1960s being white skinned and English speaking made that comparatively easy and, painful as it was at the time, the bullying was short-lived. Yet this early taste of coercive acculturation taught me how difficult it is to stand out (voluntarily or unavoidably) as different in Aotearoa/New Zealand culture.

After thirty-five years of New Zealand residence, although I happily acknowledge my Scottish roots, I identify myself as a Pakeha New Zealander or, usually on official forms, as a European New Zealander. I consider Aotearoa/New Zealand my home, my country. Wherever I go in this country, because I speak like a kiwi and look like the majority of the population, I am accepted as a New Zealander and I feel like I belong. Yet, most people are surprised to find out that, although I am a permanent resident, I am not a New Zealand citizen. Legally, I am British. The point I am making here is that, for my family, the transition from immigrant/outsider to kiwi/insider was relatively easy. As British
immigrants, after the initial acculturation process my siblings and I became indistinguishable from the majority European population of New Zealanders. My parents are still marked as immigrants by their accents and even now people mistake them for new arrivals, but they too consider Aotearoa/New Zealand their home and their right to be here is generally not questioned. The same cannot be said for other immigrants to this country, particularly those whose first language is not English, and those who do not look European.

As a Pakeha, I am largely perceived as a member of the majority culture in Aotearoa/New Zealand, but at the same time, because I am lesbian, I also identify with a minority sub-culture that is not always approved of or accepted by the dominant heterosexual sector of the community. I would argue that, like most people, at some times and in some contexts I feel like an ‘insider’ and at others I feel like an ‘outsider’ within Aotearoa/New Zealand culture. Yet, even as a lesbian ‘outsider’ I am privileged compared to many because I am able-bodied, university educated and Pakeha. In other words, the boundaries between insider and outsider are slippery, unclear, and inconstant. As a researcher at Plains FM, and particularly as I write this chapter about minority communities’ use of programming at Plains FM, I am also both an insider and an outsider. Many of the comments made by women about their programmes and their communities could also be applied to my lesbian community and our programme Lesbian Radio. However, as a researcher I am concerned with foregrounding the words and perspectives of the women that I interviewed. All of those interviews (including those with lesbian broadcasters) pre-date my involvement as a programmer with Lesbian Radio and they form the basis for my discussion. Although the distinction sometimes feels awkward because I am also a programmer, I refer to interviewees in the third person to make it clear that I am not assuming a commonality of experience and perspective that in all likelihood does not exist.

My argument in this chapter is that their personal experiences and understandings of what it means to be excluded from the social and cultural mainstream of Aotearoa/New Zealand

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46 For example, while no-one in my family has felt the need to become a ‘naturalised’ New Zealand citizen, research indicates that many non-European immigrants feel obliged to gain New Zealand citizenship, seeing it as ‘a public symbol of their legitimate right to be here and make New Zealand their home’ even though a passport is still no guarantee of acceptance as a ‘kiwi’ (Roscoe, 1999:159-160).
present women from minority communities with powerful motivations for creating their own radio programmes at Plains FM. Through broadcasting programmes by, for and about their communities, these women aim to ‘empower’ community members by providing them with a ‘presence’, an identity and a voice on the public airwaves that resists their historical exclusion from the public sphere and their marginalized social and cultural positioning within Aotearoa/New Zealand. I am particularly interested in exploring these acts of resistance and their potential implications and consequences. I argue that participation at Plains FM enables women programmers and their communities to publicly (re)construct and express their own cultural identities (Fraser, 1990), to maintain and nurture their languages and cultural traditions, to foster a sense of ‘belonging’ to a distinctive ‘community’, and to enact their ‘power to name’ (Melucci, 1996). It offers them opportunities to reach out to the wider Canterbury community in order to both challenge attitudes and stereotypes and to generate cross-cultural connections and communication. When Plains FM women use community access programming in these ways, I contend that they are claiming and enacting their full ‘cultural citizenship’ of Aotearoa/New Zealand (Stevenson, 2001) and thereby challenging and blurring the insider/outsider boundaries implicit within dominant discourses of New Zealand nationhood.

Theoretical Context: Nationhood, Identity and the Media

The topic of nationhood approaches the soul of our social and political organization: that which distinguishes insiders from outsiders, that for which wars and revolutions are fought.

Adam J. Lerner, 1993:1

The ‘topic of nationhood’ is significant for this thesis because the concepts of ‘nation’ and ‘national identity’ operate as ‘boundary-marking constructs’ (Lerner, 1993:3) that provide the means by which to identify individuals as insiders or outsiders, members or non-members of the ‘nation’ in question. In this section I explore theoretical debates about nationhood and national identity, particularly in relation to Aotearoa/New Zealand, as a way into a discussion of notions of social and cultural inclusion and exclusion in the narratives of women at Plains FM. By emphasising the constructed and contested nature of the concepts of ‘nation’ and ‘national identity’ and the role of the media in their
construction, I aim to highlight possibilities for using the medium of community access radio to resist and challenge some of their exclusionary and disempowering effects.

The term ‘nation’ can be defined and utilised in a variety of ways. Dictionary definitions (which arguably present the common understandings and usages of words) include ‘a people under the same government and inhabiting the same country’ and ‘a people belonging to the same ethnological family and speaking the same language’ (Cassell, 1998:968). The first meaning refers to the political, territorial and legal entity of the ‘modern nation-state’, while the second corresponds to a more ‘ancient and nebulous’ understanding of nation as ‘the “natio” – a local community, domicile, family, condition of belonging’ (Brennan, 1990). According to Timothy Brennan (1990), although these two meanings should be kept distinct, they are frequently conflated within public discourses of nationhood when people represent their nation-state not simply as a political and legal entity but as a unified national ‘community’ or ‘family’ with a distinctive heritage and identity. This representation of ‘nation’ provides a way of ‘ascripting group membership to a diverse population’ and engendering a sense of national loyalty and belonging (Bell, 1996:9). However, as Benedict Anderson (1991) points out, such ‘nations’ are actually ‘imagined communities’. He contends that only since the development of mass print media like novels and newspapers have heterogeneous populations been able to think of themselves as nations. Suddenly, large numbers of people within a territory who would never personally meet or know one another became simultaneously exposed to the same information, ideas, symbols and political and value messages. Being aware of sharing a common knowledge about their locality and the wider world, they could therefore imagine themselves sharing an identity as a national community (Anderson, 1991). By conceptualising nations as ‘imagined’, Anderson emphasises that they are invented or constructed through public discourse and therefore inherently unstable.

An ‘imagined nation’ can only be sustained if people believe that it exists, and that belief relies upon citizens being exposed to ideas, images, symbols and ‘traditions’ that constantly create and represent the nation for them (Crang, 1998). Joanne Sharp argues that through constant public repetition, particular symbols and ‘(t)raditions of ceremony, monument and national celebration’ ‘come to represent a nation’s origin and its uniqueness’, thereby creating a distinctive ‘national identity’ (1996:98). Because they are
so ubiquitous, the symbols and mythologies of national identities and cultures become ‘naturalized’, that is, the processes of their creation are ‘hidden’ and they become ‘woven into the fabric of daily life in a territory’ (Sharp, 1996:98). As a child immigrant, I quickly realised I had to learn about the stories, symbols and rituals of New Zealand national identity that were largely taken for granted by cultural ‘insiders’. Everyone simply ‘knew’ that New Zealanders were ‘kiwis’, descended from colonial pioneers who built this country from wilderness, tough ingenious outdoors types who fought bravely as ANZACs in two world wars, great sportspeople who could beat the world at rugby and teach the Brits a thing or two. Everyone also ‘knew’ that the kiwi and the silver fern were important symbols of New Zealand, that New Zealanders love rugby, racing and beer and that they spend their summers swimming and picnicking at the beach. At primary school we all, including the two Maori students in the class, studied ‘the olden days’, meaning the lives of ‘our’ settler ancestors and some of the traditional (which seemed to mean quaint but no longer existing) customs of ‘the Maoris’, who were here before ‘us’. From the moment of arrival, everything around me, from voices on the radio, to streets named after British heroes and battles, to the almost absolute whiteness of Nelson, to the literature and versions of history we were taught, emphasised the idea that being a New Zealander, a ‘kiwi’, meant being an English-speaking, British-descended white person. Given that New Zealand was originally a Maori country, and that being an actual British person seemed to be a source of shame, that always seemed to me a little strange.

More than thirty years later, Auckland sociologist Claudia Bell (1996) argues that, despite some token moves towards biculturalism and multiculturalism, mainstream public versions of the Aotearoa/New Zealand nation and its identity still predominantly represent the history, culture, values and realities of Pakeha or European New Zealanders and marginalise Maori and minority perspectives. According to Bell (1996:4), this monocultural version of national identity is a legacy of the way in which the New Zealand nation was imagined or ‘invented’ by its predominantly British colonial settlers.
"Constructing the New Zealand nation: ideals and undesirables"

...the approach to the nation implies borders, policing, suspicion, and crossing
(or refusal of entry)...

Geoffrey Bennington, 1990:121

Bell (1996) argues that colonisation and immigration policies are two key strategies used to construct a nation as a homogenous and united entity. In the case of Aotearoa/New Zealand, colonisation meant imposition of the (supposedly superior) cultural values, beliefs and practices of British settlers on the indigenous Maori people (Mulgan, 1989), a process that effectively positioned Maori populations as outsiders within their own lands (a marginalisation that was, and still is, strenuously rejected and challenged by Maori). Having established political dominance for British settlers, successive governments then used restrictive immigration policies in an attempt to retain New Zealand as an almost exclusively British settlement (Brooking & Rabel, 1995). From the beginning, immigration officials actively encouraged immigration by white, English-speaking British subjects and did everything they could to discourage non-European, non-white settlers (Brooking & Rabel, 1995). Overtly racist and discriminatory policy was designed to protect the supposedly 'pure-bred' Anglo-Saxon Protestant population from undesirable immigration by Chinese or 'Asiatics' and by 'the disabled, the mentally ill, and other Asians and coloured persons' (Brooking and Rabel, 1995:24-5). Potential immigrants were also excluded on the basis of religion and political beliefs 47. The net result of such exclusive immigration policies was that 'until World War II, 96 per cent of non-Maori New Zealanders were of British extraction, a level of concentration that was never achieved in either North or South America or South Africa' (Brooking and Rabel, 1995:34). Although immigration legislation was changed in the 1980s and 1990s to remove racial or ethnic restrictions and equalise requirements for obtaining residency and citizenship (Brooking and Rabel, 1995), people of European (mostly British) extraction still represent over 80 percent of the Aotearoa/New Zealand population (Bell, 1996).

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47 For example, Protestant Christians were favoured over Catholics and Jews and legislation in 1919 added 'Germans, Marxists, and socialists' to the 'undesirable immigrants' list (Brooking and Rabel, 1995:31).
By financially and legally assisting the passage of some groups of migrants (like my family) and restricting the entry of others, governments and immigration officials constructed distinctions between the ‘ideal’ and the ‘undesirable’ immigrant. The ideal immigrant would become the ideal citizen by assimilating without a ripple into the dominant European or Pakeha culture, thereby causing minimal social disruption. Those whom legislators believed could not or would not blend into the mainstream were perceived as dangerous and marked for exclusion. Therefore, immigration policy represents one way in which the insider/outsider boundaries of the New Zealand nation have been, and still are, drawn (Ip, 2001a).

However, Aotearoa/New Zealand never became as British, white or homogeneous as its creators intended (Brooking and Rabel, 1995). Firstly, the Maori population, language and culture did not die out, in fact they have resurged since the 1970s and forced governments to begin to formally address historical grievances and implement bicultural policies based on the Treaty of Waitangi. Secondly, many of those who were designated ‘undesirable immigrants’ did settle in Aotearoa/New Zealand at various stages of its development, bringing their own languages, rituals and cultural traditions. Although some of these immigrants moved quickly to fit into the dominant culture, many minority groups within Aotearoa/New Zealand held onto at least some aspects of their cultural distinctiveness through, for example, the establishment of cultural associations (Brooking and Rabel, 1995). Thirdly, even the ‘ideal’ immigrants of British origin turned out not to be so homogeneous after all, coming as they did from different backgrounds and religions, and carrying with them different hopes, expectations and political and social values. Fourthly, despite powerful socialising pressure upon individuals to accept the dominant version of what it means to be a New Zealander, ‘not everyone fully submits’ to its prescription or accepts its constraints (Bell, 1996:187).

For all these reasons, Claudia Bell (1996) argues that the popular perception of New Zealand as a homogeneous and socially cohesive nation is in fact a ‘myth’ that has been created and perpetuated in public representations of New Zealand’s ‘national identity’. She argues that ‘national identity’ is constructed for political reasons to create a ‘fake unity’ between disparate groups so that governments can claim that they speak and act ‘in the nation’s interests’ (1996:9). What is publicly represented as ‘national identity’ and ‘in the
nation’s interests’ may appear to ‘work for the good of all’ but actually represents the values and interests of the dominant social group while the interests or needs of minorities are ignored (1996:10). In Aotearoa/New Zealand, says Bell, ‘the dominant group is Pakeha’, ‘(t)hey hold the nation’s purse strings, and they dominate the social, political and cultural landscape’ (1996:185). Hence, Pakeha versions of the past are enshrined as New Zealand ‘history’ and ‘symbols of Pakeha culture are the dominant icons for national identity’ (Bell 1996:13). For example, common descriptions of New Zealand as a ‘settler’ society or a ‘young country’ with ‘no history’ suggest that history began with the European arrival and ignore the 2000-year pre-colonisation history of Maori (Roscoe, 1999:38). Similarly, the continued use of the Union Jack on the national flag emphasises Pakeha origins and historical ties to Britain.

Bell (1996) argues that communications media, and particularly the dominant medium of television, are crucial vehicles for the construction of national identity, because ‘(t)he establishing of local identity and solidarity is impossible without the media’ (1996:131; emphasis added). This position is supported by Denis McQuail (1994:64) who says that:

*The information, images and ideas made available by the media may, for most people, be the main source of an awareness of a shared past time (history) and of a present social location. They are also a store of memories and a map of where we are and who we are (identity) and may also provide the materials for orientation to the future.*

McQuail’s use of the words ‘shared’ and ‘we’ points to the unifying impulses behind media messages: the media supposedly speak to ‘us’ about ‘our’ shared past, present and future, and ‘our’ shared standards, norms and realities. The media help us to construct an identity in relation not only to ‘where’ we are (our place in the world) but who ‘we’ are (and who ‘we’ are not). However, as Bell (1996) suggests, what the media presents is only a ‘version’ or construction of what ‘we’ and ‘our’ realities might be. In the case of Aotearoa/New Zealand, the version of ‘us’ as a nation that is presented in mainstream media is dominated by European faces, voices, interests, preoccupations, values and lifestyles (Bell, 1996; Roscoe, 1999; Walker, 1994). When the media constructs New Zealand and the ideal New Zealander as European or Pakeha, ‘whole classes, generations,
ethnic and interest groups are overlooked’ and therefore positioned outside of the social and cultural mainstream (Bell, 1996:136).

From Bell’s perspective, the media construction of a dominant national identity ‘instils in individuals the desire to believe in a “real New Zealand”’ and to support the view that differences within the population are irrelevant because ‘we are all New Zealanders’ (1996:188-9). Although she acknowledges that ‘collective imagining of an identity in common does not prevent individuals from having other social identities’, in her view these are ‘publicly undermined in favour of the qualities of the dominant group’ (1996:186). Encouraging a belief in a single New Zealand national identity is therefore a ‘form of social control’ that masks social contradictions and inequalities, and denies, excludes and marginalizes women, Maori, the poor and other minority social or cultural groups (Bell, 1996:188-9). From this perspective, the frequent public statements that ‘we are all New Zealanders’ deliberately and blindly sidestep ‘the lesser opportunities of some citizens’, and operate as a ‘blanket to conceal differences, when those differences are inconvenient’ (Bell 1996:186).

The paradox within the concepts of ‘nation’ and ‘national identity’ is that they unify by dividing, because they construct beliefs about ‘us’ and ‘them’. The existence of ‘defacto exclusion’ (Castles, 1997:8) means that the boundaries of nationhood are not only constructed around outsiders or foreigners, they also distinguish between classes of insider, despite protestations that ‘we are all New Zealanders’. As sociologist Zygmunt Bauman (1997:46) points out, ‘all societies produce strangers’ and ‘each kind of society produces its own kind of stranger’. The strangers within a nation can be immigrants but they may also be native-born people who for some reason or another ‘do not fit the cognitive, moral or aesthetic map’ of their society, or who have (either deliberately or involuntarily) transgressed a boundary or norm and become a stranger (Bauman, 1997:46).

I would argue that, within Aotearoa/New Zealand, minorities like elderly people, disabled people, transgender, lesbian or gay people (for example) are frequently positioned as ‘strangers’ or ‘outsiders’ because they are ‘symbolically annihilated’ within media and social and cultural institutions that appear to assume that everyone (or everyone important, interesting or normal) is young, able-bodied and heterosexual. To use my own experience
as an illustration: ‘lesbians’ were so strange in my growing up that I never knew they existed. I only ever remember one instance where I encountered the mention of the word, even the possibility of ‘lesbian’ in the public arena. Sometime in my teens The Truth newspaper Headlined the lesbianism of politician Marilyn Waring, and I thought, ‘no, that can’t be true, she’s such a lovely normal person’. Other than that, I remember nothing, even in conversation. Yet somehow, I knew that lesbian equalled bad, strange, not normal, not ‘us’. Consequently, coming out as a lesbian myself required stepping over an invisible boundary line, becoming, almost overnight, a stranger to myself and others. By transgressing that boundary, the norm of heterosexuality, I displaced many of my previous certainties about my identity and my location and sense of belonging within my family, my friendship network and the wider nation in which I live. Effectively, I had to construct new ways of identifying myself, develop new relationship networks and locate myself within a new imagined lesbian/gay community. For myself, my lesbian and gay friends and others in that wider lesbian/gay/queer community, transgression has had very real and sometimes painful consequences as well as tremendous rewards. Being lesbian/gay is only one facet of my/our identity and the extent to which we as individuals feel like ‘strangers’ or suffer discrimination or exclusion for our lesbianism or any other of our subject positions varies immensely. As the make-up of our Lesbian Radio collective demonstrates, there are as many differences among lesbians as there are between lesbians and other minority communities. What I am arguing is that, while the experiences of members of minority communities are very different, and the extent to which they experience exclusion will vary both within and between communities, they all fall outside of the boundaries that construct the dominant version of the ‘ideal New Zealander’. That is, they are all to a greater or lesser extent, positioned as ‘strangers’, ‘problems’ or ‘outsiders’ within dominant discourses of Aotearoa/New Zealand identity.

However, because the boundaries of nation and national identity are ‘imagined’ and historically, socially and culturally constructed, they are also contestable. Being an outsider can pose distinct difficulties, but it can also be a spur to action and offer opportunities to

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48 In the period of my involvement with Lesbian Radio, group members have ranged in age from early 20s to 60s and have held diverse political and spiritual positions and worldviews. The group has had several members who were born outside of Aotearoa/New Zealand and, while most members are of European origins, this is not true of everyone.
challenge boundaries, norms and entrenched cultural codes. For example, it is the experience of feeling on the outside of the social and cultural mainstream, and an awareness of the struggles of others in a similar position, that motivates me and many of the women programmers that I interviewed to make programmes at Plains FM. For the interviewees from minority communities in particular, broadcasting at Plains is much more than a media or entertainment exercise. Their central concern is with what their programmes can do for their community or interest group, particularly for those members coping with the challenges of daily survival in what often feels like ‘someone else’s country’. Through their programmes these women aim to resist or refuse the marginalised ‘outsider’ positioning of their communities and interest groups by asserting their right to public space, their right to produce their own ‘knowledge’, and their right to both be different and to belong to the Aotearoa/New Zealand nation.

*Broadcasting at Plains FM: Challenging Insider/Outsider Boundaries*

*The frontier does not merely close the nation in on itself, but also, immediately, opens it to an outside, to other nations. Frontiers are articulations, boundaries are, constitutively, crossed or transgressed.*

*Geoffrey Bennington, 1990:12*

In the remainder of the chapter, I explore ways in which women from minority communities use the medium of community access broadcasting to nurture and enable their communities and challenge the insider/outside boundaries within dominant constructions of the New Zealand nation. They do so by utilising the medium of radio to facilitate information flow and debate within their own communities and to add their distinctive voices and cultural perspectives to wider public dialogue and debate. In making this argument I draw upon John Keane’s (1995) conceptualisation of a three-tier public sphere, composed of a micro-, a meso- and a macro- public sphere. In the face of rapid technological advances and the decline of traditional national public service media, Keane suggests that the ideal of a single unified public sphere within a nation-state has become ‘obsolete’ and is being replaced by ‘a complex mosaic of differently sized, overlapping and interconnected public spheres’ (1995:8). In particular, Keane (1995) identifies three significant differently-sized public domains that he calls micro-, meso- and macro- public spheres.
Micro-public spheres describe the wide range of small-scale localised public arenas within which citizens engage in public discussion, debate and social action. These include both formal and informal entities like parents’ groups, neighbourhood groups, book discussion groups, anti-war protests, health education/support groups, church communities, cultural communities, in fact many of the kinds of groups and communities that broadcast at Plains FM. Meso-public spheres correspond most closely to the traditional ideal of the public sphere, being larger-scale public arenas mediated by high-circulation newspapers and by electronic media. According to Keane (1995:11), meso-public spheres are ‘mainly co-extensive with the nation-state’ but they can extend wider to incorporate a region (Australasia, for example) or be limited to a region within a nation (Canterbury, perhaps). Macro-public spheres stretch beyond nation-state boundaries to operate at the global level. They have emerged as technological advances and the international concentration of mass media ownership have enabled the development of macro-publics of hundreds of millions of people for mass media news and entertainment products or as users of internet services. Keane (1995) argues that the development of both micro- and macro-public spheres has put pressure on meso-public spheres from below and above, challenging their traditional hegemony and offering new gateways into public space and debates. Keane is not arguing that meso-public spheres are disappearing, rather he is suggesting that their previous dominance over the public imagination of nations is weakened by symbolic challenges generated within macro- and micro-public spheres. 49 It is this point that makes Keane’s three-tier conceptualisation useful to a discussion of minority community participation at Plains FM.

By using Keane’s framework, it is possible to explain what happens at Plains FM as the creation and sustenance of a ‘mosaic’ of diverse and differently sized micro-public spheres within which minority communities engage in public deliberation and debate. While these micro-spheres primarily aim to serve the communication needs of specific micro-publics, their creators frequently also aim to introduce their micro-public sphere debates, values and

49 A similar point is made by Castles (1997:6) in his discussion of challenges to traditional nation-state citizenship. He argues that ‘national culture is being squeezed between the global and the local’ as ‘global cultural factories, like Hollywood’ dominate international media production and distribution while a ‘re-ethnicisation of culture’ is occurring at the sub-national level. He describes these trends as ‘a form of resistance to both nationalisation and the globalisation of culture’.
perspectives into the meso-public sphere of the Canterbury region (and by extension the nation). Through their minority community programming, Plains FM broadcasters are attempting to empower their own micro-publics, to educate and communicate with the wider meso-public and to contribute to the ongoing (re)definition of the Aotearoa/New Zealand nation. Their broadcasting can be seen as both ‘reactive’, in that it emerges in response to the alienating and disempowering effects of social and cultural marginalisation, and ‘active’, because it involves minority community members actively engaging in symbolic production and the crafting of counter-discourses that challenge, complement and interact with dominant cultural codes and assumptions (Rodriguez, 2001). In addition, simply through speaking on air in their own voices and from their own cultural perspectives, Plains FM programmers bring into public notice a mosaic of differences that has the potential to challenge the dominant mono-cultural version of Aotearoa/New Zealand culture that so often does not recognise either the existence or richness of the minorities in its midst.

Claiming Public Identity: “Here we are, here we are”

While some actors can ‘display their discourse’ before the rest of society in different spaces and opportunities – giving these actors cohesion, legitimation and power – others lack this opportunity.

Marita Mata 1994:198

Tim Congdon et al (1992:181) argue that ‘our sense of our own identity derives from how we see ourselves in relation to society and from where we “locate” ourselves within it,’ and that the media play a significant role in developing this sense of identity. The problem for members of minority groups in Aotearoa/New Zealand is that not only are they unable to locate a recognisable version of themselves in the mainstream media, they also lack opportunities to ‘display their discourse’ in the public domain. The ‘symbolic annihilation’ of minority languages, cultures or lifestyles in the meso-public sphere means that these communities lack a public identity and are invisible as communities to the mainstream culture and possibly even to their own members. What community media like Plains FM offer these groups is the opportunity to create their own micro-public spheres in which they can ‘deliberate together’, ‘develop their own counter-discourses’ and ‘interpret their own
identities and experiences through dialogue' (Forde et al, 2002:57). In particular, the development of a micro-public sphere where communication is created by, for and about a specific minority group provides its members with the opportunity to 'imagine' or recognise themselves as part of a distinctive cultural, linguistic or special interest community within Aotearoa/New Zealand. Through their programming, Plains FM minority-group broadcasters are sending a message, both to isolated members of their own community and to the wider regional and national meso-public, asserting that their communities exist and have something worthwhile to say.

The significance of a public assertion of minority group 'presence' is expressed in the following comments by lesbian broadcaster Merrill:

*I know that a number of women have said... how (the lesbian programme) was the first time they heard 'lesbian' mentioned and, you know, how they used to listen with nobody else knowing they were listening, and what they got out of it. And so, if we're going to provide something like that as lesbians for other lesbians, and particularly women who are coming out, or exploring the possibility of coming out, we've actually got a responsibility to be presenting material that's got some meaning... that tells them what being a lesbian's about, who they can talk with, what groups are going, what's going on in the community, that gives them a sense of identity.*

The paucity of representations of lesbian identity and culture in mainstream media and culture is implied by Merrill's comment that women reported hearing the word lesbian for the first time on Plains FM. Without programmes like *Lesbian Radio*, Merrill suggests that some isolated lesbian women and others exploring their sexuality may have no other source of information or evidence of the existence of other lesbians and a lesbian community. For Merrill, the power of radio that is produced by, for and about lesbians derives from the way it can offer information, a sense of identity and a potential community to those who may not be fully aware of, or confident in, their sexual orientation. It can also do so safely and anonymously, because women can receive that information with 'nobody else knowing' they are listening. Such a role is so important to Merrill that she sees it as a 'responsibility' of programmers. Of course, the idea of telling women what 'being a lesbian's all about' is
problematic, given that there are diverse ways to express lesbian identity. However, what Plains FM does is open a micro-public space within which women who identify as lesbians can debate their own identity as individuals and as a community rather than receiving only mainstream versions of themselves. Within such a public space, Clemencia Rodriguez (2001) suggests, communities have the potential to be empowered. In her view, empowerment happens when ‘the language, the shared social codes, the history, and all of those texts that make up the collective imagination of a subordinate community’, which are usually ‘systematically ignored, distorted, or caricatured by hegemonic media institutions’, are expressed, celebrated and debated in community or citizens’ media (Rodriguez, 2001:153).

In another example, Asi Es LatinoAmerica programmer Cristina explains how the opportunity to broadcast on Plains FM also contributes to the public recognition and presence of her Latin American community:

*What you offer is a... a possibility to express yourself in your own language, maintain your culture, and you give us that and the support that you give us to make our message go through to other communities. It make us feel maybe not so much part of Christchurch but being recognised as a community - we are living in Christchurch, we are living in New Zealand, we are living in this culture that completely different to us, but there is... we accept that because we are decide for ourselves to come here but at the same time we are saying look, we are different and we really like the way we are different - and we like you being different - but please recognise us. And by having a programme in Spanish and having a programme in our own language it’s saying here we are, here we are ... and we are part of you now. Please join us and enjoy what we’re doing too.*

From Cristina’s perspective Asi Es LatinoAmerica offers a way to assert the Latin American community’s existence within the wider Christchurch and Aotearoa/New Zealand communities: ‘here we are, here we are.’ In her view, the programme helps Latin Americans to feel affirmed as a distinctive community living their lives in Christchurch.

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50 The issue of whose perspectives make it to air and who gets to represent minority communities is a complex one which I address in detail in Chapter Five.
According to community worker Jim Ife (1995:68), such affirmation has important consequences for minority community members because ‘it is through one’s sense of belonging to a community that one develops a sense of personal worth, and the capacity to lead a more enriched and fulfilling life’. Cristina and several other programmers suggest that the need and desire for a sense of belonging to a distinct cultural community can be particularly acute when the dominant culture is ‘completely different’ to their own. In a sense, the micro-public sphere communication of community radio fulfils a ‘communion’ function for communities like Cristina’s, in that it helps to ‘bind’ them together, reinforcing and affirming their shared values and identity (Hope-Hume, 1997:67-8). Through such ‘communion’, broadcasters hope that the difficulties of living in a completely different culture will become a little easier for some of the more isolated members of their community 51.

However, Cristina hopes that her programme will generate more than self-recognition and a sense of belonging for her Latin American community. She also wants the wider Canterbury and Aotearoa/New Zealand community to ‘recognise’ her Spanish-speaking community as a distinct entity and to acknowledge and appreciate the ways its members are ‘different’. Her comments clearly indicate that being recognised as ‘different’ is important to her, and that she does not wish or see any need to give up her difference in order to assimilate into the dominant New Zealand culture. By saying ‘we really like the way we are different’ and ‘we like you being different,’ Cristina is constructing difference and diversity as positive characteristics. By saying, ‘please join us and enjoy what we’re doing,’ she affirms the value of her culture and suggests that difference need not be a barrier to communication and interaction between cultures. Her comments challenge and offer an alternative to the often fearful and negative portrayals of difference that have circulated in public discourse throughout the history of Aotearoa/New Zealand (Ip, 2001a; 2001b).

Cristina’s emphasis on the need to ‘express yourself in your own language’ and ‘maintain your culture’ and difference suggests that one of the attractions of community radio for minority communities is its potential as a ‘strategic venue for struggling against the silencing of a community’s ethnic and cultural dynamics’ within mainstream media and

51 However, this ‘communion’ is not without its problems. In Chapter Five, I explore some of the tensions and conflicts that can arise within minority communities.
culture (Riano, 1994:36). Through their programming at Plains, Cristina and numerous other women from minority communities assert and celebrate their cultural difference. However, by valuing their difference these minority broadcasters are not refusing to join the nation. On the contrary, Cristina positions the programme as a vehicle for both maintaining her community’s cultural distinctiveness and for asserting her community’s membership of the nation in which they now live: ‘we are part of you now’. By asserting her community’s difference and belonging, Cristina’s comments challenge and refuse the assumption within discourses of New Zealand nationhood that national unity requires homogeneity, that immigrants (and all ‘strangers’) should give up their cultural difference (‘strangeness’) as a condition of becoming (and remaining) part of the nation. In contrast to the dominant homogenising version of New Zealand national identity (Bell, 1996), Cristina’s version of the New Zealand nation is determinedly heterogeneous and culturally diverse.

Social theorist Alberto Melucci (1996:141) argues that, by claiming their right to difference, minority groups and social movements address the whole society in which they live, challenging them to accept and value a ‘different “eye” on the world’. However, he suggests that ‘in societies which exert strong pressures towards conformity the appeal to difference has an explosive impact on the dominant logic’ (Melucci, 1996:141). Accepting and valuing difference is challenging because it exposes the constructed and arbitrary nature of common-sense reality, shaking previous certainties, assumptions and power relations. As Manying Ip (2001b:49) points out, many New Zealanders, including some government officials, still publicly portray difference as ‘potentially upsetting to a stable, positive society’, and ‘disruptive of New Zealand’s social cohesion’. When programmers like Cristina and Merrill make their communities’ difference publicly visible and audible and assert their communities’ right to be part of the nation, they both empower community members and challenge the dominant New Zealand culture to change. Their challenge is an attempt to subvert dominant understandings of the New Zealand nation and to negotiate a new form of nationhood that no longer expects minorities to assimilate into the Pakeha majority’s Euro-centric culture and world-view. While their micro-public sphere challenge

52 This assumption is implicit with comments made by politicians like Winston Peters who make frequent public pronouncements about immigration. Clifton (2002:21) provides an example of this.

53 She is referring particularly here to non-European immigrants.
may be quieter and more localised than mainstream media messages, its significance lies in its public existence as a counter-discourse, a different way of interpreting the nation and difference. Melucci (1996) suggests that the creation of public spaces where difference can be expressed is vital to the survival of minority groups and social movements. In his view, ‘(b)eing recognized as different’ may be ‘one of the most crucial rights at stake’ within the contemporary globalised information society (1996:141). Within this information-driven world, he says, ‘differences in cultures and the definition of cultures themselves become critical social and political issues which affect economic and social policies’ (Melucci, 1996:161). Minority communities need access to public space to display their counter-discourses and differences so that their specific interests and needs have the potential to gain visibility and traction in public policy and service provision debates (Melucci, 1996).

Melucci’s point is illustrated by lesbian programmer Corina, who criticises what she calls ‘the mainstreaming, the normalising of lesbians’:

*We’ve fought all these years for the right to be different. We don’t want to be - even the way that lesbians are being treated in the mainstream, we’ve been mainstreamed and it’s assumed that we want to be exactly the same as heterosexuals. I don’t want to be the same as heterosexuals. What I’ve fought for is my right to be different, to be a lesbian.*

Corina’s frustration emerges from her sense that the dominant culture is attempting to neutralise the difference of lesbianism by assimilating lesbians into a heterosexual cultural framework. As an example, she cites the draft property relationships legislation (now passed into law) that attempts to interpret lesbian relationships on the basis of the heterosexual marriage model, whereas what she wants and needs is legislation ‘that supports my lifestyle, not a heterosexual lifestyle.’ For Corina and other Plains FM minority-group broadcasters, claiming the right to difference is an ongoing battle against such pressures to become more ‘normal’ or ‘mainstream’. To that end, community radio becomes a vehicle for celebrating their difference and an avenue to lobby for the inclusion and consideration of their communities’ ‘different’ interests and needs within the social, cultural and economic policies of the nation. That is, by broadcasting on Plains FM, minority communities lift the ‘blanket’ concealing differences within the nation and refuse to be excluded from discussions and definitions of ‘the national interest’ (Bell, 1996).
Enabling Access and Participation: “Information is power”

There is no doubt that the poverty of communications technology does result in poverty of information, and that it also contributes to that sense of ‘aloneness’, of feeling that the rest of the world has passed by certain communities, for those communities lack the wherewithal to participate.

Frances Berrigan, 1981:45

Writing about the role of community media in development, Frances Berrigan (1981) argued that ‘community communications’ initiatives can be ‘the machinery’ through which disenfranchised communities overcome information ‘poverty’ and ‘aloneness’ and gain access to and influence within the socio-political sphere (1981:9). The concept of ‘information poverty’ is widely used in literature and commonly associated with other forms of disadvantage, yet it is difficult to define and quantify (Sligo & Williams, 2001). Following Balnaves, Sligo and Williams suggest that manifestations of information poverty may include ‘deficits in being informed and associated’, ‘problems in conducting the business of everyday life activities’, ‘incurring losses in not meeting information and communication needs’ (including “opportunity costs” in not being able to participate fully in society) and ‘dysfunctions in common information and communication purposes’ (2001:3-4). As I will show, interviewees’ narratives clearly identify informational barriers or lacks within their communities that are similar to the above suggested dimensions of information poverty. In addition, although they use different words from Berrigan, several women that I interviewed share both her concern about the isolating and disempowering effects of information poverty within their communities and her enthusiasm for community radio as a way to begin to address and counter such effects. Several programmers from minority communities also express clear ideas about why a poverty of information exists within their communities, how it affects community members’ lives and how their programmes at Plains FM help to redress information deficits and thereby empower communities and community members.

According to several interviewees, one central reason for information deficits in their communities is that the kind of information that community members need and want is often not available or accessible to them via the mainstream media. For example, as Merrill
suggested in the previous section, lesbian women need some way of finding one another in order to feel part of a community. If lesbian and gay lives, interests and issues are rarely visible, audible or acceptable in mainstream media, then how do individual lesbians find out about the lesbian venues, events and groups where they can meet other lesbian women? Other interviewees emphasise that because the programming in mainstream media and the literature available from public institutions is predominantly in English, people without English skills struggle to find basic information and services and to keep apace even with significant local and national events. As Chinese programmer Szuwen says, mainstream media are irrelevant and unhelpful to Chinese with little English because they cannot understand their content. Consequently, important events and issues pass them by: ‘they may not know that there’s an election coming up (laughs), things like that.’

Pacific programmer Sina is one of several broadcasters who identify language barriers as a key reason for informational deficits within their communities. While Sina is well settled in Aotearoa/New Zealand and able to access places and information that she needs, she says that she is constantly aware of those in her community who cannot do so:

When I go places and I sit and look at something, and when I found out about something I thought, wow! Look, I can read, I can understand English and I can understand people talking English. How about our people who doesn’t even know an English? Or can’t read? Or can’t speak? If they come here, what happens to them? What they can do?

Without proficiency in English, Sina suggests, Pacific people’s abilities to gain the information or knowledge they need to act and interact in their new, unfamiliar environment are severely constrained. However, she also suggests that language is not the only barrier to communication and information seeking because cultural and environmental factors can also prevent new arrivals from asking for help when they need it:

This is a good example! When I get off in Wellington, wow! It’s wonderful beautiful new airport, and you know when I walk across there, and I look around and I waited... and there was no call, and I came closer to the, all those computers and one, two, three, four computers... all of them saying, you know, departure and arrival, and I thought what about our old people who can’t speak English, can’t read English, what happens if they arrive there?
Boy, they totally lost. And here are people sitting there and just read or do their own thing without, you know, being disturbed. And then, and what happen if one woman or someone, someone at all, even a child, walk in there, I'm talking about Island child aye, walk in there and look around? Because our ways, like when you see somebody, “hello, what you doing?” ... Even though you reading, they still say “what you doing?” ... you know, you're reading... “I'm reading” what else?... But, that's our way, you know, or just look at someone and not even speak, but if I look at you and you look at me, you know, smile come and then hello, and you know, talk and conversation start, and you can ask...

In this passage Sina suggests that communication is not just about being able to understand spoken and written language, it is also about the cultural cues expressed in body language and the use of space. In the space of the Wellington airport, she observes that communication occurs primarily through technological rather than interpersonal means, there are no voices announcing flights, only information displayed in English on computerised screens. Not only is this written information inaccessible to non-readers of English, but Sina suggests that cultural differences, for example the lack of expected interactive cues like eye contact and smiling in acknowledgement of another person, make it difficult even for a Pacific person with some English to ask for help.

In Sina’s view, another reason some Pacific people may feel unable to ask for help when faced with bewildering situations is that they are unsure or nervous of the reaction they will get:

\[
\text{There are a lot of areas, you know, language, being ashamed of speaking it wrong and people laugh at you. There are also so many of our women, just for, just looking at people is ashamed... is ashamed of looking at people, because they might be look at as, oh they are second class because they brown, you know, things like that.}
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In these comments, Sina suggests that some members of her community expect or anticipate racism in their dealings with other New Zealanders. That is, they expect to be perceived not only as ‘different’ (which can co-exist with ‘equal’) but as ‘second class’ and the possibility of such prejudice can prevent them from initiating communication and
interaction. Sina is not alone amongst interviewees in suggesting that racism, prejudice or unequal treatment (or the fear of these) can be a factor in the lives and experiences of minority community members. Several interviewees cite prejudice or inequality as factors that impact materially and emotionally on individuals and their ability to participate fully in New Zealand life. Their comments in this regard challenge the trivialisation or disregard for differences and inequalities inherent within the frequently voiced sentiment that ‘we are all New Zealanders’ and therefore we are all equal (Bell, 1996).

Far from being equal, Sina suggests that the combination of communication and cultural barriers facing some of her community members can make even the simplest daily life tasks difficult. She offers the example of ‘going to the shop’:

All you do is pick what you want and you can take it to the counter and they say the money and if you don’t know what they say you can look at the number on the little screen and pay. But, still, there are lots of our people who needs to be told – and information is power...

It is her understanding of the power of information that leads Sina to dedicate a significant proportion of her week and her personal money to broadcast ‘any information that might lead to empowering people.’

The ‘power’ and importance of information is a common theme in the narratives of programmers from immigrant communities, particularly those with large numbers of recent settlers with little English. These women suggest that without accurate sources of comprehensible information, their community members cannot access community resources, institutions and support systems, and they cannot participate fully in the social, cultural, political and economic life of the wider community. Waikato University lecturer Nittaya Campbell reaches similar conclusions in a research study on immigrants and alternative media (2001). Campbell suggests that lack of adequate post-arrival information and ongoing information sources exacerbates settlement difficulties for immigrants and may even contribute to the decision by some to re-migrate to other countries. She argues that immigrants not only ‘need information to help them take advantage of services available, obtain employment, set up businesses, and generally learn about the New Zealand way of life’, they also have ‘long-term on-going needs for other types of
information such as news and entertainment’ (2001:1-2; see also Husband, 1998). Campbell points out that immigrants also ‘have the same need (as other members of society) to be part of the societal communication network and enjoy the same benefits the network bestows on members of the host country’ (2001:2). However, her review of numerous research studies demonstrates that the communication needs of large numbers of immigrants in Aotearoa/New Zealand ‘are not being met, resulting in their feeling alienated and marginalised’ (Campbell, 2001:3). Although Campbell’s comments and my examples in this section refer primarily to immigrant communities, similar communication needs are also expressed (albeit to varying degrees and in varying contexts) by broadcasters from other marginalized minority groups represented at Plains FM. As Riano (1994:12) points out, ‘all’ people have needs ‘to transmit and receive information and to see their views and groups represented in the media’.

Campbell (2001:25) argues that alternative media like access radio have ‘an important role’ in Aotearoa/New Zealand because:

...they fill the gap left by mainstream media. They inform, entertain and empower people in the under-served communities, including – in some cases especially – immigrants.

Campbell’s belief in the empowering potential of alternative media is clearly supported by the narratives of Plains FM broadcasters from minority communities. As Sina’s previous comments demonstrate, these women utilise discourses of empowerment to describe their programme objectives and content. Immigrant women in particular argue that the information they broadcast helps members of their communities to make sense of the unfamiliar (and sometimes unfriendly) linguistic, social and cultural environment they are living in and enables them to locate and access essential services. Consequently, these broadcasters position their programmes as informational ‘lifelines’, particularly for the non-English speaking portions of their communities that ‘rely on’ their programmes for daily survival information. As Sina says: ‘what we do is just trying to help and improve the ways of living and facing the new way of life in this... this country New Zealand.’
The following extract provides an example of one of these ‘lifeline’ programmes. The speaker is Mariana, who for several years broadcast a programme for her ethnic and linguistic community. She says:

*I felt it was more like a support radio for the people who were... from my background, you know, a minority group who needed lots of service. They didn’t know how to access, you know, institutions, or how to work within the system, as an immigrant. People often would call to my place, very often, and ask me all sorts of questions regarding immigration, health, you know, legal matters. I thought well maybe it would be a good idea if I... through the radio, I would say to these people there are systems in place that they can access... so in that way I might get rid of all these calls, they are causing me so much distress in my life (laughs).*

Mariana’s description of the numerous ‘calls’ she received from community members highlights the information needs within her community and the ‘distress’ that the level of need caused her personally. Her comments about the kind of requests she received emphasise that people wanted information about how to ‘access’ and ‘work within’ services, ‘institutions’ and ‘systems’, including those related to ‘immigration’ ‘health’ and ‘legal’ matters. Producing a radio programme was one way for Mariana to offer supportive and empowering information to a wider audience, rather than dealing with requests one to one. Ironically, she reports, because of the extent of the informational needs in the community and the public profile she gained from being on radio, ‘I did not get rid of the calls (laughs), I receive a lot more (laughs).’

To produce the kind of knowledge/information that is relevant and accessible to their community members, programme makers at Plains FM utilise a variety of information gathering and processing skills. For example, Sina says ‘everywhere I go, when I see something I grab it and I brought it with me.’ The material might be Ministry of Justice pamphlets or health or educational information, it may be written in her language or she may need to translate it before she can convey the information on air. She contacts government agencies, like the Immigration Department, to ‘send all their changes to me’ so that she can detail them and discuss their implications on air. She also interviews
representatives from relevant groups so that her audience can hear directly from the source of the information. Another programmer Niva says:

*I read the newspaper and listen to the news every day, Radio IRN Pacific News... and I prepare all these news and I cut it down and use simple language that are easy to understand for my people.*

When Sina, Niva and other broadcasters select, sort and rewrite the snippets of news they gather from other media to make them relevant and accessible to their audiences they are 'circulat(ing) and recreat(ing) the meaning of the messages' (Riano, 1994:49). They are bringing their 'different eye' to events and debates in the meso- and macro- public spheres and 'naming the world in a different way' (Melucci, 1996:162).

Melucci (1996: 228) argues that now, more than ever, we are living in a society in which 'information is the crucial resource'. In his view, the issue facing populations in contemporary societies is not the quantity of information available, but the power relations surrounding the creation and control of information. Hence, he argues that it is 'the power to name' that predominantly determines whether, and to what extent, an individual and/or community grouping can participate fully and effectively in their society:

*In the contemporary context, we can define exploitation as a form of dependent participation in the information flow, as the deprivation of control over the construction of meaning. The true exploitation is not the deprivation of information; even in the shantytowns of the cities of the Third world people are today widely exposed to the media, only they do not have any power to organize this information according to their own needs. Thus, the real domination is today the exclusion from the power of naming.* (1996:182)

Through their community radio programmes, Plains FM minority communities refuse a 'dependent' position in the information flow and seize the opportunity to 'create new symbolic systems' that name their specific realities and experiences and affirm, nurture and empower their cultures and communities (Melucci, 1996:155).

In a similar vein, Riano (1994:23) argues that grassroots communications is primarily about 'naming' people's 'denied and fragmented' realities and therefore making them 'visible, identifiable and meaningful'. Many Plains FM broadcasters are using the micro-
public space of their community programmes to name their own previously denied realities, to share information and experiences, to address and generate dialogue about community problems and even to rehearse possible solutions to them. For example, Cristina describes how the *Asi Es LatinoAmerica* programme became a forum for airing community members’ experiences of racist attacks in response to a violent incident that occurred in the city:

_Last Saturday we had (prepared) a programme on poetry, and by Thursday we change it, we wanted to talk about violence and racism because of what was happening here in town. Our community is very small and many of our people have been attacked by white power and skinheads and everything has been kept quiet because some people feel ashamed or feel there’s not a point to talk about it... and then when someone said ‘oh something happened,’ they say ‘oh it happened to me too,’ so we feel that we need to talk about it and let them know what they can do about it and not to feel ashamed, feel strong and feel that they are not in the wrong, you know, so we just changed our programme in two days and we had a very good programme on Saturday._

This broadcast aimed to respond to a serious current issue within the Latin American community by offering support for community members through the airing and sharing of common experiences of violence and the discussion of potential strategies to deal with such attacks. By publicising the issue the programmers were able to raise community awareness about violence and its impact on community members.

The programme *Chinese Voice of the Garden City* shared similar goals when it produced an award-winning series of interviews discussing how new migrant women integrate into the community. One of the programme makers, Pansy, describes the experiences of one of the women interviewed:

_Every time when the telephone rang she just panic because she feel if she pick up the phone she couldn’t understand what the other party were saying, she’ll feel embarrassed and bad, but if she doesn’t pick up the phone it could be her husband ringing home to see how she was... She also articulate her anxiety when her neighbours invite her for afternoon tea. She really wanted to go, but_
at the same time, she felt she can’t communicate and she had to turn it down
and it could be interpreted as a gesture of, you know, being unfriendly.

This series of programmes provided a forum for airing the common difficulties experienced by new migrants in an attempt to lessen their isolation. By sharing the difficulties of their immigrant experiences publicly, interviewees, like the woman in the above programme, offer a message to others in a similar situation that they are not alone. Pansy suggests that the programmes may also have given new migrant listeners some hope for the future, because although the women discussed ‘trying times’ as they adjusted to New Zealand life, they also shared ‘the triumph moments when they see their children doing well at school and become, you know, doctors, accountants and lawyers.’

In the above examples from the Chinese and Latin American communities, the forum of radio was able to transform ‘shameful’ or ‘embarrassing’ private problems into public issues for the wider community to discuss and address. In each of these cases, by providing broadcasters with the means and the space to open public debate amongst themselves, community radio programmes became ‘the means of expression of the community’ (Berrigan, 1981:13), enabling the emergence of counter-discourses (discourses of “us” rather than of “the other”). Within the micro-public space, community members are able to name and explore the implications of their previously denied realities through the medium of their own vocabulary, language and cultural perspectives. In so doing, they use their community radio programmes to ‘enhance community self-awareness’, ‘explore alternatives’ (Berrigan, 1981:13, 46), and create and draft ‘an oppositional agency’ (Riano, 1994:36). For example, by sharing personal experiences of racist violence, the participants in Asi Es LationAmerica contributed to a greater ‘self-awareness’ or knowledge within the Latin American community of the prevalence and nature of violent incidents. By discussing the possible avenues for addressing violence, the programmers attempted to explore alternative means by which listeners could cope with potential or actual violent situations. By contesting assumptions that victims of racist violence should feel ‘ashamed’ or ‘in the wrong’, they also aimed to create an empowering counter-discourse of community strength and pride. And by positioning the existence of violence as a community rather than an individual problem, the broadcasters opened up the possibility of community action in response to violence.
The narratives of Plains FM broadcasters from minority communities express their understanding of the power of information and the marginalising and alienating effects of information poverty. It is this understanding, often born of personal experience or knowledge of the effects of information poverty, that motivates many of them to broadcast at Plains. Through their programmes, these broadcasters aim to ‘empower’ their community members by providing them with accessible, relevant and culturally appropriate information that will enable them to participate more fully in the social, cultural, economic and political life of Aotearoa/New Zealand. To that end, Plains FM broadcasters are engaging in ‘symbolic production’ that challenges their community’s ‘self-perceptions’, contests dominant social codes, and ‘legitimises’ their previously marginalised cultural identities (Rodriguez, 2001:20). In other words, they are claiming for their community the ‘power to name’ their own realities, strengths and struggles (Melucci, 1996), and their right to contribute to the symbolic construction of the nation and the world in which they live.

**Resisting, Challenging, Educating: “Oh, these are real people”**

*Community media, at its core, is about every person and every idea. ... Community media proudly shines a spotlight on every different face so that we all can achieve a better understanding of each other. ... [Community media producers] use their talents to foster learning and provide their neighbours with enriching views into worlds they might never have known. They bond with their own communities and share that relationship through community media.*

Matthew Bennett, 2000:9

Because anyone in the transmission area can listen to programmes broadcast at Plains FM, when minority community broadcasters ‘name the world’ in different ways on air their messages also have the potential to circulate within the meso-public sphere of the local Canterbury region (and by extension the nation). As several interviewees point out, this potential for wider circulation offers broadcasters from minority communities valuable opportunities to communicate with, and possibly influence the ideas and opinions of members of the wider Canterbury community. Having few, or no, other avenues for
reaching out and speaking to the wider community, these are opportunities that many Plains broadcasters are keen to seize. Several Section 36c broadcasters at Plains identify the ‘education’ of the general public as one of their important programme objectives. This aim is also inherent in two of the station’s formal objectives which state that Plains FM should work to ‘increase public understanding and awareness of minority interest groups within the community’ and to ‘heighten awareness and appreciation of the cultural and social diversity of New Zealand’ (Plains FM, 2001). Plains FM broadcasters, staff and managers suggest that by ‘educating’ the general public, in the sense of exposing them to new ideas and realities that could heighten their ‘awareness’, ‘understanding’ and ‘appreciation’ of diversity within Canterbury, the station’s programming contributes to making Aotearoa/New Zealand ‘a better place to live’. In so doing, they position Plains FM broadcasters not as marginalised outsiders, but as active social agents making valuable contributions to the definition and construction of community identity and culture at the regional and national level.

One way in which Plains FM programmers attempt to ‘educate’ the Canterbury community is by using their programmes as an opportunity to present a ‘window’ into their world for listeners who are unfamiliar with their cultures, lifestyles or perspectives. By opening the lifestyles, interests, knowledges and cultural specificity of their communities to meso-public scrutiny, Plains broadcasters appear to be supporting Graham Murdock’s (1992:38) suggestion that, ‘(r)ather than liquidating significant differences in the interests of creating a unitary “national culture”, we should aim to explore them in the hope of forging new accommodations and similarities based on mutual understanding and respect’. Several broadcasters hope that, through exploring their differences publicly, their programmes will help listeners from the dominant culture to recognise their common humanity with minority community members, thereby reducing their fear of difference and generating mutual understanding and respect. These broadcasters also hope that their programmes will enrich meso-public debates about significant social and policy issues that affect their communities.

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54 One of the broadcasters who uses the ‘window’ metaphor is Cristina from *Así es LatinoAmerica*, who suggests that opening a window into her community’s debates and lives is the way in which her community has become ‘recognised’ by the wider Canterbury public.
One person who wanted to change public perceptions of her community of interest is Vema McFelin, a member of the community group Pillars (Prison Inmates Loved ones Linked As one to Renew Strength) which supports the families of prison inmates.\textsuperscript{55} Vema was one of the producers of the ninety-minute weekly programme \textit{Inside Out}, which she says ‘was really a communication across prison walls between families and inmates’. The primary objective of the programme was to maintain the relationships between prisoners and their loved ones, but Vema also saw it as an opportunity to (re)educate the general public about the realities of imprisonment and those it affects. Plains FM ex-staff member Megan, who participated in production for the Pillars programme, gives a specific instance of the kind of relationship-building communication that \textit{Inside Out} was attempting to facilitate:

\begin{quote}
We did a whole lot of interviews with kids saying, you know, Dad or Mum is in solitary and we can’t see them on Christmas, and we all had a big party and then we taped them … and we taped these Christmas messages from these kids to their parents inside, and just knowing that in prisons around Canterbury region, people turned on the radio to hear their kids… it was kind of like, wow, it is hugely significant, it really is.
\end{quote}

Vema says that through this kind of programme the public were exposed to some of the actual people behind the stereotypes of prisoners and their families and were therefore confronted with the realisation that ‘oh, these are real people, they’re not just tattooed people behind prison bars – they’ve got families, they’ve got children, wives, they’re real people.’

Historian John Fitzgerald (2001:22) suggests that this kind of realisation is necessary for attitudes about minorities to change because ‘the dominant Other is in no position to recognise the subordinate subject unless and until it can identify elements of itself in the subject seeking recognition’. The problem is that mainstream media representations of minority groups do not facilitate such identification and recognition because they provide such a simplified and stereotypical version of minority identity (Bell, 1996). What Vema and other Plains FM programmers are trying to do is help their listeners to look beyond the simplified stereotypes of their communities so that they can relate to minority group members as complex individuals and identify the ways in which these normally stigmatized

\textsuperscript{55} The programme is no longer on air.
'Others' are 'real people’ just like them. Verna suggests that *Inside Out* offered listeners the opportunity to recognise prisoners and their families as more than just crime statistics or tattooed bodies behind bars. By emphasising the humanity behind the stereotypes of prisoners, she hoped that the programme would disrupt listeners’ preconceptions about who goes to prison and what their lives are like.

Verna also wanted the programme to offer listeners a different perspective from which to think about prisons and imprisonment. In a way, the *Inside Out* programme-makers wanted to open a window that some members of the public would prefer to keep closed:

> I think also the public seems to confuse the person with the crime, where in fact a person has committed a crime, and yes, they are there to pay for that crime, nobody's got any problem with that. But it's while they're there, what are they going to do with them? It's like the public don't want to know about that side of prison life, I mean, prison is a place where a person has to have some type of rehabilitation, some type of support systems, so that when they are released they are respectable members of society.

*Inside Out* aimed to explore the issues of crime, punishment, prison conditions and prisoner rehabilitation from the perspectives of those most intimately affected by them. These perspectives would be new to most of the general public because, despite the huge proportion of mainstream media news that focuses on crime and ‘law and order’ (Atkinson, 1994b), the voices of prisoners and their families are almost wholly absent from the meso-public sphere. Stereotyped as ‘criminals’, prisoners are most frequently represented not as people or citizens but as transgressors of the social and moral code who have placed themselves (and by implication their families) ‘outside’ of the national community. Their incarceration reinforces this ‘outsider’ status by removing their physical presence from public space and public consideration. As Verna suggested, people ‘don’t want to know about’ prisoners’ lives. *Inside Out* attempted to put prisoners back into the public imagination by valuing and legitimising them as people and by emphasising their needs for support and rehabilitation while in prison so that they are able to fit more easily into society when released. By suggesting that rehabilitation is a necessary precondition for prisoners to become ‘respectable members of society’ on their release, Verna positions prison policy as a community issue and challenges dominant discourses that individualise the responsibility
for crime and law and order. She hoped that the knowledge listeners gained through being exposed to the views and experiences of those most affected by imprisonment would feed into public debates on prison policy and issues like prisoner rehabilitation. 56

Another programmer Joanne Clarke, who produced an informational and support programme for transgendered people called Transister Radio, also hoped to educate and inform listeners about her community. In particular, Joanne wanted to emphasise ‘positive’ aspects of transgendered life in order to counter damaging media stereotypes. She wanted the programme to:

*let the wider audience know that we can be part of the community without being part of the twilight world, that we are in the everyday, everyday world, that you see us all the time, you work with us all the time and that we have a right to be here... and that we love and get hurt and bleed, like everybody else.*

*... I think education is a really important thing, that you are never too old to learn something new. And I come from a background where it’s different to ninety percent, more, say ninety-five percent, of the general public, so if I can help people understand where I’m coming from, that will make it easier for the next person coming along.*

Joanne’s programme aimed to challenge the dominant culture’s relegation of transgendered people to the ‘outsider’ status of ‘the twilight world’ by bringing their lives and experiences into the ‘everyday world’. Like Cristina, she explicitly claims ‘insider’ status for her community by asserting their presence as ‘part of’ the national community. And like Verna, Joanne hoped that listeners would be ‘educated’ simply by being exposed through the ‘window’ of radio to an unfamiliar and different reality and recognising its human face. This is a position supported by Melucci (1996:183) who argues that the messages of social groups or movements do not necessarily have to be verbalised in order to be successfully communicated, because ‘the message of such movements is their action itself.’ In his view, social movements often ‘make new meaning visible through their practice’, and these new meanings offer a significant ‘symbolic challenge’ to institutional powers and dominant cultural codes (1996:183). From this perspective, by being themselves and expressing their

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56 According to Vema, *Inside Out* went off air for two reasons: its broadcasters became too busy with other Pillars activities to continue with the programme and they found it difficult to fund.
identities, cultures, perspectives and realities on air Plains FM minority broadcasters generate new knowledge that has the potential to contest dominant cultural codes and transform meso-public sphere debates.

For some broadcasters, the desire to contest dominant cultural codes is a primary rather than secondary programme objective. For example, Japanese programmer Yuko’s experiences of racism while studying in Christchurch led her to create a programme that she hoped would increase New Zealanders’ understanding of Japanese people and challenge their racial stereotypes:

*I’m just doing some introducing Japanese culture and lifestyles and customs and language, like a little bit of everything, so that like people can understand what we think and how we feel, and also we are not different, like, yeah, very different from the backgrounds and stuff... but we are still like people, so we feel happy and they feel happy. So I thought like, many... some people are really biased, like some people don’t like Japanese because of, you know, war and also anti-Asian stuff. And I found it’s quite sad because, I don’t know, it’s really hard to tell, or maybe people just... If there were some reasons to disliking people it’s okay, it’s understandable, but like people hate us just because I’m Japanese. And it’s really sad, and it’s very hard to cope with it. So I found maybe if I, or maybe someone else, tried to teach or tell people how we feel and we are just the same. I thought it makes less biased opinion and anti-Asian stuff, I thought it’s better to know each other so we feel more like getting... liking each other. So that’s why I started doing my programme in English so people start liking Japanese people...*

Yuko ties her motivation for broadcasting to her experiences and awareness of some New Zealanders’ ‘biased opinions’ and even ‘hate’ of Japanese and Asian people just because of their ethnicity. It is a bias that she clearly finds difficult to understand because, although she connects it with the country’s history of ‘war’ and a prevalence of ‘anti-Asian’ sentiment, these do not seem to her to be sufficient reasons to dislike all Japanese. Her programme is a response to the pain that such dislike causes and an attempt to generate more positive relationships between Japanese and non-Japanese in New Zealand.
Yuko’s perception of New Zealanders as biased against Japanese and Asians is supported by commentators like Auckland professor Manying Ip, who suggests that New Zealand’s mono-cultural history has made it ‘very unused to’ and ‘very unfriendly’ towards ‘people from different cultures’ (2001:11). She argues that the ‘historical baggage’ from the period when New Zealand’s laws specifically excluded Chinese immigrants is still apparent in ‘residual anti-Chinese feelings, narrow parochialism and xenophobia’ that have ‘combined to bring out popular anti-Asian feelings’ (2001:11). As Yuko discovered, these ‘anti-Asian’ feelings are directed at all people of East Asian ethnicity, as many New Zealanders have difficulty in distinguishing between them (Beal, 2001). By ‘introducing Japanese culture and lifestyles and customs and language’ and explaining to her listeners how Japanese people ‘think and feel’, Yuko is attempting to convey the specificity and complexity of her experience of being Japanese. Her programme separates the identity of ‘Japanese’ from the ‘Asian’ label under which it is so often subsumed in dominant discourses. Like Vema and Joanne, Yuko hopes her programme will ‘teach’ the ‘biased’ New Zealanders in her audience that Japanese and Asian people, despite different backgrounds, ‘are just the same’ as them. As Mata suggests, all three women are attempting to use radio as a vehicle for ‘the production of different meanings of the social order’ that marginalises and stereotypes their communities (1992:198). All three use (or used) Plains FM programming to ‘propose their own meaning of this order and their own ideas about what is real’ with the intention that their ideas would ‘compete for hegemonic meaning’ within the meso-public sphere (Mata, 1994:198).

While individual programmers challenge and attempt to transform the dominant discourses marginalising their specific communities, several Plains FM participants suggest that the station as a whole is also offering a symbolic challenge to New Zealand’s entrenched mono-culturalism. These interviewees suggest that the station makes a vital and positive contribution to the definition of their nation because, as the station objectives suggest, it ‘heighten(s) awareness of the cultural and social diversity of New Zealand’ (Plains FM, 2000). For example, Grace Hollander, who served as Chair of the station’s governing body (the CCT) in 1997, says:

57 Of course this is her version or understandings of what Japanese people think and feel
I see this sort of heightening of awareness as a wonderful thing for any radio station to be doing. And hopefully it will create tolerance and an appreciation of the social diversity of the multi-cultural population of New Zealand. You've got so many of these ethnic groups coming in here and telling people about their ethnicity and culture and I can only see it as an asset for the country.

Similarly, ex-programmer Pansy comments that through Plains:

*ppl* you start to know the variety, the differences, the different voices, different communities, different opinion. So when you tune into there you just know you're going to get different sound beats, different people. I think it's just exciting and dynamic, it's more in terms of the New Zealand ethnic mix, makeup and the New Zealand modern day populations.

Both Grace and Pansy suggest that the cumulative impact of the symbolic activities of all the individual programmes and programmers at Plains has the potential to influence and even transform the meso-public sphere and the nation in a creative and positive way. Grace sees the station's diversity as an 'asset' for the country. Although Pansy highlights the 'differences' between the voices and cultures heard on Plains, she (like Cristina earlier) challenges the frequently negative connotations of 'different' (think, for example, of the common understanding of 'differences of opinion') through the use of words like 'exciting' and 'dynamic'. Both women construct an inclusive and fluid version of contemporary New Zealand identity that celebrates rather than fears or denigrates its diversity.

**Building Social Capital: “The network is getting stronger”**

*In a civil society, we need to recognise the supreme importance of social connections...*

Eva Cox, 1995:10

*What happens here is networks. Networking happens, people meet other people that they never would meet otherwise...*

Lesley, staff member

Staff member Lesley is just one of the many participants at Plains FM who position the station as a place where 'networks' and 'connections' are built and 'relationships' develop.
These interviewees suggest that ‘networking happens’ at Plains during the process of producing programmes and as a consequence of the interpersonal interactions that occur at the station or its social functions. Numerous interviewees emphasise both the personal and community benefits of the informational, support and personal contact networks that they have developed or enhanced through their involvement at Plains FM. Some, like Lesley, suggest that networking at Plains also changes people (including herself) for the better because ‘they get their minds broadened enormously’ through engaging with others that they would never normally meet. It is clear from interviewees’ narratives that the networking and relationship-building that occur at Plains FM are valued by station participants. I would argue that this value can be theorised as an enhancement of ‘social capital’ both within the micro-communities that participate at Plains and within the meso-public of the Canterbury region in which station participants live, work and socialise.

The concept of ‘social capital’ refers to ‘connections among individuals - social networks and the norms of reciprocity and trustworthiness that arise from them’ (Putnam, 2000:19). According to Robert Putnam (2000:18-19), ‘the core idea of social capital theory is that social networks have value.’ He argues that, like financial, physical and human capital, social capital increases the productivity and effectiveness of individuals and groups (Putnam, 2000). Key elements of social capital are social trust and norms of reciprocity, both of which are generated and enhanced by participation in a range of formal and informal social networks (Putnam, 2000). Social trust entails a belief that other people are generally ‘fair, trustworthy and helpful’ (Capella, 2001:230). People with high levels of social trust are willing to help others or contribute to the common good without expecting an immediate or direct reward for their action, in the belief that others would act similarly. Putman (2000:20) calls this a ‘norm of generalized reciprocity.’ He argues that a key feature of social networks is that they ‘involve (almost by definition) mutual obligations’, and that ‘frequent interaction among a diverse set of people tends to produce a norm of generalized reciprocity’ (2000:20). According to social capital theorists, by helping to develop trust, cooperation, interdependence and reciprocity amongst their members, social

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58 Informal social networks could include connections and interactions with family, friends, neighbours or workmates, for example, whereas formal networks could include membership of sports or service clubs, church groups, political parties or community organisations (Putnam, 2000).

59 Capella contrasts this with the mistrustful belief that ‘others are predisposed to look out for themselves and take advantage’ (2001:230).
networks generate and enhance social capital (Cox, 1995; Putnam, 2000). The social capital that they generate can be described as both a ‘private good’ and a ‘public good’ because the individual benefits of high social capital have ‘spillover benefits’ for the wider community (Putnam, 2000:20).

Social capital theory is relevant to Plains FM because it suggests that community organisations are ideal arenas for social capital development, particularly when they encourage volunteer participation and tolerance of diversity and when the relationships within them are predominantly egalitarian (Cox, 1995; Onyx and Bullen, 2001; Putnam, 2000). By spending time together and working cooperatively towards common objectives, participants in voluntary community organisations like Plains FM are perceived to be in an ideal position to develop trusting relationships and norms of reciprocity. Interviewees’ narratives certainly support such a view with relation to Plains FM because they indicate that the positive relationships that they form at Plains are one of the most satisfying outcomes of their participation. Several programme makers and volunteers talk about the social and friendship bonds that develop during the process of programme production. Szuwen says that the opportunities to ‘make friends’, ‘have fun’ and ‘work with other young people’ are the main reason that the people in her Chinese language programme group, all young immigrants, participate at Plains. According to Cristina of *Asi Es LatinoAmerica*, the socialising in her group was so enjoyable that it had to be curbed:

*We normally have a meeting every six weeks and we get together and we have lunch and we have a lot of laughter, drinking and well, the meetings were getting a bit out of hand because now we say two hours and that’s it, we eat, we drink and we talking for two hours because one of the meetings carry on for about six hours and gosh it was a good meeting (laughs).*

Sociologist Eva Cox (1995:11) argues that trust is essential for cooperative group relations and ‘a prerequisite for healthy risk-taking’. As Cristina suggested earlier, the trust generated within her programme group and community as a consequence of working and socialising together enabled participants to discuss their personal experiences of racial violence. Once one person took the risk of sharing their experience others also contributed to a discussion which then grew into a programme on violence in the community. Thus, the socialising processes involved in programme production can help to create a safe
atmosphere for exploring seemingly personal issues and experiences that can lead to the development of new community knowledge(s).

Within social capital theory, the creation of trusting and reciprocal relationships within a group such as Cristina’s reflects the development of ‘bonding social capital’. Bonding social capital is generated within networks of similar individuals like the many ethnic communities, religious groups, cultural groups or interest groups represented in Plains FM programming (Putnam, 2000; Onyx and Bullen, 2001). The trust and reciprocity norms that these relatively homogenous networks develop ‘bond’ members by strengthening in-group identity, solidarity and interdependence (Putnam, 2000). Bonding social capital within a community can also be enhanced when access programmes become the vehicle for publicising and encouraging participation in community events, for disseminating important community information, for nurturing their cultural traditions and languages, and for promoting community strength, solidarity and pride.

The bonding social networks facilitated through Plains FM can also operate across the micro-, meso-, and macro-public spheres. Through the use of communications technologies like telephone, fax, email and internet, Plains broadcasters are able to generate and sustain bonding social networks with others of their ‘community’ around the country or the world. For example, Pacific programmer Niva maintains strong informational networks amongst her extended family and country-people around the country. She says:

*We share. What’s happening in Christchurch, I feed direct to Auckland, what’s happening in Wellington, important matters that concern (my) community in New Zealand, they fax it to me, I fax it to Dunedin... that’s the way we work.*

Tongan programmer Mele makes weekly phone calls to ‘Dunedin, Oamaru and ‘any place I know there is a Tongan’ to collect ‘news from the mainland’ (archival interview). This news is broadcast not only on her Plains FM programme, but also in live telephone reports that she makes to Auckland Pacific station 531 PI. In these situations, the relationship between Plains FM programmes and community networks is symbiotic: the networks help to generate the radio content and the broadcasts feed information to community networks, keeping individuals, families and communities in contact with one another and enhancing bonding social capital. Similarly, Cristina from *Asi Es LationAmerica*, used Plains FM contacts to tap into international news networks like Fempress, a news network for Latin
American women. Use of macro-networks like Fempress widens the range of information that the programmers can gather and broadcast, which is particularly important because of the number of different countries their programme aims to serve.

While interviewees suggest that the enhancement of bonding social capital is a significant benefit of participation at Plains, I would argue that the station's potential to generate 'bridging social capital' is just as valuable to the long-term wellbeing of its Section 36c participant communities. Bridging social capital attempts to 'bridge' social or cultural boundaries. Where bonding social networks tend to be inward-looking and exclusive, bridging social networks are outward-looking and inclusive, 'encompass(ing) people across diverse social cleavages' (Putnam, 2000). The categories of bonding and bridging capital usefully suggest that social networks take different forms and serve different purposes. While the connections between people within bridging social networks may be weaker than those developed in bonding networks, they provide participants with access to a broader range of external resources, information and support systems.

Social capital theorists argue that the ability to develop social connections outside of their own micro-community is crucial for members of marginalised communities because while bonding social capital can act as an effective strategy for survival or 'getting by', generating bridging social contacts is vital for real community development or 'getting ahead' (Onyx and Bullen, 2001; Putnam, 2000). That is, although it may be rich in bonding social capital, unless a marginalised micro-public reaches beyond its own constructed boundaries it cannot 'connect with' and 'draw on' the social capital available within the meso-public sphere. Hence, its scope for participation and integration within the mesosphere is limited (Cox, 1995). A micro-community whose members cannot participate fully within the meso-sphere is also less likely to negotiate an integrated place for itself within the imagined community of the nation. For these reasons, Onyx and Bullen (2001) suggest that the health and wellbeing of individuals, families and communities is likely to depend upon their ability to generate a combination of both bonding and bridging social capital through both formal and informal networks.

At Plains FM, while committed to bonding as communities of Koreans, Latin Americans or Catholics (for example), minority community broadcasters also have the potential to
generate bridging capital. Plains FM is a site where the existing social, informational and political networks of a diverse collection of participant groups and individuals converge, interact and supplement one another. Each participant generally comes to Plains FM with at least some (family, cultural, community, church, interest-group, political, neighbourhood or work) networks already established. These existing networks then have the potential to feed into and be in turn nourished or supplemented by the station’s dense and broad-reaching pool of contacts, resources and networks and by the personal connections and relationships that participants form both within and outside of the station.

Chinese programmer Pansy offers an example of the useful bridging social networks that can develop through Plains broadcasting. While preparing material for her programme, Pansy made contact not only with Chinese programmers at Wellington Access Radio, but also with a range of other people from outside the Chinese community networks who shared her interest in issues ‘related to the Chinese community or new migrant integration’. She says that Plains FM ‘opened up a whole lot of networks for us to know other people who are interested in migrant society’. Over time, she says, many of the people she made contact with through Plains became personal friends. By developing contacts within meso-level migration networks, Pansy increased the breadth of her information gathering sources and the potential for solidarity with other groups and individuals interested and actively engaged in migrant community issues and affairs.

Another example of the bridging social capital that can develop at Plains is the way in which some Pacific programmers at Plains FM have developed both informal and formal networks to bridge the cultural divide between their different Pacific communities. Programmer Niva says that Pacific broadcasters, particularly women, co-operate in a variety of informal ways that range from sharing hints about where to find good ‘Island food’ to alerting one another to upcoming events that are newsworthy for all Pacific communities, like a visit from the Minister of Pacific Island Affairs. By sharing information across their national groups, Niva suggests, all Pacific communities are better

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60 This is because until a community or group has at least one member able to access the social networks and resources available within Christchurch or Canterbury, it is unlikely that it will have a programme on Plains. As staff member Nicki says, those communities with low social capital (like recent refugee communities) are ‘too busy surviving’ to make use of Plains FM.
informed, and the burden for broadcasters of keeping up-to-date with community-relevant events is shared. As one of the early Pacific programmers to broadcast at Plains, Niva remembers how different it was before such networks were formed: ‘When I first go in there I don’t have this supportive community… it was a very lonely battle to start with.’ She says that networking is always a part of ‘the way Islanders work’ but that information sharing between Pacific groups has flourished as people from different Pacific nations have realised the informational potential of radio and the benefits of solidarity. She cites the creation of the Pacific Islands Radio Trust, a support body for Pacific broadcasters, as an example of the way that participation at Plains FM has united and mobilised Pacific communities: ‘they finally come together and say: “hey, this media is a powerful thing, let’s use it.” So we’re learning.’ By strengthening their cross-cultural networks and working together as a unified entity, the Pacific Islands Radio Trust generates bridging social capital that has potential benefits for each of the participating communities.

Individual Plains FM participants also generate bridging social capital through their interaction with members of other communities while participating in social events and shared activities at the station. In the following extract, ex-manager Sarah suggests that at times the incidental interactions that occur amongst individuals while volunteering or programme making can result in the bridging of seemingly irreconcilable differences:

(Plains FM) has always been incredibly diverse... people from, from opposing views basically. I remember Monday nights we used to have the Salvation Army on and, and Outwaves 61 on the same night, and it was about the time that the Salvation Army came out against homosexuality, and of course they had to go on the same night as Outwaves. And they actually, the people involved with each programme became very good friends, and the Salvation Army man actually appeared on the gays’ programme as well. So there were these wonderful little magic moments where people made contact and realised they were only people, there was nothing to be frightened of or to shy away from.

Sarah suggests that the people from these two communities would very likely never have met outside of the station. Plains FM provided the venue where these individuals with

61 The gay and lesbian community programme.
potentially incompatible backgrounds and opposing values could interact, discover their common humanity and overcome their differences to become friends.

Sarah also cites her own experience of coming face to face with the diversity of the station’s participants at her welcoming party as station manager:

*I was just totally overwhelmed because I had never seen such a diverse group of people in a room together...ever! And it was absolutely... I'll never, never forget that! And the other thing was, friends of mine who had been invited, said to me, are still saying to me years later, “Remember that... I never knew there were so many different types of people in Christchurch.”*

Sarah suggests that because many Christchurch people are rarely exposed to the range of ethnic and cultural groups that exist in their own community, they ‘don’t know how or are not given the opportunity’ to relate to diversity. In Sarah’s view, the diversity of the Plains FM participant population offers people who attend station events the opportunity to ‘notice’ all the ‘different types of people’ they may not have encountered before and to understand the social, ethnic and cultural makeup of their city and nation in a different way. Similarly, another staff member Karen says that Plains FM challenges people to look beyond their ‘own little neighbourhood’, to see themselves as part of a hugely ‘diverse community’ and to realise that they ‘benefit by what they learn from each other’. In her view, by facilitating this kind of realisation and helping people to bridge their differences and work together, Plains FM contributes to making Aotearoa/New Zealand ‘a better place to live’.

Karen and several other interviewees seem to support Cox’s (1995:16) view that the social capital that develops through diverse individuals working together in community groups ‘allows groups and organisations, and even nations, to develop the tolerance that is sometimes needed to deal with conflicts and different interests’. Programmer Mele suggests that the trust and goodwill that develops through participation at the station contributes to a sense of oneness and unity amongst individuals and communities that is able to overcome past divisions and increase cross-cultural bonding. She says:

*The best thing about Plains FM is that it combines us here, because you know, unity is the name of the game, and that’s what happens here, because now I*
know all of these people, the programme makers. This is the best thing Plains FM can do, bringing people of every other races, because the more you see each other that bond grows, eh, and then it's really left all the past and all the division that is happened to people, and we all realised after all we're one people...

Mele is suggesting that bonds grow through interaction into a sense of trust in a common ground. For Mele, getting to know a whole new group of diverse individuals and developing a sense of ‘unity’ with them as ‘one people’ is a way to overcome past differences. While there are inevitably some exceptions and complications within this strongly positive positioning of the station and the relationships within it, the narratives of numerous interviewees representing a range of different communities, backgrounds and interests support Mele’s positioning of the station as a unifying force.

Staff member Nicki suggests that the potential influence of the station’s social capital stretches even wider than Aotearoa/New Zealand into the macro-public sphere:

In its own small way Plains FM draws diverse communities together and helps us all be a bit less fearful about differences. And here you can openly celebrate, openly celebrate who you are. And the thing is that we’re a global village and the world is now really, really small and I think that Plains FM has a part in helping a sort of new global attitude develop, and evolve in the way that we relate and learn and... respect people, that we learn to respect other people who are different from ourselves.

When Nicki suggests that the celebration of diversity at Plains and the co-operative and respectful relationships that develop amongst participants might contribute to ‘a new global attitude’ she implies that small-scale local actions are significant. In a ‘global village’, she suggests, differences are no longer elsewhere, therefore we all need to learn to live with and respect those different from ourselves. According to Nicki, the local and the global are brought together so that even a small organisation like Plains FM is seen to have a role to play in the development of a more respectful and inclusive way of thinking about and working with difference.

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62 These will be discussed in detail in Chapter Five.
Claiming Cultural Citizenship: "We are part of you now"

Citizenship is about much more than passports: it is about participation in a community, political power(lessness) and about belonging.

Jane Roscoe, 1999:39

Based on her international research into grassroots media initiatives, Clemencia Rodriguez (1994, 2001) argues that community access radio stations like Plains FM are most accurately described as ‘citizens’ media’ endeavours because they are ‘important sites where citizenship is being forged’ and ‘enacted’ (2001:20). Initially, the use of the term ‘citizens’ media’ may appear inappropriate to Plains FM where many participants (including myself) are not formal citizens of Aotearoa/New Zealand. However, when she refers to citizenship, Rodriguez, like Jane Roscoe above, is not just talking about the legal citizenship represented by possession of a passport. Her conceptualisation of citizenship is both broader and more active. Drawing on a theory of ‘radical democracy’ (as developed predominantly by Chantal Mouffe and Kirstie McClure), Rodriguez (2001) argues that citizenship is not a passive legal status, but a political identity that requires the citizen to be actively engaged in everyday political practices. Only through active participation and intervention in the symbolic life of the nation, can those living within it become empowered and claim genuine citizenship (Rodriguez, 2001). Following Rodriguez, I argue that, through their participation at Plains FM, broadcasters from minority communities are enacting citizenship in the radical democratic sense of the term. However, because the political practices of these broadcasters are centred on aspects of cultural negotiation and resistance, I also draw upon theories of ‘cultural citizenship’ (McGuigan, 2001; Rosaldo 1994; Turner, 2001; Stevenson, 2001) to specify more clearly the kind of political identity that I believe Plains FM broadcasters enact through their programming efforts. My argument is that, regardless of their individual legal citizenship status, when Plains FM minority-group broadcasters claim a public identity for their communities, when they collect, reconstruct and disseminate empowering information, when they challenge mainstream ‘knowledges’ and rename the world in their own way, and when they develop social capital through their bonding and bridging social networks, they are acting as ‘cultural citizens’ of the Aotearoa/New Zealand nation. By acting as ‘cultural citizens’, I contend that these broadcasters both resist the marginalisation traditionally associated with
their status as minorities and renegotiate some of the insider/outsider boundaries and assumptions implicit within dominant discourses of New Zealand nationhood.

The theory of radical democracy is useful to an examination of participation in community radio because it emphasises the significance of a ‘quotidian politics – a politics which extends the terrain of political contestation to the everyday enactment of social practices and the routine reiteration of cultural representations’ (McClure, 1992:123). By ‘fram(ing) “the social” as a site of political action’ and ‘cultural codes as objects of political struggle’, the theory of radical democracy identifies the participation of subjects in cultural and symbolic activities like community radio programmes as an empowering form of political action (McClure, 1992:124). From a radical democracy perspective, a subject’s identity is constructed and contingent, that is, identity ‘is not what one is, but what one enacts’ (McClure, 1992:124; original emphasis). Therefore, citizenship is not a status a person is born to or given (as it is in the liberal democratic model upon which New Zealand nation was constructed), but an actively constructed ‘political identity’ (Mouffe, 1992:231). Rodriguez (2001:202) argues that community broadcasters forge a political identity as citizens through their ‘active presence’ in the public realm, their ‘persistent intervention’ in the symbolic realm, and their contribution to the ‘empowerment’ of their communities. Elsewhere (1994:202) she says:

\[\text{By participating in these media experiences, re-shaping their identities, re-formulating established social definitions, and legitimising their cultures, lifestyles, and personal experiences, communities generate power, therefore becoming genuine citizens.}\]

In other words, according to the theory of radical democracy, when Plains FM broadcasters (re)name the world in their own way and when they continually (re)construct and enact their own identities and the identity of the nation on air, they are engaging in empowering political acts and enacting their citizenship of Aotearoa/New Zealand.

What a theory of ‘cultural citizenship’ adds to this picture is a more specific focus on the kind of citizenship minority community broadcasters are enacting at Plains FM. Theories of cultural citizenship combine the radical democratic focus on ‘quotidian politics’ with discourses of ‘cultural rights’ to develop a definition of citizenship that emphasises
‘cultural empowerment, namely the capacity to participate effectively, creatively and successfully within a national culture’ (Turner, 2001:12). According to cultural citizenship theory, issues surrounding the cultural empowerment of minority groups within nations can no longer be ignored in an era of increasing globalisation, trans-national labour markets and growing commercialisation of culture (Turner, 2001). In Bryan Turner’s view (2001), such macro trends are pressuring states (meso-publics) from above while the increased diversity within their borders is generating claims from below for the full inclusion of minority groups (micro-publics) within the social and cultural community of the nation. In this context, he says, it becomes less possible for nations to insist on ‘cultural homogeneity’ as the basis for ‘communal solidarity’ and to sustain the notion of a single national culture (Turner, 2001:13). The concept of cultural citizenship presents a more diverse and inclusive version of nationhood and national identity. Instead of invisibilising difference, cultural citizenship upholds the ‘cultural rights’ of minority communities to ‘unhindered representation, recognition without marginalization, acceptance and integration without “normalizing” distortion.’ (Pakulski, 1997; cited Stevenson, 2001:3). Renato Rosaldo describes cultural citizenship as ‘the right to be different and to belong’ to the nation (1994:402). He defines ‘belonging’ as ‘full membership’ of the nation and the ‘ability to influence one’s destiny by having a significant voice in basic decisions’ (1994:402). Similarly, Nick Stevenson (2001:3) argues that ‘to be excluded from cultural citizenship is to be excluded from full membership of society’.

Cultural citizenship theory is relevant to Plains FM because the ‘cultural rights’ that it articulates are very similar to the ‘rights’ that many Plains FM minority community broadcasters claim in their interview narratives and through their radio programming. Cultural citizenship is also relevant to Plains FM because of its focus on ‘culture’ as a ‘key site of contestation’ in the contemporary globalised information society, and on the media as a key arena for cultural contestation (Stevenson, 2001:1). In Stevenson’s view:

_The development of a sophisticated array of visual codes and repertoires that interrupt the agendas of more hegemonic institutions and cultures is an essential armament within the semiotic society. To have access to cultural citizenship therefore is to be able to make an intervention into the public sphere at the local, national or global level. (2001:5)_
Plains FM broadcasters from minority communities 'make an intervention' in the micro- and the meso-public spheres of Aotearoa/New Zealand by developing their own 'codes and repertoires' and employing them in ways that resist the previous marginalisation of their communities within the nation and contest 'hegemonic institutions and cultures'. For this reason, I contend that they are acting as 'cultural citizens' and modelling 'cultural citizenship' as a different and challenging way of understanding nationhood, national identity and belonging within the Aotearoa/New Zealand nation.

Plains FM broadcasters act as cultural citizens of Aotearoa/New Zealand when they use their programmes to empower members of their minority community to participate more fully as members or citizens of the nation. According to Murdock (1992:20), 'full membership' of a nation 'implies two things: the right to participate in existing patterns of social and cultural life and the right to challenge these configurations and develop alternative identities and forms of expression.' Plains FM broadcasters are attempting to enhance their community members' potential and opportunities to exercise both of these rights. For example, broadcasters of 'lifeline' informational programmes, like Sina, Mariana and Niva, use their programmes to provide empowering information and support that enables their micro-community members to access the social capital and material resources of the nation and thereby to participate in 'existing patterns of social and cultural life'. As Murdock (1992:21) says, 'in order for people to exercise their full rights as citizens, they must have access to the information, advice, and analysis that will enable them to know what their personal rights are and allow them to pursue them effectively.' When Sina, Mariana, and Niva broadcast information about immigration laws, health services, parental obligations and educational policies they assist their community members to understand their rights, obligations and entitlements and enable them to access them. The same is true for programmes like *Greys are Great, Inside Out, Lesbian Radio* and *The Kiwiable Show* (by and for people with disabilities).

All of the programmes by, for and about minority communities aim to provide recognisable and affirming representations of their traditionally marginalised groups and cultures. These (self)representations supplement, negotiate with and contest dominant cultural discourses. Murdock (1992: 21) argues that citizenship requires that people be 'able to recognise themselves and their aspirations in the range of representations on offer' within the media
and that they are also ‘able to contribute to developing and extending these representations.’ Broadcasting on Plains FM offers minority communities the opportunity to publicly represent themselves and their aspirations to their own micro-public and to others in the meso-public sphere. As Cristina suggested earlier, it is significant and affirming for Latin Americans living within the ‘very different’ culture of New Zealand to be able to recognise themselves and be recognised ‘as a community’ and to be able to represent their community and culture to other communities in Christchurch.

Simply by publicly enacting their ‘alternative identities and forms of expression’ through broadcasting, Plains FM minority communities are also able to present challenges to dominant understandings of the Aotearoa/New Zealand nation. For example, the audible and visible diversity of the on-air participation at Plains FM contests the dominant monocultural version of New Zealand national identity (Bell, 1996). Through the action of broadcasting Plains FM programmers from minority cultural and linguistic communities (like Cristina, Pansy, Sina, Niva, Merrill, Corina, Verna and Joanne) challenge Cantabrians to make sense of their city and country in a different way. As staff member Karen points out, Plains FM listeners need not even understand the content of all the station’s programmes to learn more about their community, because its diversity is apparent in the station’s programme schedule and in the sounds of the 17 different languages spoken on air. From this perspective, the mere presence of those 17 languages presents a challenge to the frequent monocultural imagining of Christchurch as an ‘English city’.

Cristina and other Plains FM broadcasters like Joanne (Transister Radio), Verna (Inside Out), and Merrill and Corina (Lesbian Radio) also act as cultural citizens when they develop and extend the range of representations of their communities available within the meso-public sphere by using their programmes as a window on their cultures and lifestyles. In so doing, they and other Section 36c broadcasters present the wider community with the ‘cultural gift’ of their ‘different eye’ on the world (Melucci, 1996). Melucci (1996:183) argues that social movements (which include the kind of cultural, youth, environmental, religious, identity and political groupings that broadcast at Plains) present ‘cultural gifts’ to their societies by ‘reveal(ing) new possibilities’ and ‘another face of reality’. For example, Verna’s programme introduces new information about prisoners’ lives to the majority culture that may only have thought of them as ‘tattooed people behind bars’. This new
information opens the possibility for those who hear it to understand prisoners and the prison experience differently. Similarly, Joanne’s programme by, for and about transgendered people brings their lives and culture out of the ‘twilight world’ and into the ‘everyday’, revealing them ‘to the wider audience’ in a new way. I would argue that Plains FM broadcasters from a range of communities are constantly offering and exchanging the cultural gifts of their knowledges, opinions, experiences and realities through broadcasting programmes for their micro-publics and for the wider Canterbury meso-public. The important thing is that such cultural gifts are an ‘offering’ of a new way to understand the world, not a ‘request’ for support (Melucci, 1996). As such, they constitute an act of resistance, ‘a breakdown in the rules of the game’ of domination that position minorities as unable (or unwilling) to contribute meaningfully to their society (Melucci, 1996:359). Instead, through their active contributions and persistent interventions within the social and symbolic realms, Plains FM broadcasters and their micro-communities demonstrate the investment that they are prepared to make in the nation in which they live.

My argument that Plains FM Section 36c broadcasters act as cultural citizens of Aotearoa/New Zealand derives from their willingness to intervene in the micro- and meso-public spheres to empower their communities and to challenge and reconstruct dominant cultural discourses, including those of New Zealand nationhood and identity. By claiming a public identity and presence for their micro-community within the meso-public sphere, Plains FM Section 36c broadcasters ‘rework frameworks of common understanding’ with relation to the New Zealand nation (Stevenson, 2001:2). Their pride in their ‘different’ identity and their refusal to allow their difference to discount them from membership of the nation challenges mainstream assumptions that only young, able-bodied, heterosexual, English-speaking, white people qualify as ‘normal’ or ‘ideal’ New Zealanders. In asserting their difference and their right to belong (as Cristina does when she says ‘we are different’ and ‘we are part of you now’), these Plains broadcasters ‘seek to rework images, assumptions and representations’ about the nation that are ‘exclusive’ and ‘marginalizing’ (Stevenson, 2001:4). They raise questions about what it means to be a citizen and how the nation can be made more inclusive, and they contest the notion that the unity and social cohesion of the nation requires homogeneity. Instead their narratives suggest that, as John Solomos (2001:206) argues, ‘we need to get away from the idea that solidarity can only be forged when we all think alike’ because there are other ways of thinking about and
achieving solidarity. Plains FM aims to provide a safe environment and opportunities for diverse individuals and communities to voice and enact their different perspectives.

The celebration of difference in Plains FM programming and the willingness of minority community broadcasters to share their cultural perspectives also challenge the fear of difference that has permeated much of the history of the New Zealand nation (Ip, 2001a, 2001b). By redefining difference and diversity as positive attributes rather than ‘problems’ within the nation (Bell, 1996), Plains FM broadcasters like Pansy and Cristina, and staff members Karen and Nicki, create the potential to imagine Aotearoa/New Zealand as a nation with the ‘capacity to use difference as a resource rather than fear it as a threat’ (Solomos, 2001: 207-8). Karen and station archivist Jan suggest that its diversity and inclusiveness makes Plains FM a ‘model’ for other organisations because people can look at Plains and see that it is possible for very different people to work together in a positive and constructive way.

Throughout this thesis, I am concerned with trying to understanding the political potential of minority-group broadcasters’ actions rather than investigating their impact. Nevertheless, Melucci (1996:185) argues that all symbolic challenges to the mainstream culture carry a ‘hidden potential for change.’ He suggests that, while a potential for change is not always converted into actual change, the impact of minority-group challenges within any community should not be underestimated because ‘small interventions’ in the symbolic sphere can sometimes generate ‘big effects’ (Melucci, 1996:185). At the very least, new ways of thinking about communities, nations, identities, politics and difference must begin somewhere.

In Rodriguez’ (2001) view, all symbolic interventions by citizens’ media participants like Plains FM broadcasters are political acts, with potentially empowering and transforming consequences for the participants and their communities. In her words:

*What is most important about citizens’ media is not what these citizens do with them, but how participation in these media experiments affect citizens and their communities. So, even if the information and communication channels are left untouched, even if the mainstream media structure is left unaltered, citizens’ media are rupturing preestablished power structures, opening spaces that*
allow for new social identities and new cultural definitions, and, in a word, generating power on the side of the subordinate (2001:158).

However, Rodriguez (2001:152) does caution that, while the power generated through citizens' media can 'displace boundaries' and 'swell the democratic,' 'all this rupturing of codes and discourses does not mean that instances of exclusion and marginalization' vanish. Displacing a boundary does not remove it, and the new boundaries created may contribute towards 'marginalising and excluding other, different groups' (Rodriguez, 2001:152), although the exclusionary effects of such boundaries may be mitigated when they are perceived as fluid and contingent. As Solomos (2001:204) argues, the making of identities, even contingent identities, will always involve both elements of inclusion and exclusion because '(t)here is no identity that is without the dialogic relationship to the Other. To be “us”, we need those who are “not-us”.’ In the next section, I explore some of the ways in which Plains FM as an organisation negotiates insider/outsider issues and the ongoing internal and external constraints on its potential for empowerment.
PART 3

ORGANISATIONAL

DYNAMICS AND DILEMMAS:

SUSTAINING

THE STATION
Chapter 5  The Plains FM “Family”: Negotiating Insider/Outsider Tensions

Introduction: The Politics of Participation

(Community media) is a media full of color and diversity, a media of many tongues and traditions. A media where differences are appreciated, respected and embraced.


This is the world of community media – a world that welcomes everyone.

Matthew Bennett, US Alliance for Community Media, 2000:9

Because Plains FM exists primarily to serve the communications needs of those ‘minority’ and ‘under-represented’ groups identified in Section 36c of the 1989 Broadcasting Act (Plains FM, 2000:1), it is particularly important that it is a place where Section 36c groups can feel safe and encouraged to participate. Yet gaining and sustaining the participation of members of those communities that are frequently excluded or marginalised within mainstream culture is not necessarily an easy or straightforward task. Community access media ventures face the challenge of attempting to create an inclusive and cooperative organisational body out of a collection of heterogeneous individuals and groups. As community media analyst John Hochheimer (1993) points out, sustaining both heterogeneity of participation and a smoothly running radio station can be difficult. Because communication systems necessarily operate within wider structures of power, community stations invariably face issues of ‘power and control’ that may restrict the ability of some individuals, groups or communities to participate within the station (Hochheimer, 1993:474). Open participation within community radio stations can also be restricted when ‘power and control’ issues arise within and between participant communities, and as part of stations’ decision-making and management processes (Hochheimer, 1993:474).

Drawing on Hochheimer’s ideas, interviewee narratives and participant observations, this chapter explores the politics of participation at Plains FM by discussing some of the factors
that facilitate and constrain the participation of individuals and groups. In their interviews, every volunteer, staff member and programmer talked about why they are involved at Plains and what sustains their participation. One of the strongest reasons given was the welcoming and safe environment at the station and the positive nature of the relationships that people form during their involvement with the station. Threaded throughout the majority of interviews are notions of 'belonging' to a station 'family', 'community' or 'fellowship'. However, as with any 'family', individuals experience their participation at Plains FM differently, and not every participant feels the same sense of belonging to the station. I begin my discussion of participation at Plains by exploring notions of belonging and by examining the benefits and drawbacks of some interviewees' construction of Plains FM as an inclusive and diverse 'family' of 'equals'. Following that, I investigate some of the problematic aspects of participation at Plains. Firstly, I identify some of the participatory hurdles or barriers facing individual broadcasters. Secondly, I explore some conflicts or tensions that can arise within participant communities around the questions of who gets to represent a community publicly and who 'owns' a particular programme. Finally, by focusing on a particular conflict that occurred between participants during the course of this research, I explore the issue of how insider/outsider tensions at the station are negotiated.

Embarking on such an exploration has not been without its personal challenges. In writing this chapter, I feel most acutely the tension involved in being both a researcher and a participant at Plains FM. As a researcher, I am committed to representing Plains FM, its participants, its operations and its challenges fairly and in all their complexity. That commitment does not allow for a portrayal of the station's strengths and successes without an accompanying exploration of the tensions and struggles that it faces. However, as a participant whose relationships with the station, its staff and some of its broadcasters spans almost a decade, I have a personal investment in the station that makes the exploration of its struggles, tensions and conflicts more complicated. That is, like many other broadcasters, I feel immensely enriched by my experiences at Plains FM and supportive of its philosophy and operations, yet not all my experiences at Plains have been positive and neither have those of all interviewees. To my mind, while they can be uncomfortable to explore, the negative experiences or the tensions within an organisation reveal most about the challenges that it faces in achieving its desired objectives. By raising questions about
participation and ‘belonging’ at Plains, my intention is to investigate some of the organisational, contextual and discursive factors that facilitate or restrict the station in the fulfilment of its participatory goals and its transformative potential.

*The Plains FM “Family”: Metaphors of Belonging*

It just feels so much like a team and a family and, you know, everyone pulls together. And out of that, you know, this creativeness, the creativity that comes together through everybody being linked on a wonderful level is just very spiritual in a sense, it’s just so amazing.

*Jane, volunteer*

You always felt like you were part of [Plains FM] when you walked in the door, that this was “our place”.

*Dianne, ex-programme maker*

At Plains FM, participants express their personal investment in the station using notions of belonging that construct the station as their ‘place’ and incorporate metaphors like ‘family’, ‘community’, ‘team’ or ‘fellowship’ to describe the station. When they talk of Plains FM as a ‘family’ or a ‘community’, interviewees use the terms positively, to highlight the ‘co-operative’ relationships, ‘camaraderie’ and ‘great affection’ between people at the station and their perception of the station as a ‘friendly’, ‘safe’ place where they feel ‘comfortable’ and ‘at home’ enough to take risks and be creative. As the narratives of station staff make clear, the positive ‘family’ atmosphere that many participants praise has been fostered by station management practices. The station policies, objectives, rules, established practices and training styles are designed to achieve a safe participatory environment and to generate a sense of belonging to Plains FM. Staff actively encourage interaction between station participants and attempt to strengthen the bonds between them by organising regular social events like birthday and Christmas parties. At these social occasions, the achievements and efforts of station participants are publicly recognised and participant communities provide food and entertainments that represent and promote their cultures and interests. The station magazine *Airtime* is another tool for generating connections amongst station participants and supporters. It is used for welcoming, farewelling and thanking station participants, for profiling new programmes and the communities they represent, for promoting events and
new developments at the station, for sharing training or programming hints, for celebrating participants’ successes and family milestones and for generally keeping participants involved with one another and with the life of the station. By fostering a sense of belonging within the station, the staff and volunteers aim to increase the levels of interaction, trust and cooperation between participant communities, and therefore to facilitate the effective operation of the station.

Hochheimer (1993:479) argues that, in an attempt to create an alternative, non-bureaucratic structure, community radio stations ‘strive towards the construction of an ideal community within the station itself where interpersonal relationships are of vital importance.’ At Plains FM, participants appear to be constructing ‘an ideal community’ when they represent the station as a harmonious, inclusive, cooperative ‘family’ that celebrates diversity and treats everyone equally. The ideal of a Plains FM ‘family’ is beneficial to the smooth running of station because it helps to generate and sustain commitment to a ‘we’ with common objectives and allows staff to manage the station on the basis of a presumed consensus. Several interviewees suggest that the feeling of belonging to a Plains FM ‘family’ also benefits station participants because it helps them to feel like accepted and valued members of the station. This sense of belonging can be extremely significant, particularly for those from marginalised groups who may not feel accepted or valued in other arenas within the wider Canterbury and Aotearoa/New Zealand communities. When participants feel they belong to a Plains ‘family’ or ‘community’ they feel a sense of ownership in its operations and they are willing to invest themselves emotionally and financially in its work.

However, what interests me about interviewees’ narratives is the extent to which some Plains FM participants suggest that the ideal harmonious, inclusive and egalitarian community has been achieved at the station. When interviewees talk about a Plains FM ‘family’ they represent it in an overwhelmingly positive way that does not address the many negative connotations of ‘family’ and the contested and unequal relations that exist within families. Several interviewees comment that Plains FM models the kind of harmonious cross-cultural relationships that the wider community should embrace. Others suggest that Plains is a place where every individual or group can participate equally and will be treated equally regardless of their different experiences, backgrounds or positioning within the wider community. Staff member Fiona even suggests that the egalitarian
‘family’ environment at Plains is able to neutralise the social barriers that participants might face in the rest of their lives:

*I guess it’s sort of, it’s like walking into a warm, friendly, caring environment that is for some people a safe haven from the battles they might have to fight in everyday life with sex, with gender issues in their workplace for example. I think it’s about, I think it’s maybe that being here, it strips away as a user, your social, the social barriers - in terms of social and gender barriers and race, all those sorts of barriers - because everyone comes in at an equal level. Even the people who come in with some experience soon find they’re no worse or no better than anyone else in terms of actual broadcasting. The staff here have got an ability to treat everyone equally, and not favour any particular one group, I think. The spirit of Plains, I don’t know, I just think it’s like, sort of like a family.*

When Fiona describes the station as a ‘safe haven’ from the ‘battles’ inherent in life outside of Plains, she suggests that such battles do not need to be fought inside the Plains ‘family’ because people either come into the station on ‘an equal level’ or soon find themselves on an equal level with other participants. She suggests that within Plains FM gender, racial and other social differences do not matter because staff willingness to treat everyone equally can ‘strip away’ inequalities and barriers that exist outside the station environment. Fiona’s comments seem to draw a distinction between what happens at Plains FM and the struggles that participant groups might face in the rest of their lives as a consequence of their gender, racial or social positioning, inferring that the station is unaffected by the issues of power and control that permeate the wider community. However, as Hochheimer (1993) argues, no media organisation can separate itself from its specific social, political and cultural context. Inequalities within the wider society and differences between individuals and groups cannot be simply left behind or disregarded on arrival at Plains FM, because they affect the ability of individuals and communities to participate and the way that they participate, and they permeate the power dynamics within the station (Hochheimer, 1993).

The narratives of many programme makers at Plains FM support Hochheimer’s position and problematize Fiona’s suggestion that ‘everyone comes in at an equal level’ to Plains. These programmers identify significant hurdles to participation at Plains FM that are
directly related to individuals’ social, cultural and economic positionings. Some broadcasters’ narratives also complicate the dominant portrayal of the station as a harmonious, unified and inclusive ‘family’, because they identify tensions within the station and/or indicate that some broadcasters do not feel part of, or fully accepted within, a Plains FM ‘family’ or ‘community’. As Iris Marion Young (1995:235) points out, ‘(a)ny move to define an identity or category creates an inside/outside distinction’. The construction of a ‘we’ at Plains FM simultaneously infers the existence of others who do not or cannot belong to the collective ‘family’ and raises questions about where and how insider/outsider boundaries are drawn at Plains FM. The tensions and contradictions within and between interviewees’ narratives about the station indicate that the politics of participation at Plains FM is far more complex and problematic than the notions of belonging circulating at the station would suggest.

**Programme Making at Plains: Participatory Hurdles**

*I don’t think there’s anything that would stop women here unless their own confidence wasn’t great.*

*I don’t see any barriers here. I mean the only barriers are their own individual fears and whatever they might feel about themselves, like technical phobias are one big one, really.*

*I would like to think there are no barriers, I would be disappointed if there were, if there were barriers.*

**Comments by 3 staff members**

Early in my study, one of the staff at Plains gave me a copy of a booklet published by the Community Broadcasting Association of Australia (CBAA) called *Getting Women on Air*. The booklet is ‘a practical guide for community broadcasters’ which aims to encourage and assist stations to support the involvement of women, who are shown by surveys to be ‘poorly represented in almost all aspects of station life’ (CBAA, 1998:1, 3). Because my observations at Plains had indicated a high level of involvement by women, I was surprised by the CBAA’s premise that women are under-represented in community access stations, and prompted to incorporate questions about barriers to women’s participation at Plains into my interviews. Interestingly, staff members and non-staff participants responded differently to questions about participation. Although some staff members identified some
of the same obstacles to participation as non-staff members, three out of the four staff members that I interviewed attached far less significance to those obstacles than broadcasters did. In the comments above, staff members suggest that the only participatory barriers are individual fears or confidence issues. While broadcasters identify self-confidence as an obstacle, it is one of the less significant obstacles that they mention. Broadcasters' narratives attached the most significance to obstacles like the financial costs of broadcasting, the time commitment required to broadcast regularly and the difficulties of fitting broadcasting around other responsibilities. Some broadcasters also identified language barriers, a lack of community members to help make programmes, and prejudice or inequality within the station environment as factors that can affect participation. Obviously, these obstacles have not prevented the interviewees from becoming involved at the station, but broadcasters report either experiencing difficulties with these obstacles themselves, or being unable to attract other women to participate because of their existence. The significance of these obstacles lies in their challenge to Fiona’s earlier assertions that ‘everyone comes into Plains at an equal level’ and that Plains is able to strip away the ‘social barriers’ that participants face outside the station.

Financial costs are cited as an obstacle to participation by most broadcasters. The financial costs incurred by a programme-making group at Plains include regular costs like compulsory annual subscriptions for membership of the CBS and airtime fees, and other costs like transportation, purchase of Mini-discs, Compact Discs and audiotapes, telephone calls and internet access charges. Purchasing music can be particularly expensive for immigrant communities who cannot purchase music from their country of origin within Aotearoa/New Zealand. Some groups are able to cover at least some of their broadcasting-related costs through grants from community funding bodies, as Niva explains:

_ I apply for funding - the City Council, COGS 63. Hillary Commission - but because (our) community are only small in number they only give you about $500 and that is not much, that is nothing. Most of the programme expense comes from my own pocket, and my family - toll calls, everything that you want to make toll calls to find out what is happening in North Island, you know they’re all out of your own pocket. Mmm, it’s a very expensive radio_

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63 Community Organisation Grants Scheme.
programme once you don't have the money and rely on your own pocket. It can be very stressful when it comes to that.

Niva also believes the expense of programme making is a barrier that would deter other women from starting their own programmes: 'it's a barrier if you don't have the finance, if you don't have the support it's a barrier.' In her case, family members have often provided the financial support to keep her programme on air.

Other programmes are funded and produced by a community or cultural organisation that regards broadcasting on Plains FM as one of its many activities. Many of these organisations are run by volunteers, while a few have some paid employees. One broadcaster told me that her programme group has been 'very lucky' that it has 'never had to worry' about finances because their umbrella society, which has a membership of about three hundred families, 'fully backs the programme.' She says that in the early 1990s 'it was relatively cheap to put up a programme with Plains', but that 'the policies changed and it became quite a bit more expensive.' As a result, she believes that a new programme group without organisational support ‘would struggle with the financial side of things… unless they have sponsorships lined up.’ However, as another programmer Erina points out, sponsorships can also be problematic because of the time commitment involved in finding them and because ‘young people, minority people, women,’ who are among the target groups for Plains FM, ‘traditionally have less appeal to sponsors.’

Another participatory obstacle identified by interviewees is the time commitment required to broadcast regularly, especially for women with other family, work, church or community commitments. Much of the time committed to broadcasting programmes is spent in preparation. Sina says that she takes all week to prepare a programme, beginning immediately after her broadcast: 'when I come home I started my preparation from then, you know, and that's the only way too, because of any other hundred things that I am

64 For example, Cartolina, the Italian language and cultural programme, is produced by the Societa Dante Alighieri of Christchurch; Geet Mala, a Hindi language programme, by the Indian Social and Cultural Club; Maori programme, Te Riaka, by Te Runanga o Nga Maata Waka, the urban Maori Authority; French language and cultural programme, Francofolies, by the Alliance Francais de Christchurch; and The Garden City Sound of Hwa Hsin by members of the Taiwan Hwa Hsin Society of New Zealand (Plains FM: programme schedules).

65 Plains FM staff members point out that the station offers training and support for programmers who wish to seek sponsorships but that it is not always utilised by groups.
responsible for.’ Nua also works all week on her programme: ‘I tell you, every night I spend an hour or hour and a half, every night.’ In addition to full-time paid employment, Nua also has family, church and community responsibilities, all of which make demands on her time. Given all those responsibilities, she says, spending her lunchtimes at work preparing radio programmes just became too stressful.

Another programmer, Marama, says that the time factor in producing programmes is a ‘hidden cost’ that particularly affects women with families. Marama says that, while her whanau ‘love it’ and ‘don’t have any qualms’ about her involvement in community radio she is very much aware of the ‘hidden cost factor’ involved in voluntary work that in her view ‘nobody puts a value on.’ She says that this time-cost factor will always make it difficult to attract other Maori women to community radio:

Maori women have just so much other things to do around the home and that it’s just finding the time at the end of the day. I believe that they’re out there, just that many of them work and to ask them to give an extra two hours is just quite, quite, too much.

Marama’s position is supported by several other programmers who argue that many women’s roles and responsibilities within their extended families, churches and communities mean that they ‘have no time’ for broadcasting. As a result, several interviewees have sole responsibility for their programmes and experience difficulties finding people to replace them when they are ill or out of town. In some situations, time commitments and outside responsibilities can cause the demise of a programme. During the period of this research, at least two programmes produced by women went off air as a result of broadcaster ‘burn-out’.

Participation at Plains FM can also be difficult for people without a workable grasp of the English language. Chinese programmer Szuwen identified language barriers as an obstacle for the older members of her community of relatively recent immigrants to New Zealand. She says, ‘if people, adult people, wanted to be involved, they would probably find that their language is insufficient to deal with the staff at Plains, so perhaps that’s why young people have been more interested in it.’ All of the programme-making group for Szuwen’s programme are young people, whose English is generally better than that of their parents.
because they have studied in New Zealand schools. Staff member Andrea says that language barriers can be a problem in the training process, because ‘sometimes it’s hard for us as staff to know if they fully understand.’ Language barriers and self-confidence can be related and reinforcing barriers to participation. People need to have a certain level of confidence with the English language in order to telephone or enter the front door of the station to inquire about broadcasting or volunteering. Once they have taken that first step, participants need to be able to interact with station staff, volunteers and other programme makers during their time at the station in order to participate effectively. If prospective programmers do not understand an instruction during training, and lack the confidence to ask for more explanation, this can lead to difficulties when they attempt to put their training into action.

Two women (out of the twelve broadcasters I interviewed) identified prejudice in the form of homophobia as an obstacle to their feeling an equal part of a Plains community. One Lesbian Radio programmer, Merrill, describes her experiences of sitting in the community room66 and other programme makers ‘asking what programme we were from and “ooohhh!” shock, horror, they left the room very fast (laughs), and obviously really, really uncomfortable about it.’ With another group, she says, ‘we struck really strong homophobia’, which came across in a ‘very evident’ but indirect way. ‘It was very much just in their personal attitude, their real frostiness, their not being organised to get out of the studio quickly, and... a real lack of co-operation.’ Merrill contrasts this uncooperative behaviour with the positive and friendly relationships that lesbian broadcasters have had with other Plains broadcasters.

Corina, another broadcaster involved with the Lesbian Radio programme, suggests that the existence of ‘homophobia and heterosexism’ in the wider community can make it difficult for lesbian women to feel safe about going public at Plains. She says that broadcasting as a lesbian can be very exposing:

_You’re there because you’re putting, you’re actually putting the ideas, the notions, the very being, the visibility of lesbians on the li... you know, out there... and so you are very visible as a lesbian, and hence you feel the... the_

66 The central gathering place at the station where programme groups hold meetings, wait for their programme slots, meet interviewees and where programme group lockers are stored.
hostility of some people towards that. And on occasions there is that, or it might be discomfort, or it might even be an endeavour to actually try to ... to stop you saying what you’re wanting to say, or to try and sort of water it down a bit.

Corina suggests that criticism of the content of her programme may be, or feel like, a criticism of her ‘very being.’ When she speaks of ‘hostility’, Corina is referring to occasional abusive telephone calls received by the show, and occasional examples of comments, ‘frostiness’ and ‘uncooperative’ behaviour from some other Plains programmers, despite the station’s overt promotion of inclusiveness and diversity. These examples suggest that community broadcasters and their audiences are no more exempt from prejudice than the general population. In fact, the very diversity of station participants suggests that differences in values and beliefs are highly likely to arise between communities and may affect the experience of broadcasting for some programmers.

Both Merrill and Corina suggest that other programmers or Plains staff sometimes see lesbian programming as too politically challenging, implying that there may be a resistance at Plains to programming that isn’t ‘comfortable’ and ‘safe’. Corina suggests that people have tried to stop her saying what she wants to say on air or to get her to ‘water down’ her programme content. Merrill identifies differences between ‘cultural groups’ who aim to ‘establish and maintain cultural links for specific ethnic groups’, and lesbian programmes or political programmes that challenge commonly held beliefs. In Merrill’s view, cultural programmes (that is, programmes by, for and about ethnic minorities) are presenting ‘something very safe,’ ‘comfortable’ and ‘middle-of-the-road’ that nobody would object to, while lesbian programmes attract ‘heterosexism and homophobia.’ However, this perspective is not shared by another ex-broadcaster Lydia who says she experienced no homophobia and found the staff and other women broadcasters very supportive of Lesbian Radio during her time at Plains: ‘I mean, the fact that you had a lesbian radio show was a bit of a yawn to them.’ Clearly, these interviewees have different perceptions of the extent to which the Plains FM ‘family’ is inclusive of lesbians. Merrill’s position is also refuted.

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67 Station staff members refute the suggestion that they would attempt or have attempted to ‘water down’ ‘politically challenging’ programming. Two staff members indicated that they would like to see more controversial and political programming on Plains. They say that the only reason that they would intervene to prevent or discourage a programmer from broadcasting specific content would be if it breached the broadcasting regulations or standards in some way.
by comments from broadcasters from ethnic communities who talk of the strong criticism of their programmes that they receive from their community members. This criticism suggests that perhaps the content of ethnic community programming is not always as ‘safe’ and ‘comfortable’ as Merrill perceives it to be.

Another programmer, Hana, cites unequal treatment of participants at Plains by staff as an obstacle to her full participation at the station. She talks about feeling ‘invisible’ and ‘unrecognised’ within the life of the station, and identifies a ‘subtle’ ‘disparity’ in the treatment of different groups involved at the station, based on their ‘economic status.’ In Hana’s view, groups with more money can offer staff generous gifts that other groups could not afford. Speaking of one particular community, she says, ‘their community’s very strong and they have all the resources, they don’t struggle for it. So their generosity’s extended, you know, in such a way that, I mean, people are sort of delighted to have that generosity.’ As a result, she says, staff are ‘very attentive,’ as opposed to the ‘assertive’ way they might deal with other programme makers. Hana’s comments express her sense of being outside of what she identifies as an ‘in-group’ at the station. For example, she portrays the station parties as events where staff ‘congratulate each other’ and single out their ‘best close friends’ for awards and recognition, while others who put long hours of work into the station go unrecognised. As a result, she says, ‘I felt I become invisible for a long time,’ and she stopped attending parties.

Hana’s comments stand in stark contrast to the dominant portrayal of the station as an inclusive, harmonious, egalitarian ‘family’ or ‘community.’ Her suggestions that staff members receive ‘gifts’ from wealthier programming communities and treat station participants differently on the basis of their economic status are strongly contested by station staff. Staff members also refute Hana’s perception of the station parties as staff-focused ‘in-group’ events. While other broadcasters’ narratives support Hana’s perception of a disparity between communities with regard to their economic status and the financial means they have available to use for programming, they do not support her reference to a disparity of treatment by staff of different programme-making groups. Hana’s comments are particularly interesting for the different perspective that they offer on staff-broadcaster relationships and on the station parties, the very elements of station life that the staff and several other participants position as unifying and affirming. This difference in views
suggests that the relationships and practices at the station are open to more than one interpretation and that station staff cannot be sure that other station participants will read their actions and words in the way that they intend them to be understood. Hana’s comments, like those of Corina and Merrill, provide an alternative representation of the station that resists the overwhelmingly positive portrayal of station relationships by other interviewees.

Programme makers’ discussions of the above participatory obstacles suggest a constant and shifting tension between the costs and the benefits of broadcasting at Plains. People experience different obstacles, and each obstacle to a different degree, depending on the other subject positions they hold. In order to keep broadcasting, a programmer must feel that the benefits to herself or her community outweigh the costs of her participation. The evidence that programmes go off air suggests that for some women the costs become too high to continue broadcasting. While, on one level, the turnover of programmes may simply be indicative of the cyclic and dynamic nature of voluntary groups, interviewees’ emphasis on the obstacles of finances, time and personal responsibilities suggest that the external social, cultural and economic positionings of station participants are significant factors in their ability to sustain involvement at Plains.

Interestingly, only one of the four staff members that I interviewed emphasised these external factors. Staff member Andrea says that, for some communities, social, cultural and financial obstacles to participation may be too high to surmount. Refugee and recently arrived immigrant communities in particular face a myriad of obstacles as part of their struggle to establish themselves in a new country:

*It depends on how established the community is, those people who’ve immigrated in the first place, like the Kurds for example, they are a really new community, and they just really weren’t ready for a programme of their own, they were too busy surviving.*

In Andrea’s experience, once a community is more settled and some of their survival needs have been met, they are more able to participate in community radio. The station’s outreach to such a community may begin before that time, but staff need to be sensitive to its need to be ‘ready’ to broadcast. She says:
I wonder if women don’t get involved sometimes, those new immigrant women, because they are just so tired and they’re just coping, you know, they’re just surviving here, they’re learning so much anyway. To actually have the energy to put into something new like that, which would take up more of their time, must be really difficult.

In addition, Andrea says that the financial cost of broadcasting is a significant obstacle for some immigrant communities that ‘are always going to struggle, unfortunately.’

In some communities, Andrea says, it may be apparent that there are specific gendered barriers to women’s participation, but her cultural positioning has meant that she has been unable to discover exactly what they are, or how to address them. Andrea says that it has proved difficult to get more Pacific women on air to support and offer breaks to those already broadcasting:

I’d really like to see more Pacific Island women broadcasting, taking up the opportunity. It disappoints me that there are only a few very motivated women who are prepared to do it, and they are already over-stretched and over-committed, it always comes back to the same people, and I wonder how to break through into those communities - I mean, I offer all the time: ‘can I come and talk to your group, would that help?’ - to try to get them interested. That’s a bit of a barrier really, how can you get more of those women in those communities interested and hooked in and not scare them off?

One of the problems Andrea identifies here is that a willingness to reach across cultural barriers, and the presence of women already on air, may not be enough to ‘hook in’ new Pacific women. She also highlights the difficulty of maintaining a programme on a long-term basis, particularly for women who produce programmes alone. Even with support, Andrea says, a regular programme requires ‘a big commitment every week.’

The obstacles or hurdles to participation identified by interviewees suggest that the social, cultural and economic positioning of individuals and communities do affect their ability to participate at Plains FM. They also challenge the idealised positioning of Plains FM as a place where ‘anyone’ can make programmes and where external social barriers can be ‘stripped away’. Like any other organisation, Plains FM operates within, and is inevitably
and unavoidably influenced by, its institutional context and the social, cultural and economic positioning of all its participants. However, accepting this perspective raises questions about the effect of the circulation of notions of belonging that position the station as an ideal, harmonious, egalitarian 'family'. The overwhelmingly positive use of the 'family' metaphor in many interviewees' narratives seems to overlook or negate the existence of inequality and conflict within the station. Yet, as discussion in the remainder of the chapter will show, inequality and conflict certainly exist within the station both within and between participant groups. In the following section, I explore participatory tensions that can arise within the communities that broadcast at Plains FM.

**Valid Voices? Participation as Representation**

All radio announcers become, to a greater or lesser degree, public figures. Becoming a public figure through broadcasting at Plains can be immensely satisfying and rewarding for women, particularly when they receive positive feedback from listeners or friends about their on-air performances, or the usefulness of the information that they broadcast, or when they win a broadcasting award. However, despite its benefits, becoming a public figure can be problematic, particularly for programme makers from minority groups (most of Plains FM’s Section 36c programmers). The problem for these broadcasters is that participation in the station becomes representation. That is, whether or not they choose or desire such a role, programme makers from minority groups become positioned as public representatives of their communities.

An example of how participation can become representation is discussed by Jane Roscoe (2000) in her analysis of minority group responses to a New Zealand television documentary series *Immigrant Nation*. This documentary series, screened on TVNZ in 1995, comprised programmes on the Italian, Dalmation, Irish and Chinese communities in Aotearoa/New Zealand, and attempted to ‘give voice to those usually underrepresented’ (2000:245). In Roscoe’s study, each documentary programme was discussed by a focus group made up of members of the particular community presented. Roscoe noticed that ‘the issue of representation was a key focus of all the (focus group) discussions’ (2000:254, my emphasis). Although group participants praised some aspects of the programmes’ depiction of their communities, they were highly critical of others. Roscoe attributes some of this criticism to ‘an underlying assumption or expectation that the
subjects of any documentary are there to speak from, and for, their community,' despite the fact that those subjects may not claim such a role for themselves (2000:255). Several participants also raised concerns that general viewers would accept the documentary representation of their communities as the ‘truth’ of their lives, whereas they considered the subjects and representations included in the documentary to be atypical and/or stereotypical. For example, an Italian participant commented that ‘(f)or a New Zealand viewer, who had little or no contact with the Italian community, they would get a very distorted view of what the community is’ (2000:256-7). Roscoe notes that this perception of distortion or misrepresentation is ‘particularly important given the rarity of such representations’ (2000:257). She suggests that the rarity of the representation raises community expectations at the same time as it decreases the likelihood of those expectations being met, because how can programme makers research every aspect of a community’s life and translate it into a 40-minute documentary?

In a similar vein, Susan Kray’s (1995) article on representations of Jewish women in United States media also suggests that a hyper-sensitivity to media representation results from the scarcity and homogeneity of the mainstream media representations and subject positions available to minority group members. Following Gitlin, Kray (1995:224-5) argues that because mainstream media personnel tend to identify and ‘appoint’ certain ‘individuals they feel to be representative of marginal groups’, other individuals within that community ‘become invisible’. Therefore, certain representations of a particular community become acceptable or familiar to the wider society, but the true diversity of each minority group is obscured. Kray adds that ‘even members of the minority group in question may, perhaps inadvertently, collaborate with th(is) process by suppressing alternative voices within the group,’ in a process where ‘pressure from outside (a) group leads to conflict within (a) group.’ In other words, because so few images of their lives reach the media, pressure from outside the group to conform to pre-conceived expectations may lead to conflict within the group, as some members of minority communities attempt to control the images that are publicly represented by ‘polic(ing) each other’s visibility’ (1995:224-5). The potential consequence of such policing is a decreased likelihood of diverse, controversial or alternative representations of minority communities.
Of course, the situation of programme makers at Plains FM is different from those analysed by Roscoe and Kray. Firstly, community programmes are often broadcast on a regular rather than one-off basis (as in the Roscoe study), and secondly, representation at community stations is not mediated by professional media people from outside the community, but by insiders. Through programme making, communities are able to self-represent in an ongoing way. However, this self-representation always occurs within a context of scarcity of minority representations in the wider media. Therefore, even in community access radio, conflicts emerge over the kind of representations delivered by community programmes.

Plains FM broadcaster Mariana illustrates some of the difficulties of going public as a minority community member. In the following extract, she summarises some of the solicited and unsolicited feedback her programme making group received from their target community:

_We were criticised because of the language sometimes. It was a bit intellectual for some people, yeah, and everyone would speak [our language] different, so some people they say we would like if people could use more simple sort of words. Also they wanted to have less cultural things... they wanted to have more music and more fun (laughs)... because some of them talk (sic) was quite serious. But again, people that were educated, they thought it was fantastic! And the people who hated us, they thought it was terrible, you know, it was the worst programme ever made because we are not, sort of, we were not [members of the dominant religious denomination], we were not a, you know, conservative...we had these gay people... so how come that we dare to be there and making all of this politics and things like that?_

The conflicting nature of the feedback to Mariana’s programme illustrates the diversity of opinions within her community, and the difficulty that some community members had with Mariana’s group representing their community. As her comments reveal, some audience responses offered constructive suggestions for improvements that the broadcasters incorporated into their programme, while others questioned the rights of members of the programme group to determine content and to represent the community.
Mariana’s group had their own agenda for the programme which involved a strongly political and critical approach to news and information from their region of origin, and a commitment to providing relevant and useful information to support community members struggling to adjust to New Zealand life. She suggests that this agenda was driven by the political convictions of the programme group, but that these convictions were not shared or appreciated by members of the dominant religious group and ‘conservatives’ within her community. The presence of two gay men in her programme making group attracted specific criticism:

we have a lot of problems because of that... within this particular community...
people are a bit homophobic and so, you know, in ways there was this resistance to us...

Mariana suggests that, despite the fact that these two gay men were ‘so rich culturally’, and ‘interesting people’ with a ‘great command of language’, their contribution could be disregarded or challenged by homophobic critics because they were not the right sort of people to represent the community.

In Mariana’s view, the ‘political’, ‘critical’ and ‘activist’ orientation of her programme provoked a backlash from more ‘conservative’ members of her community. Her comments support Merrill and Corina’s earlier suggestions that some community members want only ‘safe’ and ‘comfortable’ programming on Plains and will try to ‘water down’ political content. Mariana says that programmers need self-confidence and a clear sense of purpose to withstand criticism and challenges to their right to broadcast:

One thing I learn is like whatever you say, try to do, you are not, never, ever going to please everyone, you know. And if you want to be a producer you have to be very assertive in what you do, and have a sense of what really, really you want to do and offer. If you don’t have that, then you are lost, because anybody can come and hurt you and make rubbish out of your programme... in the same way that some people can come and put you in a high pedestal and say that is the best programme they have ever, ever heard (laughs). So I um began to take things with, you know, with a grain of salt, basically.

Eventually Mariana’s programme group folded and a new group from within their community began to broadcast. The newer programme, in Mariana’s view, is too uncritical
and non-political in its approach to news and information, and therefore neglects 'principles' and 'the essential things' that her programme tried to address.

What Mariana's examples illustrate is that conflict can arise within communities about who or what should be representative of their community, and about the purpose of community programmes. Her view about what her community needs is, of course, only one among many potential perspectives. Yet, many of the communities participating at Plains FM have only one programme on air, which raises questions about how certain perspectives and voices make it to air and others do not. Media analyst John Hochheimer identifies crucial questions that community stations need to ask themselves when determining how accessible and democratic they are, including 'who speaks for which community interest?' and 'who decides what are legitimate voices to be heard?' (1993:476).

**Who speaks? Who decides?**

Although station policies provide broad guidelines for programmes, Hochheimer's first question 'who speaks?' is not answered by Plains FM policies or staff, but by the community members themselves. The station does stipulate that new programmers must comply with station policies and rules and legal broadcasting standards. As long as their programme proposals fulfil these station requirements and fit with the station's non-commercial brief, new programmers self-select. However, that does not mean that every community member has the same ability to participate. Hochheimer suggests that although community radio programme makers (especially in this case 36c programmers) are likely to come from the 'more disaffected parts of society', they are also likely to be individuals from within their own community who have the 'easiest means of access to the station' (1993:476). He cites numerous research projects that demonstrate that 'those most active in programme production are most likely to be most active in the community, the middle class and centrally located in local networks' (1993:477). In other words, he suggests that the members of minority communities who feel able to approach and participate in community stations are those in a position of relative advantage.

The suggestion that participants are likely to be active in their community and well established within community networks is supported by interviewees' narratives. Staff
members indicate that programme makers from Section 36c communities have tended to be established ‘community leaders’ with ‘their names on lists of committees in the city’. One staff member suggests that the leadership status of such broadcasters gives them a great deal of influence over ‘where (a) programme should go, what it should represent, (and) the information that should be going out.’ Another says that, although conflicts may arise over interpretation of aspects of culture, or between generations, it can be difficult for less prominent community members to challenge the ‘power’ of these leaders. While the many Plains FM participants on low incomes could not be described as ‘middle-class’, programme makers’ previous comments indicate that participation is certainly easier for those with advantages like access to transport, spare time, money to pay for programming costs, strong English language skills, good self-confidence, and few outside commitments. Therefore, although in theory anybody can make a programme on Plains, and community members disaffected by an existing programme can organise and set up their own alternative show (and several communities have exercised this option), in practice, access can never be truly equal because of the unequal positioning of potential participants within their own community.

An individual community member’s ability and willingness to broadcast may also be influenced by cultural, educational, gender, generational or sexuality factors of which station staff may be unaware, and/or over which they have no control. For example, staff members identify an inter-generational ‘division of power’ that effectively excludes young people’s perspectives and voices from some ethnic community programmes. One staff member argues that older community leaders need to ‘relinquish th(eir) power’ to allow younger people to come through. Another says that young people have to ‘gain enough confidence to say I want to do a programme too’ and ‘be able to put up with the flak that they’ll get’. In his view:

*It would take the New Zealand born kids here who have a culture, a strong culture in their background, but the New Zealand born kids who are different, to make a stand and actually do some stuff. They will be real ground breakers.*

_... that would be a new beginning, of a whole new era... in radio...

He adds that ‘people in their twenties,’ will probably be the ones ‘who are actually prepared to stand up and have the confidence’ to challenge existing programmers or to
produce different kinds of shows. Another staff member agrees, saying that teenagers are more constrained because they 'are still dependent on their parents for income or, you know, get grounded, or get growled.' The assumption made by these staff members is that the presence of young voices on air would be beneficial to the community in which they belong, a position that members of a particular community may or may not support. If we return to Hochheimer's second question 'who decides what are legitimate voices to be heard?', the answer will be different for each community because the right to represent or determine representation is culturally and contextually defined. Within communities, representational rights are constantly negotiated and contested.

For example, Plains staff member Andrea expressed uncertainty about why, despite numerous attempts at community outreach, it remains difficult to get more Pacific women involved in programme making. While the barriers discussed earlier are part of the problem, the narratives of Pacific women at Plains suggest that another factor may be the difficulty of going public as a Pacific woman. It seems that questions of legitimacy, in terms of rights to speak on air, to determine issues of community importance, to express opinions and select spokespeople to interview can be deeply problematic for Pacific women broadcasters as a result of their positioning within discourses of culture and gender. Broadcasters of The Voice of Pacific Women programme comment in the station magazine that their programme aims to 'raise the profile of Pacific women' because Pacific women are usually pushed to the background as far as culture and religion are concerned, and their opinions tended (sic) to be undervalued' (Airtime, 2001:3). In this context, Pacific women broadcasting at Plains FM are pioneering a new kind of cultural expression, a process that is not always comfortable.

When Pacific programmer Niva described experiencing severe anxiety and fear as a new broadcaster, because speaking on air 'is new to me as a woman' and 'is not my cultural way of doing things,' she suggests that, before they can broadcast, Pacific women have to believe in their own legitimacy as a public figure. Then, as another Pacific programmer Sina suggests, they have to sustain that belief in the face of criticism. Sina, who has been publicly criticised for her choice of guests, says that it takes 'courage' to continue to go public because people can misunderstand a programmer's motives for doing so:
Here I am trying, thinking, knowing that I'm doing my best to do something good for our (people) and I know there are still (people) there who misinterpret me... that I'm doing to be known or doing to be in... "oh well, let's not go and support her, she just doing it for her own ego"... stuff like that.

In addition, the Pacific women I interviewed emphasised the importance of ensuring the cultural integrity of their programmes, through accurate use of language and cultural terms, and of the 'shame' they would feel to make mistakes in this aspect of their programming. Niva talks about needing to handle 'sensitive' cultural issues appropriately and says 'you've got to be very careful when you translate something from another language, because it can come back to haunt you.'

I use these examples of issues mentioned by Pacific women to highlight the difficulties that may arise for those perceived to be public representatives of a minority ethnic community. It is the individuals and interest groups within a community that determine the 'legitimate voices' to represent their culture, lifestyle and views, but that determination is an ongoing, dynamic process, as the gradually increasing number of Pacific women broadcasters at Plains demonstrates.68 Ideas about legitimacy change as the power shifts within communities and they are also always open to challenge. For example, Mariana positioned her programme, with its avowed 'political' and 'activist' focus, as a challenge to the power of established groups within her community. This challenge operated on two fronts because the programme attempted to redefine news by presenting 'alternatives' to 'official reports' and it challenged the conservative definition of 'legitimate voices' by including gay men as presenters and therefore community representatives.

Mariana's case also illustrates the kind of conflict that can arise when 'power blocs within communities who have determined who traditional spokespersons are' challenge the rights of others to start new programmes and/or express alternative views (Hochheimer 1993:477). The vulnerability of broadcasters to such criticism and challenges can be exacerbated by the isolation that they often experience as public figures. Staff suggest that programme makers sometimes find themselves in quite a 'lonely' position because of a

68 Until 1993, only men presented Pacific Islands programming at Plains, whereas in 2001, three Pacific programmes were presented solely by women and four of the other seven Pacific programmes were co-presented by women.
scarcity of feedback and practical support from their communities. One staff member says that lack of feedback can be difficult for programme makers already feeling the ‘responsibility’ of ‘going public with information.’ This is especially true, says another staff member, because the criticism they do get is more likely to be negative than constructive:

*Often, I know from my own experience, the only time you hear from listeners, readers, whatever, is when you’ve annoyed them or said something they don’t agree with, and it’s the most vitriolic and the ones that feel the most. And that’s the feedback you remember, because it’s affected you the most, and it’s hard to deal with. And also people, different organisations, will ring you and say you don’t have the right to be talking about this issue, your information is wrong... you know, just to get under your skin... and that happens a lot.*

This staff member suggests that a lack of positive feedback makes it difficult for broadcasters to measure the level of audience satisfaction with their programme, and may increase the impact of the negative comments that are received. His comments also support previous suggestions that broadcasters can face strong criticism and challenges to their ‘right’ to publicly discuss and represent particular issues.

Criticism can also become a form of control when it encourages programmers to avoid, or self-censor, controversial material that has the potential to provoke ‘vitriolic’ responses from listeners. For example, *Lesbian Radio* broadcaster Corina argues that the diversity of experiences, perspectives, socio-economic positions, and political standpoints within the wider lesbian community makes going public as a programme maker perilous. Like Mariana, Corina has felt pressured from within her lesbian community to ‘water down’ her ‘political’ content and perspectives. The irony for both of these women is that they feel criticised for producing controversial and challenging programme content on community access radio, which was created as an alternative to mainstream media blandness and homogeneity. Once again, the context of representative scarcity in which access programmers broadcast is significant. If the wider media produced plentiful and varied portrayals of lesbians (for example), Corina’s political perspective would be only one of many representations of lesbian life, and her community could tune in or not, secure in the knowledge that they had other ways to see or hear themselves on the airwaves. Instead, as
one Plains programmer pointed out, minority groups are ‘starved’ of images and sounds of themselves, which makes community access programming a ‘precious’ community resource that must meet an impossibly diverse set of expectations.

"Treading on Toes": Participation as Possession

At the same time as non-programmers within a community may attempt to control the public representation of their culture and community by broadcasters, those same broadcasters may be using their power within the community to cement control over their programmes. In other words, the exercise of power and control within stations is dynamic and multi-directional. Despite best efforts by management to equalise access to station resources, there is always the potential for power, or people, to ‘become entrenched’ in stations (Hochheimer 1993:477). For example, regardless of whether existing broadcasters are leaders within their communities, the simple fact of having the experience on air and an established programme can lead a programme group to think that they are more qualified than others to represent their community, and to cling to their representative power. According to Hochheimer (1993:477), people who are already making programmes often come to see themselves as ‘the most knowledgeable spokespeople from the community segment they serve,’ and therefore resent the intrusion of newcomers who challenge their position, or who attempt to make changes, or operate differently.

Staff members at Plains FM acknowledge that the entrenchment of programmes or programme makers can make it difficult for newcomers or those programmers wanting to try a different approach from incumbents. One staff member describes the kind of reaction a newcomer with different ideas might get:

*It’s sort of like treading on toes, people think it’s treading on toes, when it’s not, it’s just discussion, a different point of view. And I think people view it as ‘that’s our programme’, people get quite protective of programmes and (specialist subject) areas.*

Another says that one way existing broadcasters maintain control of their representative power is to withhold information from prospective challengers:

*The other people in that particular community don’t know how we operate, so they’re working on a basis of no knowledge about our systems and criteria, so they don’t know that they’ve got power to maybe come in and do another*
programme in a slightly different way... because I'm sure the people holding the power won't tell them... they won't give out that information.

Without information, prospective programme makers who are unfamiliar with Plains may lack the confidence to ring or call in and find out what the station offers.

Entrenchment of programmers poses a 'dilemma' for Plains staff. One worker says that existing groups often see themselves as 'setting a standard, whatever that may be, and it says that this is where we are, and no one else can come in, because if you want to do (a programme) exactly the same, it might be better, but too bad, we're here.' Her colleague uses a gold rush metaphor to emphasise the sense of ownership that programme makers can feel:

In a way it's like the gold rush days where there's all this airtime out there, if you like, and people go and stake their area out, they just come like that, and then I think they don't want other programmes in that area because it's like competition, they don't want the competition...

The problem, according to Plains staff, is that sometimes these existing programmes 'lose their edge' and become 'stale'. One argues that some programmes have a 'life cycle' after which they should end because broadcasters have 'said all they're going to say,' and there's no point 'going on and boring everybody silly' after their show has lost its freshness. In those cases, says another, entrenched programmers are 'stopping other people who might have that enthusiasm (from) coming in'.

When programmers feel like they own their programme and position newcomers as competition, they are not only ignoring the possibility that new ideas and approaches would enhance the service to their community, they are also likely to be putting their own needs and motivations before those of their listeners. Australian commentator, Irma Whitford, (1992: 2) suggests that such a scenario is common within 'established' stations:

As stations become more established...(they) tend to become more settled in their program agenda. This agenda significantly indicates the interests of the

Of course, implicit within these statements are value judgments about what constitutes a 'stale', 'fresh' or 'boring' show.
most active volunteers, not necessarily those of the community they are set up to service.

In addition, she points out, ‘this agenda tends to “age” with those volunteers dedicated to their programme over the years’ and may no longer meet the needs of current listeners and community members (1992:3). Whitford (1992) suggests that if programmers aim to meet the communication needs of their community they must minimise the ‘gulf’ between themselves and their audience, and find some way to constantly (re)negotiate their programme content and use of airtime with their community. The other side of this coin is that if community members want a programme to work for them, they may need to take some responsibility for constructively communicating their needs and expectations to programme makers and/or the station staff. Yet, as the discussion in this chapter reveals, the unequal positioning of communities and their members means that neither of these tasks is uncomplicated.

Issues of community representation are further complicated by forces that are out of broadcasters’ control. For example, although resistance to new programmes can result from an attempt to hold onto established power, there are also some practical reasons why groups may not want competition in their ethnic, cultural, specialist, or interest area. One key reason relates to the funding of programmes. Because programme costs can be such an obstacle or burden for some groups, staff say that competition can become ‘quite blatant’ when groups are seeking sponsorship. For example, programmes from different ‘specialty’ music groups may be seeking support from similar kinds of businesses, or a variety of Pacific communities may be seeking sponsorship from the same ‘limited pool’ of available Pacific sponsors. In such a tight funding environment, it is understandable that programmers wish to protect their existing funding sources from competition. The other major sources of programme funding are agencies like the Lotteries Commission, the Community Organisation Grants Scheme (COGS), Community Trusts, and the Christchurch City Council. Although some communities are funded for more than one programme at Plains, prospective applicants have to establish with both the station and the funding organisation that their programme differs from those already funded (although staff say that this stipulation has been loosened recently with regard to the station). This may prove to be an obstacle if they do want to provide a similar kind of programme to one
already on air, which is entirely possible given the scarcity of representations of many Section 36c communities. Once two or more programmes from a community are funded by the same body, broadcasters may also fear that the funding targeted to their community will be more thinly spread. The point here is that the station requirement that new programmes differ from existing ones, and the funding context in which broadcasters must operate can increase existing programmers possessiveness over their programmes and affect the ability of other community members to participate at Plains.

The dilemmas caused as a result of entrenchment or programmers' possessiveness over airtime are not easy for stations to address. Whitford (1992:3) argues that because of the way they are structured and run, with a number of discrete groups making programmes independently of one another, community stations are often 'poorly equipped' to deal with programmes that are not meeting community needs or station objectives. She says, 'each program is usually run by a collective, which is most unlikely to declare itself or its program defunct' (1992:3). Therefore, the responsibility for rectifying problems of access and participation falls back upon the community and/or the station management. If community members are not willing or able to pick up that responsibility, station staff are faced with the problem of how much responsibility they should take for addressing participation and representation issues. At Plains FM, staff members argue strongly for communities making their own decisions about who speaks on air and what community issues are addressed in programme content but they also acknowledge their roles in monitoring programme effectiveness and addressing entrenchment issues. The programme director attempts to monitor programmes regularly and aims to conduct a full critique of each programme at least once during the year. 70 When staff members believe a programme group is losing impetus or their programme does not seem to be meeting community needs, they will intervene by:

- trying to catch up with them when they come in, or maybe writing a letter and giving some ideas... actually put some ideas on paper for them and try and get it kick-started again in a new direction, give them... feed them information

70 All programmes on air are legally required to be recorded onto official logger tapes that are kept by the station in case of complaints from listeners. The Programme Director randomly selects examples of these tapes to listen to programmes and check that broadcasters are following station guidelines and broadcasting regulations and to offer programme advice and suggestions.
sometimes, if something comes in, and sometimes ask if they want a (training) workshop.

Of course, factors like time constraints and language difficulties can constrain the ability of staff to monitor all programmes. As one staff member comments, staff ‘guide’ programmers before they go on air, but they cannot monitor every show and the content of programmes broadcast in languages other than English is to a certain extent ‘out of your hands’ when they become established on air. In the latter case, Plains FM staff rely upon feedback from the target community, which may or may not be forthcoming depending on how comfortable community members feel about approaching Plains staff and/or commenting on their peers’ programmes. While staff attempt to help programmes to remain on air if possible, ‘very occasionally’ programme makers have to be told that ‘they’ve burnt their bridges’ and ‘they’ve got to stop.’ In the time of this study one programme that ‘never made any progress’ had to be taken off air, which one staff member says ‘was just so terrible for us.’

Another strategy employed by Plains FM staff to address exclusions that may be occurring within a community is to use Section 36c of the Broadcasting Act (1989) to encourage communities to make their programme groups and programme content inclusive and diverse. For example, when women are under-represented in programme making groups, staff can use Section 36c as a basis to question groups about how they are serving the interests of women in their community. One staff member says:

*I’ve found it personally quite useful when dealing with ethnic organisations, to try to get a gender balance for them, and point out to them that it’s also important, it’s in our charter, we get funded [through NZOA] because of it...*

The identification of specific target groups in Section 36c also allows station staff to seek out those members of minority communities who may not be represented by existing programmes on Plains to start a new one that better meets their needs. These inclusionary strategies may improve the breadth of participation within communities but they will never eliminate participatory tensions because the factors that create and feed conflicts about who should represent a particular community are constantly changing. Therefore, fulfilling the

71 Of course, the term ‘progress’ is not neutral. Definitions of ‘progress’ are as politically laden as those of ‘quality’ and ‘professionalism’.
Plains FM objective of creating an ‘inclusive’ station is an ongoing negotiated process that will never be complete. The diversity of those involved at Plains FM means that tensions are also highly likely to develop between participant groups, providing additional challenges for the station management and its policies and practices.

“Family” Problems: Negotiating Insider/ Outsider Tensions

*I think that some of the things that we’re talking about that are problems within community radio are problems that are out there (in society) as well, and they’re just intensified because we have expectations. Because it’s set up as alternative, we have expectations that it’s going to accommodate us...but in actual fact those expectations are often not met because there is prejudice out there.*

Merrill, programmer.

Over the years of its operation, Plains FM has developed and updated its objectives, policies and rules, adding a list of user rights and a code of ethics, all of which are compiled in a single document called ‘Information and Policies for Broadcasters’ that is given to new broadcasters (Plains FM, 2000). The station also has a formal complaints procedure to deal with complaints against staff or the station organisation or with conflicts within or between programme groups that cannot be resolved by the parties concerned. All of these policies, rules, codes and practices aim to make participation at the station as open, inclusive and safe as possible. However, as development researchers Nelson and Wright (1993:14) point out, ‘there are always differences between what people say and what they do, or, within organisations, between their rhetoric and practice.’ They suggest that ‘the gap between the ideal (what people say should be the normative practice) and the real (what actually happens) is most clearly identifiable’ through ‘participant observation fieldwork’ (Nelson and Wright, 1993:18). While my involvement with Lesbian Radio was motivated by personal commitment and interest as much as by my research interest in the station, there is no doubt that my participation as a Plains FM broadcaster has enriched the research project by allowing me to observe and experience the relationship between station rhetoric and everyday station practice.

During the period of this study, a situation arose within the station that highlights some of the potential contradictions or tensions between the ideal of the station as a harmonious
'family' and the reality of participation within it as members of a marginalised community. I include discussion of this situation here because it demonstrates the ongoing challenges that the station management faces in its attempts to create and sustain open and inclusive participation and cooperative working relationships amongst its diverse collection of participants. The situation also helps to pose questions about the role of station staff and station policy and practices in establishing and maintaining the best possible conditions for participation and cooperation within the station, and about how much responsibility station management should take for addressing and resolving tensions or conflicts amongst participants.

The background to the conflict is as follows. From 1996, Plains FM had a practice of retaining ‘up to two minutes’ of each broadcast hour as ‘station time’ in which ‘station promos, programme trailers, corporate sponsorship ads and other information like community notices’ would be played (Plains FM, 2001:1-2). This ‘station time’ would occur before or after scheduled community access programmes, or at a set time (usually on the hour) within programmes that were longer than one hour. Material for these ‘station time’ segments was generally allocated randomly via computer so that each programme trailer was played the same number of times during each week. However, some programme trailers were ‘dayparted’ (i.e. removed) by staff ‘out of certain times and days’ because of their ‘content’ or ‘because it’s better for the “overall station sound” ’ (Plains FM, 2001:1-2).

Conflict arose during the time of this study because the Lesbian Radio group to which I belong discovered that station staff had agreed to daypart Lesbian Radio trailers from ‘station time’ during at least three other programmes at the request of the broadcasters who produced them. This fact came to light when a broadcaster from Outwaves, the other gay programme on Plains, read, copied and passed on to Lesbian Radio comments that had been written by another broadcaster in the station’s studio book (a book that all broadcasters have access to, which is used to record any problems experienced by programmers in the studio). The broadcaster in question, Mr X, commented that he had deleted a Lesbian Radio trailer that had appeared on the computer during the ‘station time’

72 Dayparting is a common practice within broadcast media as a strategy to avoid offending listeners, viewers and advertisers. Broadcasters use it to separate items (like songs, advertisements, programming) they regard to be incompatible and to retain sexual or violent material for ‘non-family’ timeslots. They also use it for commercial reasons. Plains FM staff say that ‘dayparting is expected by other broadcasters’ and that any station that did not daypart would be unnecessarily ‘inviting complaints’.
within his show. His comments indicated that this was not the first time he had deleted a Lesbian Radio trailer, and stated his objection to the fact that these scheduling 'mistakes' had occurred when he had arranged with staff that Lesbian Radio trailers would never air during his show. When Lesbian Radio approached the station staff for clarification of this situation, we discovered that Mr X had approached them two years previously to ask that Lesbian Radio trailers not be aired during his programme, that the management had agreed to his request, and that subsequently two other programmes had requested and been granted the same exemption. We were advised to address our concerns about the situation to Mr X and come back to the staff if we were still unhappy.

Two aspects of this situation were of particular concern to our group. Firstly, several broadcasters had excluded Lesbian Radio trailers from the 'station time' within their programmes in contravention of the general station practice of random allocation. This exclusion appeared to be on the basis of personal prejudice and we wondered what would happen if other broadcasters realised that they too could exclude Lesbian Radio trailers. We also wondered whether the station would have responded in the same way to requests to remove trailers for Tongan community programmes or Buddhist programmes (for example). The selective deletion of Lesbian Radio trailers effectively meant that Lesbian Radio was being treated differently from other programmes within the station. From our perspective, promotion of programmes throughout the weekly schedule is one of the services that Plains FM offers to its participant groups and the deletion of our scheduled programme trailers constituted a breach of the Human Rights Act guarantee of equal provision of goods, services and facilities (Human Rights Act, 1993). Our second, and more serious, concern centred on the actions of the station management. Rather than refusing the request to remove Lesbian Radio trailers, challenging the broadcasters' prejudice and insisting all programmes be treated in the same way, the station management had allowed other station participants to discriminate against Lesbian Radio. This action had the effect of making several members of Lesbian Radio feel less comfortable, less valued and less safe to participate at Plains FM than they had previously. Several group members felt a sense of disappointment and betrayal that the staff, with whom they had developed positive and respectful relationships, appeared to have tacitly supported other broadcasters' attempts to 'delete' lesbian voices from the airways. This disappointment was particularly felt because of the fact that Lesbian Radio fits into the station's target
Section 36c categories (of 'women' and 'minority group') while at least two of the groups deleting our trailers did not.

Although we had been directed to address our concerns to Mr X directly, the role and responsibility of the station staff were as much of a concern to us as the actions of Mr X. Our response was to write letters of concern to Mr X and to the station management, citing station policy and the Human Rights Act and requesting that, in the interests of fair treatment for all, the station and Mr X adhere to the random allocation of programme trailers within station time. Mr X replied saying that he would play Lesbian Radio trailers before or after but not during his programme because when they had appeared in the past listeners had complained and sponsors had threatened to withdraw support for his show. The station management replied with a brief note introducing a draft of a new ‘Station time and Trailer Policy’ that removed station time from programmes and hence the requirement for broadcasters to play trailers for other programmes during their shows. The draft policy was to be discussed (and was subsequently supported) at a meeting of the CBS (the broadcasters’ representative body) on the day that we received the letter. The overwhelming response of the Lesbian Radio group to this letter and policy was dismay and disappointment. While the new policy meant that Lesbian Radio trailers were far less likely to be deleted from the computer, the timing of the policy change, the fact that the new policy was the only response to our much wider concerns, and the fact that our group had no time to respond to the draft before it was discussed and given the green light by the CBS, all increased our discomfort with station processes. It appeared to us that Mr X had been given exactly what he wanted without having to acknowledge that he had acted inappropriately. It also seemed that the station staff had disregarded our concerns about their actions in (as we perceived it) condoning prejudice. Most importantly, however, it seemed that the station management had not heard or understood the significant distress that we all felt about the situation with Mr X and the way the station had dealt with it. This distress was in large part due to the fact that group members had had expectations that

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73 The station staff say that part of the problem in this situation was a matter of 'unfortunate timing' and perception. At the time we made our complaint they had already been discussing the station time policy with a view to updating it to meet the changing profile and needs of programmes. They say that they are constantly reviewing policies as technologies and circumstances change. One staff member says that 'nothing is done without thought' although 'maybe our speedy changes can cause consternation'.
Plains FM would be a safe and welcoming place in which to participate and those expectations had been disappointed 74.

While Lesbian Radio members unanimously agreed that the station had not addressed our concerns, members had different ideas about how to respond to the situation. Most of the group wanted to persist with questioning station staff and insisting on equal treatment, but there was some nervousness expressed about the effect that such persistence might have on our previously positive relationships with the Plains staff. At least one group member expressed the opinion that, although staff had ‘rendered our concerns of homophobia invisible’, Plains is ‘their station’ and ‘they get to make the rules’, therefore this was ‘one battle not worth fighting’. In her view, challenging Plains staff might ‘sour’ our relationships with them and jeopardise our group’s ability to use the station’s resources. She argued that ‘we will always have our hard knocks in life because we are lesbian but let’s not let that stand in the way of our success as a collective’. Her position that we should accept an unpalatable situation to avoid conflict or unpleasantness in our relationships with station staff was unacceptable to other group members.

There followed much discussion via email and at a special meeting attended by Lesbian Radio and Outwaves members about how to proceed. Those present at the latter meeting (7th May 2001) agreed on several concerns and questions to be conveyed by email to the station management with a request for a meeting to discuss them. These concerns and questions centred on the station management’s lack of response to the issues raised in Lesbian Radio’s letters and their failure to impartially implement the previous station time policy, but they also queried some of the wording of the draft new station time policy. Concern about the draft policy document centred on a comment that trailers had previously been ‘dayparted out of “family time” and aired later at night due to content’ and a newly included requirement that programme trailers must have ‘no overt sexualising of content’.

74 The safety that Plains had appeared to promise was extremely significant for group members because, as Corina suggested earlier, coming out publicly as a lesbian is so difficult for many women. Even within the Lesbian Radio group where women broadcast publicly as lesbians every week, we have had many discussions over the programme name because some women perceive the word ‘lesbian’ to be too negative and stigmatising. When the group ordered t-shirts the programme name did not appear on them because several women said they would not wear a t-shirt that contained the word ‘lesbian’. While we laughed at the irony that no-one but us would know what the t-shirts signified, the incident highlights the ongoing ‘coming-out’ struggles that many lesbian women experience.
These statements raised questions like what constitutes inappropriate content for ‘family time’? Who decides what is in/appropriate and on what basis? What does ‘overt sexualising of content’ mean and why did it need to be included in the new policy? Some Lesbian Radio and Outwaves members were particularly offended by the ‘overt sexualising’ comment, in the suspicion that it had been specifically directed at our ‘gay’ programmes (which, as far as any of us knew, had never contained overt sexual content)\(^75\).

After several emails back and forth between the station and our group, a meeting was held on 15\(^{th}\) May 2001 between two members of the station staff and all of those Lesbian Radio and Outwaves members who could attend. At this meeting, the issues raised by Lesbian Radio and Outwaves were discussed fully and the station staff members apologised for the offence that had been caused by the way that the Mr X situation had been addressed. By the end of the meeting, the issues raised by Lesbian Radio had been resolved to the satisfaction of all parties present. Station staff agreed to ask Mr X to apologise to Lesbian Radio and assured us that the same situation would not happen again. The most positive aspect of the meeting was that Lesbian Radio members felt heard, understood and validated by the station staff. Since that time, relationships between the station staff and Lesbian Radio group members have been amicable and constructive\(^76\).

The conflict situation that arose with Mr X exemplifies some of the tensions that surround representational legitimacy and entrenchment of programmers within Plains FM. When Mr X decided to delete Lesbian Radio trailers, his actions suggested a belief that lesbian voices were not appropriate for his audience. He justified this position by arguing that previous broadcasts of Lesbian Radio trailers during his programme had offended his listeners and endangered his sponsorship. His actions suggested a belief in his right to evaluate the appropriateness of other programmes and their trailers and to exclude them from his programme accordingly. He seemed to consider himself above or outside of the station staff.

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\(^75\) The station staff say that, at some time in the past (before our Lesbian Radio group was formed), Outwaves had made some sexually suggestive advertisements referring to “glowing red stalks” and being “down in the shed playing with my trannie”. These are the kinds of items that they had dayparted into later evening slots rather than ‘family time’.

\(^76\) The above summary is clearly one version of the events that occurred. Any other person that was involved would tell the story differently. I have based my account on the central concerns, emotions and opinions expressed in the numerous letters, emails and minutes of meetings that circulated amongst the various participants in the events.
policies and rules that guide the practice of other programmers. Some time after the events that I have outlined, our group discovered that his deletion of *Lesbian Radio* trailers was not the first or the last time that Mr X had altered pre-programmed items on the on-air computer. It appeared that ours was not the only programme that offended Mr X and we were not the only programmers to complain about his actions. When these complaints were followed up by the station management and the CBS, Mr X was suspended from broadcasting. The station management asked the CBS to review Mr X’s membership status (current CBS membership is a requirement for any broadcaster to remain on air) but before his due date to appear at the CBS review meeting, Mr X resigned voluntarily from the station. According to a staff member, ‘Mr X is no longer a broadcaster at Plains FM due to his unwillingness to meet the conditions of his return after suspension.’

**Conclusion:**

In this chapter, I have discussed notions of belonging at Plains FM, constraints on individual participation at the station and some of the tensions that arise within and between the station’s participant communities. My purpose in doing so has been to explore the ongoing, complex challenges that the station faces in trying to become an inclusive, diverse and co-operative organisation within which participants can feel a sense of safety and belonging. Throughout the discussion, I have drawn upon examples from interviewees’ narratives and my participant observations at the station to problematise several interviewees’ positioning of Plains FM as a harmonious, inclusive, accepting ‘family’ of equals. While the positive connotations of the ‘family’ metaphor suggest welcome, belonging, acceptance and pulling together, families are not always safe, comfortable or accepting places for individuals to be and their members experience them differently. The same is true of Plains FM. The people who participate in the station are positioned differently within wider social, cultural and economic contexts and their positioning within those contexts informs and affects their participation at Plains. The obstacles to participation identified by interviewees indicate that the inequalities and social barriers that station participants experience outside of the station are relevant and cannot be stripped away. Station participants may feel they have differing levels of personal influence on the station’s operations depending upon their role within the station (for example, as broadcasters, CBS committee members, representatives on the governing CCT, or as staff members), the duration of their involvement or the strength or weakness of their
relationships with people they perceive as influential station participants (like staff members, long-term members or broadcaster representatives).

The tensions within and between participant individuals and communities suggest that, while the metaphor of Plains FM as an inclusive family of equals is useful as an ideal for the station to aim towards, it is an impossible goal to actually achieve. I would argue that too strong an investment in the ideal of the station as a harmonious ‘family’ might actually hinder the station’s progress towards its participatory goals if participants feel unable to identify or address disharmony, or to question policies and practices that do not meet their needs, or to seek assistance with problems they encounter with other broadcasters. The Mr X situation raises crucial questions of who gets to make and alter the rules and policies at Plains FM and how participants can ensure that they have a say in the station’s day to day operations. While the answers to these questions are unresolved at Plains FM the Mr X conflict suggests that they need to be constantly on the agenda and all station participants need to take responsibility for their resolution. Working towards inclusiveness, and equality of belonging will inevitably involve participants in ongoing dynamic processes of negotiating insider/outsider boundaries and balancing expectations and realities.
Chapter 6  Facing the Future: Staying “Open” and Staying “True”

What is the special significance of community media to civil society? Community media provide a viable alternative to the profit-oriented agenda of corporate media. They are driven by social objectives rather than the private, profit motive. They empower people rather than treat them as passive consumers, and they nurture local knowledge rather than replace it with standard solutions. Ownership and control of community media is rooted in, and responsible to, the communities they serve. And they are committed to human rights, social justice, the environment and sustainable approaches to development.

World Association for Christian Communication, 2002

Introduction:
This chapter marks a shift in focus from the experiences or perspectives of Plains FM participants to the broader political, institutional and funding context within which the station is obliged to operate. I argue that this context, exemplified within debates over professionalism and quality broadcasting, poses considerable ongoing challenges to the station as it works towards its community development goals. These challenges are significant for this thesis as a whole and for an understanding of Plains FM because, as media researcher Robert White (1984:126) argues, participatory media operations are highly vulnerable to ‘structural constraints’. In White’s view, a clear understanding of the ‘structural factors’ and ‘constant internal and external constraints’ on the operations of any participatory media organisation is crucial both to the likely success of a specific media venture and to any (internal or external) assessment of its long term effectiveness. This suggests that, in order to sustain their participatory effectiveness and reach their democratic potential, participants in any participatory media organisation must keep reflecting upon their own practice, with one eye on their history and another looking for potential threats to their ideals and objectives.

Similarly, community media analyst Nick Jankowski (1991:173) argues that there is ‘a great need for research within station organizations… on the tension between professional
media routines and "ordinary citizens" seeking a medium and a form of expression for their concerns. He is particularly concerned with the question of 'how (the) basic principles (of access and participation) may fare in an increasingly commercial media environment' (Jankowski, 1991:173). Given such concerns, I would argue in relation to Plains FM, that it is pointless to discuss the potential of community access radio as a vehicle for personal and community development and cultural citizenship without also identifying the ongoing contextual, structural and material challenges and tensions that the station faces and the possible constraints that these place upon the achievement of that potential. My discussion in this chapter explores some of the material and structural conditions that have the potential to enable and constrain the effectiveness of Plains FM as a vehicle for community development and transformation. I begin with a personal anecdote.

An Australian Experience:

In November 2001, I travelled to Hobart, Tasmania to present a paper on my Plains FM research at the annual conference of the Community Broadcasters' Association of Australia (CBAA). On arrival at Hobart airport, I waited outside the terminal for the bus into the city, which was very late. It soon became clear that many of those waiting with me were also attending the CBAA conference and I particularly noticed two men speaking much louder than everyone else. One of them, from a community radio station in New South Wales, was regaling his newfound companion with the story of his station's recent scheduling overhaul. They had introduced commercial radio elements like strip programming, including a daily breakfast show and evening drive time slot, in order to increase their audience size and make the station more attractive to advertisers. In this man's view, commercialising community radio formats is the 'only way to go' if stations are to survive financially in tight economic times. When the second man suggested that such moves must have caused conflict in the station (he could not imagine such changes being acceptable to community broadcasters at his station), the first man replied, 'you can't worry about things like that' because people have to accept changes for the 'good of the station' as a whole and 'you can't keep running shows that hardly anyone listens to'. He positioned those who complained about losing their community shows to the new strip formats as 'selfish' and

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77 Programming that is broadcast in the same timeslot every weekday.
‘stuck in the past’ and made it clear that managers of community stations have to ‘stand strong’ against such criticism if they want their station to survive.\textsuperscript{78}

What struck me about this conversation was the absolute conviction and passion in the first man’s voice as he talked about the need to commercialise community stations and his apparently scant regard for ‘community access’ programming. His comments suggested that station profile, audience numbers and financial success are more important to a station than community access and that station managers know better than community broadcasters what is best for a station’s future. The approach to ‘community radio’ that he was advocating appeared to be founded on a very different set of values and understandings from the community development focus apparent in the above quotation from the World Association for Christian Communication\textsuperscript{79} and in the Plains FM station objectives, policies and participant narratives. This conversation at Hobart airport was the first of many instances at the CBAA conference that exemplified the tensions between community development-centred and media-centred approaches to community broadcasting that arise in the everyday operations of the community media sector. These tensions demonstrate that the normative definitions, values and practices of community media are continually contested within the sector. Discussions in the CBAA conference plenary sessions and workshops made it clear that sector definitions, values and practices are also under pressure from external factors, particularly the political and economic contexts within which community media are obliged to operate. As the above conversation indicates, many Australian community stations are struggling with financial difficulties and some are attempting to become more ‘professional’, which effectively means becoming more like ‘commercial’ media, in order to survive (Melzer, 2000). This trend has generated considerable debate within the Australian sector about the core values and objectives of community media and their significance within society. Battle lines are drawn between those who see increased ‘professionalism’ and ‘commercialisation’ as positive or at least necessary developments, and those who regard them as ‘selling out’ the community

\textsuperscript{78} This conversation was recorded in some depth in my fieldnotes and quotes were recorded at the time.

\textsuperscript{79} This quote is typical of the representations of community media ideals and objectives found in the international community media literature. Dominant discourses of community media within this international literature overwhelmingly advocate a community development and community access focus for community stations and criticise those stations deemed to be falling short of these ideals (AMARC website; Barlow, 1988; Girard, 1992; Hope-Hume, 1997; Riano, 1994; Rodriguez, 2001).
development and community access values of the sector (Matthews, 1999; Melzer, 2000; Thompson, 2000a; Whitford, 1992).

While there are many differences between the community broadcasting sectors operating in Australia and Aotearoa/New Zealand\textsuperscript{80}, there are some similarities in the challenges and dilemmas faced by both sectors and by many of their international counterparts. Those similarities derive from a tension inherent within the construction of community media organisations as ‘hybrid’ ventures that attempt to combine community development objectives with the running of a financially viable radio (or television) station. While the combination of these two functions presents opportunities for stations to utilise the medium of radio (or television) to enable local communities in various ways, it can also be problematic for stations. As hybrid organisations, stations like Plains FM can never be simply either community development ventures or radio stations, instead they must juggle the often conflicting objectives and imperatives of both functions simultaneously. The tension between community development and media values/objectives is represented most clearly in debates and struggles over the definitions of ‘professionalism’ and ‘quality broadcasting’ for the community media sector. As a way of exploring this tension, this chapter explores how ‘professionalism’ and ‘quality broadcasting’ are constructed in the narratives of Plains FM participants and draws upon commentary from the Australian community media sector in order to highlight the challenges that face community stations as they try to stay ‘open’ to and for their communities and ‘true’ to their community development objectives.

\textit{Hybrid Tensions: Professionalism at Plains FM}

\textit{Media professionalism: Context}

‘Professionalism’ is a contested term throughout the media sphere. Struggles over the definition of professional behaviour and standards are inherent in popular distinctions between ‘quality’ and ‘tabloid’ newspapers, for example, and in the public debates

\textsuperscript{80} The Australian sector is much larger, with 200 Australian stations in 2000, compared to Aotearoa/New Zealand’s 11. It is much more diverse with different types of community station (For example: Fine music stations, Education stations, Ethnic stations, Aboriginal stations, Print-handicapped stations and Politically progressive stations) and it operates within a different policy and funding environment (Moran, 1995).
amongst media practitioners about ethical issues like journalistic accuracy, sensationalised reporting, and chequebook journalism. ‘Professionalism’ in mainstream media is also many-faceted. Its various definitions can include more formal and explicit elements like codes of journalistic ethical standards, as well as informal aspects like newsroom/production/editorial practices and conventions. All of these aspects of professionalism can be extremely powerful influences on which kinds of stories, images, voices, issues and lifestyles are included in media content and which are excluded, and on when, where and how we as audiences will hear, read or see them. Formal and informal elements of media professionalism may also conflict, as what is considered ‘professional’ in theory may not be implemented in practice. For example, Jim Tully (1992:149,151) equates ‘professional integrity’ with adherence to journalistic ethical standards such as accuracy and fairness in reporting, respect for privacy and independence from commercial or political influence. However, he points out that implementation of these ethical standards can be compromised by newsroom realities where tight staffing, stretched resources and the competition to be first with stories and strong visual images put journalists under ‘intense pressure’. Discourses of media and broadcasting are also continually transformed and contested as the global mediascape changes, therefore definitions of professionalism, and the boundaries of what are considered acceptable practices within media industries, are also always changing.

Despite the contested and dynamic definitions of ‘professionalism’ in mainstream broadcasting, the term ‘professional broadcaster’ is generally applied to those who are employed in media careers, that is, broadcasting work for which people are formally trained and paid. In this sense of professionalism, broadcasting and journalism are positioned as ‘professions’ like accounting, teaching and law, whose members are trained practitioners, or ‘experts’ in their field of endeavour. This view of ‘professional broadcasting’ invests media workers with power and authority to represent the world, its peoples, its ‘news’, and its histories, issues and concerns, to audiences. It also precludes ‘amateurs’ from participating in media production (or at least attaches a lower status to their work).

\[81\text{ See discussion in Chapter Three.}\]
Alternative discourses of community access media attempt to challenge mainstream media conventions of representation and participation by insisting that, instead of being represented by 'professional' media workers, individuals and communities can and should be able to represent themselves by producing their own media content. These community access discourses promote the collapse of hierarchical distinctions between producers and receivers of media products, and the democratisation of communication through the removal of professional mediators between ordinary people and their communities. According to this view, professionalism is a barrier to effective and democratic communication because it is too strongly tied to the conventions and commercial imperatives of media organisations to be able to serve diverse audiences, particularly those audience groupings with little advertiser appeal and/or political and economic influence. 'Amateur' media producers on the other hand, are presumed not to be shackled by the same kind of expectations, and therefore to be able to produce information and programming more suited to the communication needs of their target communities (Barlow, 1988; Mata, 1994).

**Professionalism at Plains FM: broadcaster perspectives**

Because the community access radio sector in Aotearoa/New Zealand draws strongly on a blend of these alternative participatory media discourses and community development discourses, it might be expected that 'professionalism' would be a discredited concept within Plains FM. However, the narratives of broadcasters suggest that, on the contrary, professionalism is regarded by many Plains FM participants as highly desirable. Several broadcasters explicitly state their desire to be seen as 'professional broadcasters' or to be producing 'high quality' programmes. Lydia aspires to a 'smooth, professional sounding show,' because a professional sound would 'bring (her show) up a level and people would listen to it.' Dianne says that 'it became quite important' to her programme group 'to produce a high quality programme.' Dianne and several other programmers describe the achievement of professional standards as both 'challenging' and 'incredibly satisfying.' Becoming more 'professional' is clearly important to these broadcasters, yet within broadcaster narratives and the formal station literature there appears to be no consensual

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82 As represented, for example by the station objectives, policies, rules, promotional material and training/information texts produced for volunteers and programme makers.
definition of what being a 'professional' or 'good' broadcaster at Plains FM actually entails.

When explaining their ideas about quality standards for programming, programme makers emphasise different aspects of broadcasting, depending upon their cultural, social and experiential 'knowledge' about quality, professionalism, communication and broadcasting, their motivations for broadcasting, and their understandings of what the station staff and audiences expect of them. Dianne’s definition of ‘a high quality programme’ emphasises ‘balance’ between the elements of talk and music in the programme format, and skill in technical aspects like editing. She says her group focused on ‘getting the music right and the editing right and having a bit of interviewing and a bit of chat’ and that it ‘was quite a task to get it balanced.’ Claire says that programme quality is about being ‘well prepared,’ which is why she carefully scripts each programme and ‘count(s) the minutes’ to be sure of her timing. She is ‘quite critical’ of her own performance, listening to each programme to ‘make sure it comes across clearly, not too fast, and that it’s interesting.’ For other women who are primarily concerned with conveying basic survival information to their listeners, the accuracy of the information they broadcast and a culturally sensitive presentation are paramount. As Niva says:

You’ve got to get it right, because if you don’t get it right someone will complain. And that’s the sensitive part of being on air, you’ve got to get your words right, you’ve got to translate the information right. There are sensitive issues that can be... culturally... and they can sue you if you put the wrong information on the air.

To overcome difficulties with translation, Niva says she uses dictionaries and rings the consulate of her country for advice if she has doubts about particular words or concepts. For her, making a quality programme means not misleading people or offending against their culture and making sure that she does nothing to breach broadcasting regulations and standards. Given the contested nature of ‘quality broadcasting’ and ‘professionalism’ within the mainstream media sphere, it is unsurprising that the diverse participants at Plains FM have different perceptions of these concepts. One staff member suggests that the absence of a consensual definition of what constitutes ‘professional’ or ‘quality’ broadcasting reflects the ‘reality’ of Plains FM participation: ‘there is no one way (to make
programmes), and because of people’s restrictions there can’t be one way, they’ve got to do it in their own way’.

Regardless of their lack of consensual definitions of ‘quality’ or ‘professionalism’, I would suggest that Plains FM participants accrue several advantages from positioning themselves as ‘professional broadcasters’. Firstly, the term ‘professional’, with its connotations of expertise and high technical and ethical standards, generally carries more status and value than that of ‘amateur’, which suggests low technical skill, dabbling or playing at an activity. (Cassell Concise Dictionary, 1998) When they position themselves as (at least aspiring) ‘professional’ broadcasters, Plains programme makers emphasise the seriousness with which they approach their broadcasting role; rather than dabbling, many interviewees regard their programming endeavours as significant to the wellbeing of their communities. As a result, they have high expectations of themselves with regard to technical, content and ethical standards. Secondly, the term professional carries weight from its association with payment, which is a means of attaching value to an activity. By claiming the status of professionalism for their unpaid work, programme makers at Plains assert their belief in the value of that work. This is an empowering assertion given the feeling expressed by several interviewees that their work, because unpaid, is not valued by the wider community.

Thirdly, by challenging themselves to meet professional broadcasting standards, programme makers set high goals for themselves and for the ‘quality’ of the programming they present to their communities. As a result, they feel personally enriched and validated when they and their audiences believe those goals are achieved. In addition, as the first two points illustrate, positioning themselves as professional broadcasters allows Plains programme makers to challenge or rework aspects of dominant discourses of media professionalism by re-defining ‘professionalism’ and ‘quality’ broadcasting.

However, the programmers at Plains engage with dominant discourses of professionalism in complex ways. While they contest some conventions of mainstream media, they appear to uncritically adopt others. Their redefinitions of ‘professionalism’ and ‘quality’ seem to relate more to content than production concerns. In their interviews, broadcasters almost exclusively limit their criticism of mainstream media to content, representational and informational concerns rather than technical production matters. For example, Pauline from Greypower criticises the mainstream media representation of older people as ‘imbecilic’
and 'whinging'. Pacific programmer Sina criticises the ‘disgusting music’ and ‘rude’ announcers on commercial radio. Another programmer, Lydia, contrasts what she calls ‘frivolous’, ‘conservative’ and ‘shallow’ commercial radio programming with the ‘variety’ of ‘interesting’ and ‘thinking’ content that she has heard on Plains FM. Programmers’ claims to be ‘alternative’ broadcasters also predominantly relate to the content of their programmes, that is, to the range of ‘different’ voices they bring to air and the alternative nature of the information and the representation they provide to their communities. They appear to see little need to challenge dominant production norms. On the contrary, emulation of mainstream media standards of editing and sound production seems to be seen as a way of increasing the status and value of their programmes and the station. Programmer Lydia says that one reason Plains FM is a ‘good’ station is because its community access programmes ‘sound professional, their trailers are professional’ and the station’s broadcasters sound like ‘they know what they are doing’ in a technical sense. Her comments suggest that producing programmes with ‘professional’ sound and technical production standards is an important way that Plains FM broadcasters reinforce the value and status of their particular community’s perspectives and of the station as a whole.

When they position themselves as aspiring professional broadcasters, Plains FM programmers are then both challenging and reproducing aspects of dominant media conventions of professionalism. They challenge content and format limitations of mainstream media by redefining what constitutes appropriate content and appropriate voices for radio. They reproduce and valorise mainstream definitions of ‘quality’ broadcasting when they strive to emulate the professional production standards that they have absorbed from their own previous mainstream media exposure. In other words, their understandings of what makes a ‘good’ programme represent a mix of mainstream and alternative ideas about quality and professionalism.

Several community access broadcasters appear to experience and/or promote a drive towards professionalism at Plains. Pansy comments that ‘even though we (access broadcasters) are amateur we have to get more professional in delivery.’ Joanne says that programmes at Plains ‘are becoming more professional,’ which in her view, ‘can only be a positive thing’. Erina says that, as a broadcaster, ‘you can’t be an amateur forever, and the sooner you get good the better it is for everybody’s (sic) here,’ which suggests that she has
experienced some level of pressure, either from within herself, or from the station to ‘get good.’ Her comment suggests that the professionalism of individual programmers reflects upon the image of the station as a whole and may even become a point of contention between programmers.

Another programmer, Cristina, says that a certain level of professionalism is expected of programmers by the station staff:

_We feel that you have to do your best, you have to do your best and you have to be there, and you feel that either your programme is good or good, there’s no other way. Because you have to come up to the standards that are set for you... and those standards are set by the staff of Plains FM._

This perception that programmes are expected to be ‘good’ is supported by one staff member’s comment that Plains FM broadcasting standards are ‘probably quite high... compared to other access stations around the country’ but that they _need_ to be, in order to maintain listeners. This comment supports suggestions by programmers like Lydia that high expectations might lead listeners to switch off any programme that does not reach a certain level of technical competence. However, Cristina’s comments focus more strongly on staff than audience responses to programmes. In saying that ‘standards are set by the staff’ she suggests that staff perceptions of quality and professionalism in broadcasting significantly influence broadcasters’ approaches to and assessment of their programmes. Given the staff role in training new broadcasters and monitoring the performance of existing programme makers, it therefore becomes crucial to understand how staff understand and define ‘professional’ and ‘quality’ broadcasting for Plains. During a group interview with the entire staff, I noticed a strong group consensus on this issue.

**Defining professionalism: Staff perspectives**

While arguing that there is no single over-arching definition of professionalism at the station, Plains FM staff members do talk about a ‘minimum standard’ of professionalism that programmers must achieve and maintain in order to broadcast at the station. This minimum professional standard appears to comprise three broad areas of competency: selection and production of appropriate programme _content_, utilisation of practical _skills and techniques_ of broadcasting, and _responsibility_ regarding station protocols.
In the staff view, to meet content standards, programming must have ‘something to say’, in that ‘it either informs you, entertains you’, ‘educates you’, ‘or moves you in some way’ 83. They say it is important that programme content ‘makes some connection with the listeners’ to encourage them to listen rather than switch off. Ideas expressed should be ‘clear’ and develop in a ‘logical progression for the listener’, so that a programme ‘flows’ and the presenters avoid getting ‘bogged down’ in too much detail. In addition, broadcasters should strive for variety within their programmes, by balancing talk and music content and inviting outside input through use of interviews, commentary slots, or talkback, for example. Otherwise, say staff, programmes become ‘stagnant’ and ‘boring’.

When referring to practical broadcasting skills and techniques, staff emphasise the crucial importance of ‘making sure that levels of sound remain reasonably consistent’ across different items and elements of a programme 84. They point out that achieving consistency with sound levels has become easier as the station has developed technologically. For example, improvements in portable pre-recording equipment available to broadcasters and the computerisation of programming have reduced the potential for sound quality problems: ‘everything that’s on the computer is already set at the right level, whereas in the past every single thing that you put on the radio was at a different level’ and therefore ‘had to be changed individually’. While technical development has made the maintenance of sound quality easier for programmers, it appears to have also raised the threshold of technical competence acceptable at the station, because as one staff member points out: ‘in a way there’s less excuses for them to say “oh, the machine wasn’t set” or things like that.’

Other practical skills and techniques emphasised by staff relate to the way that programmers prepare and present their programmes. To reach the Plains FM minimum standards, broadcasters are expected to plan programmes so that they know what they want to convey to their audiences. They should think about and plan the best ways to present their material. Initially they are advised to script the entire programme, and although

83 These comments echo the Reithian BBC public service credo as discussed in Chapter One.
84 A single programme consists of a collection of elements like, for example, a programme intro, presenter voicebreaks, music items, pre-recorded interviews, etc. When sound levels vary greatly between programme items the effect is disjointed and jarring. Staff (and several programmers) suggest that too much of this kind of disparity makes the programme sound ‘amateurish’, particularly because such technical ‘errors’ are not acceptable in the commercial or public radio programmes with which many audience members are most familiar.
presenters may later develop enough confidence to speak more spontaneously, they are expected always to script interview questions and to be clear about why they are doing a particular interview. They are expected to write up a programme plan that includes times for each programme item so that the overall programme fits its designated timeslot exactly.

In the staff view, being fastidious about timing is a key element of broadcasting professionalism. As one staff member comments:

Professionalism too can be something as simple as turning up to do your show when you’re supposed to, turning up to production when you’re supposed to, finishing your show when you’re supposed to, not taking five minutes of the next person’s time, not finishing five minutes early and ‘I’ve finished, you’ll have to take over’ and walking out - which has happened - informing the staff when there’s a problem and not just walking away from it and leaving dead air all night, or something like that. So professionalism is wider than, than presenting a nice programme - you can present an award-winning programme and then if everything else is letting you down I wouldn’t call you a professional broadcaster.

This staff member is emphasising the need for programmers to accept their share of responsibility for the smooth running of the station as a whole. That responsibility involves respecting station equipment and protocols, and co-operating with other programmers and staff to keep the signal on air all twenty-four hours of the day. It also includes producing a reasonable consistency of programme quality. To this end, staff members advocate programmers listening critically to their own shows, evaluating their performance, working to improve their skills, and asking for help when they need it.

The staff desire for consistency in programming and in sound levels is not confined to individual programmes, because they argue that evenness of quality across programmes is also a factor in the overall station profile. One staff member noted that although consistency is ‘not a driving force’ the station does not want to have ‘too wide a variation’

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85 This focus on self-evaluation is evidenced in a broadcaster ‘self-test’ that appeared in the station magazine Airtime in September 2002 with the following introduction: ‘Is your Radio Show a Jalopy or a Jaguar? Dynamic progressive or stupefyingly stagnant? Gaining listeners or losing them? Sometimes it pays to take a good hard listen to yourself.’
in quality. Too great a disparity in quality and standards would damage the 'station reputation' and consequently its relationships with the groups that sustain it: its listeners, its sponsors and its funders. Echoing earlier comments by programmers, another staff member comments that if the quality variation between programmes becomes too wide, or if the station goes off air as a result of programmer error or carelessness, then listeners will say 'sorry!' and switch off. Therefore, the station needs to work to keep its listeners because they can be 'fickle'. In his view, the station reputation also 'affects our ability to get sponsorship, or get advertising, or do projects or do all those things that we need to do for everybody else.' His colleague adds that one poor quality or 'sloppy' programme 'can affect our general reputation... so that's what we're also guarding because it affects all those other broadcasters.' She argues that Plains needs to be 'thought of as a viable entity... for whatever we choose to develop or do, whether it's in the commercial field like sponsorship, or creatively, or whether it's from New Zealand On Air our funder.' Her use of the term 'viable entity' suggests that the station, as an alternative media outlet, must continually prove its worth to its listeners, sponsors and funders. This idea is supported by another staff member who describes the station and the broadcasters as 'needing to be seen as delivering professional sound' (emphasis added).

The interesting aspect of this reference to the 'need' for 'professional sound' is that sound quality fits into only one of the competency areas identified in the staff definition of professionalism. A focus on production quality and its effects on audiences appears to contradict positions taken elsewhere in staff narratives, like for example, the comment by one staff member that Plains is more concerned with 'giving the community the opportunity... to use the station, rather than what is best for the listener.' Yet, when it comes to establishing the viability and value of the station with external bodies like funders and sponsors, 'professional sound' and audience retention appear to become crucial. Both staff members and programmers clearly express the belief that listeners will not tolerate 'amateurish' production standards, and that the key to maintaining audiences is a consistently 'professional' sound quality. The suggestion that the reputation (and ultimate survival) of Plains relies upon the mainstream media criteria of sound quality and audience levels once again emphasises that mainstream media priorities and values wield significant influence over definitions of professionalism, even within 'alternative' stations.
The notions of professionalism and quality broadcasting circulating within Plains FM highlight the tensions between community development and media objectives that the station faces every day. As a community development venture, Plains FM is committed to community access, inclusion and diversity, objectives that require it to open its doors at minimal cost to untrained and inexperienced broadcasters who must learn to make radio as they do it. Clearly, their performance on air will not (initially at least) be as polished as that of professionally trained broadcasters. Community development is also very much a process rather than product-centred endeavour, in that the opportunities and experiences of making and/or accessing the programmes made by a marginalized community is more important than their actual content (Riano, 1994). Given the Plains FM commitment to ‘minority groups’ and those marginalised by mainstream media, prospective audiences for many shows are small, with few financial resources and little ability to attract advertising or sponsorship. All of these factors flagrantly flout the accepted rules and imperatives of broadcasting in a commercialised mediascape. A community-participation and process-centred broadcasting agenda is fundamentally incompatible with the audience maximising, ‘bottom-line’ focus of mainstream media\textsuperscript{86}, yet at the same time, like any radio station, Plains FM must generate enough income to continue operating. As a radio station, Plains FM also carries audience and funder expectations that it will, for example, have programming on air all day, every day, that its programming will sound ‘professional’ and meet certain (constantly changing) technical standards. Because dominant understandings of ‘what radio is’ and what makes a ‘successful’ radio station derive from the mainstream media models that audiences and community broadcasters are most familiar with, expectations and evaluations of Plains FM are to some extent based on these. The interviewees’ narratives demonstrate that although Plains FM promotes itself as an ‘alternative’ ‘community access’ radio station, it cannot totally separate itself from dominant media discourses because its own definitions of quality and professional broadcasting are partly constructed from them. As a hybrid community development/media venture, Plains FM therefore faces a range of contradictory expectations from its participants, supporters, audiences and funders. As a small-scale, local, non-profit, community-centred media organisation operating within a predominantly commercialised

\textsuperscript{86} I include public radio and television services within the term mainstream media as they have adopted many of the audience-maximising strategies of commercial media.
and globalising media environment, it is also continually required to prove its viability and worth.

Developing the station’s reputation as a ‘professional’ broadcasting outlet that produces ‘professional’ radio programmes across its schedule is one way in which staff members and programmers suggest that Plains FM proves its worth and viability. The staff point to the positive aspects of maintaining professional standards within the station, suggesting that when the standards are set at a high level broadcasters can feel that they are producing quality rather than second rate programmes. However, some interviewees’ narratives also suggest that too much professionalism would come at a cost. Programmer Pansy supports the idea that Plains as a whole should strive towards a professional approach to programming, but also voices her reservations:

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\text{We have to get more professional in our delivery, because audience expectation do increase all the time, do raise. But within that discipline I think community broadcaster should not lose the difference which is the freshness, the sort of, not adherence at all time to certain stereotypes. So I see the, the community radio future as straining for more professional discipline in delivery, in, you know, in technology, but maintain that cultural and ethnic and diversity in voices, in opinion... really reflecting what the local community, you know, is all about...}
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Here Pansy begins to articulate the central tension for the station between its objectives as an ‘alternative’ community access station providing access and representation to its diverse local communities, and the rising expectations of both its audiences and its more experienced programmers for a more professional delivery of programmes. While she supports a certain level of professionalism and technological development, Pansy is clear that, in ‘straining for more professional discipline’, the station should not lose its ‘difference’, its cultural and ethnic diversity of voices and opinions, its community focus and the ‘freshness’ of its approach. Her mention of the latter qualifications suggests an awareness of the potential for Plains to lose its alternative qualities should the drive to professionalism within the station extend too far along the mainstream media path. This suggestion implies that too strong a focus on professionalism can undermine the core mission and identity of community radio. The dilemma facing Plains FM and the
community sector as a whole is to determine how far along the professionalism road is too far.

_Facing the Future: dilemmas and threats_

Three inter-related issues arising from the above staff and broadcaster definitions of professionalism are significant for any discussion of how far professionalism should be taken at Plains FM. The first is the suggestion that there is (or should be) a drive towards professionalism and technological development at Plains, the second is the relationship between professionalism and station funding, and the third is the difficulty of measuring or proving the ‘value’ or significance of community media. It is my contention that each of these issues illustrates a potential threat to the long term sustenance of Plains FM’s community development mission. In the remainder of the chapter, I explore these threats by drawing upon my participant observations at the station, debates about professionalism in the Australian community media sector, and the work of US community media researcher Robert White.

_Professionalism and technology_

When programmer Pansy says that she sees ‘the community radio future as straining for more professional discipline in delivery... in technology’, she draws an explicit connection between professionalism and the use of technology at Plains. A similar connection is apparent in staff narratives, when they say that the improved technology at the station improves the overall station sound and makes it ‘easier’ for individual broadcasters to create professional sounding programmes. These interviewees suggest that it is through the effective and skilled use of radio technology that programme delivery and the image of the station become more ‘professional’. Clearly, technology is essential to the station’s operations because nothing can be broadcast without it. The question is, how much technology and what sort of technology should a community access station be using?

87 While similar debates are occurring within community media sectors around the world (Ananthakrishnan, 1994; Barlow, 1988; Dichter, 2000; Drijvers, 1992; Hollander, 1992; Land, 1999), Australia offers a useful point of comparison and contrast with the Aotearoa/New Zealand situation because the size, relative maturity and competitive funding regime of its community media sector mean that debates over professionalism in Australia are highly developed. The existence of the sector’s representative body, the CBAA, means that the Australian sector also has well-established arenas for such debates like the CBAA’s magazine _CBX_ and its annual conferences.
According to Brian Pauling (1997), Plains FM has long been one of the most technologically sophisticated community access stations in the country. It maintains that position by constantly upgrading its equipment as new technology becomes available. The available technology for radio broadcasting is constantly developing and it is arguable that 'an increasingly sophisticated listenership is expecting higher technical standards of the station' at the same time as 'programmers are seeking access to the same level of professional equipment to that used by commercial broadcasters' (Pauling, 1997:58).

However, Australian community broadcaster Nick Bastow (1998:9) suggests that community radio stations should be alert to the possibility of 'technology seduction', where excitement over new technology and the professional sound it offers overrides other considerations. He suggests that stations have to remember that radio technology is a means rather than an end in itself. Bastow (1998:9) states that 'the challenge with new technology is to make it serve our communities in the same way that microphones, panels and tape recorders' have done, because 'it's important that as a sector we are making sure that some groups aren't left out of the benefits new technology can offer'. Pauling (1997:58) also makes connections between technological development and exclusion:

*The challenge to stations that use such technology is to prevent any form of "technical closure" taking place. This happens when the technology becomes so complicated to understand and operate that fewer people are able to competently access it. This creates a technical "elite" who control the services of the station and excludes many programme makers (from) having true control over their programme.*

Pauling comments that technologically sophisticated stations like Plains FM need to actively work to avoid any form of 'technical closure' that will exclude the least advantaged programmers. In his view, two important elements in preventing such exclusions are 'regular and adequate training for volunteers and programme makers and a systems design that uses the technology to simplify access and use and not complicate it' (1997:58).

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88 For example, Plains FM was one of the first two Aotearoa/New Zealand stations to adopt computerised digital storage and studio production facilities in 1996. In June 2001, the station upgraded the technology in its on-air studio and early in 2003 it upgraded its whole computer operation to a new Windows based system.
While I am not suggesting that Plains FM has reached a position of 'technical closure', I am aware that the technology in use at the station has changed significantly since I first became involved as a teacher in 1994, and that these technological developments have led to re-definitions of what kind of material is 'broadcast-quality'. For example, when I began planning this research in 1998 the most commonly used off-station pre-recording equipment for community broadcasters was the portable Marantz audiotape recorder. Programmers would use these machines to pre-record interviews or other audio items for their programmes. Soon after I began broadcasting for Lesbian Radio in 2000, I was told by station staff that these machines were now to be used only as a last resort because the sound they produced was no longer considered good enough for broadcast. Instead, our programme group was encouraged to use the new Marantz portable minidisk recorders. The minidisk technology produces higher quality sound that does not deteriorate like that on audiotape and the material recorded can be edited in-machine without loss of quality. The minidisk machine offers broadcasters more creative freedom than the tape recorder because they can edit tracks without relying on the station staff. Minidisks are also easier for studio panellists to use in live shows as tracks are selected directly rather than cued up like audiotapes. However, the change to minidisk technology caused significant discussion within our programme group for two reasons. Firstly, the minidisk machine is slightly more complicated to use because it can do more than a tape recorder. While this required extra training for anyone who wanted to use minidisks, those who did train generally found the machines user friendly. However, fewer than half of the group's members are willing, or feel sufficiently confident in their ability, to use the minidisk machine for their programmes. Secondly, and perhaps more importantly, a professional quality minidisk machine of the sort used at Plains is expensive and unable to be covered by insurance. Because the group does not have funds to cover any loss, a group member borrowing the minidisk would be personally liable for the cost of repairs or replacement if the machine was damaged or stolen while in her possession. Some group members are simply unprepared to take such a financial risk. The potential for loss or damage also limits the range of venues into which programmers are willing to take the minidisk. Therefore, while the minidisk technology offers distinct benefits, its cost and level of technical sophistication can also be potential barriers to its widespread use by community broadcasters.
As station technology becomes more sophisticated and definitions of 'broadcast quality' develop, existing broadcasters have to be upskilled and new broadcasters face a higher threshold of technical knowledge and competence in order to reach the minimum standard of professionalism to be allowed on air. Given that individuals' fears of technology constitute one of the barriers to participation at Plains FM (discussed in Chapter Three), such changes are potentially significant for community access. When I interviewed station staff in January 2001, the consensus amongst staff members was that improvements in technology at Plains, and particularly the computerisation of the station's broadcasting operations, were making it easier rather than more difficult for community broadcasters to make programmes. They held this view despite their awareness that many of their Section 36c broadcasters have no, or little, computer experience when they come to Plains 89. Interestingly, by April 2003 one of those staff members was telling me that the station had experienced a drop off in volunteers that seemed to be associated with the 'dramatic' changes in the station's technology in the previous twenty-four months. This staff member suggested that it is now more difficult for the 'average person off the street' to come in and volunteer because most volunteer tasks at the station now require at least a basic level of computer skills. Some people who want to volunteer decide not to continue once they realise that computer skills are involved because they are 'afraid of the technology'. This person also suggests that many people who went through the school system before computers became widespread have a skills 'gap' that affects their ability to participate in many aspects of contemporary life, including Plains FM 90. These comments imply that the computerisation of broadcasting at Plains FM may have problematic consequences for the ability and willingness of some community members to access and utilise the station's resources 91.

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89 In the staff interview, one staff member suggested that the level of computer ownership and usage within the Plains FM participant body would be lower than the national average and that many who do own computers have 'older technology'. He says that particularly for some of those 'people who come to New Zealand as refugees' who 'may never have seen a computer in their lives', coming into Plains FM entails 'a big jump' technologically.

90 The huge range of jobs that now require 'computer tests' at or before job interviews was given as an example of how significant computer skills have become for everyday participation in community life.

91 At the same time, station staff say that the computerisation of afternoon and evening music shifts and an increase in community programmes being broadcast during the afternoons has reduced the station's need for volunteers, many of whom used to do 'continuity shifts' to cover breaks between scheduled programmes that involved reading community notices and disc-jockeying.
This implication is supported by comments made to me in informal conversations with two Lesbian Radio broadcasters. At the beginning of 2003, the station upgraded its entire computer system to a new, more sophisticated Windows system, a move that necessitated the retraining of all its existing broadcasters. According to station staff, they kept the old DOS system as long as they could but faced problems sustaining it because they were no longer able to obtain parts and servicing for what has become obsolete equipment within the industry. The new system offers broadcasters a wider range of technical options and capabilities for programme production. Plains staff members expect that it will eventually also provide better backup for programmers working alone in the station because when technical problems arise staff will be able to log on to the system from home and hopefully fix any glitches. However, the two women from Lesbian Radio who underwent training in the new system suggest that it has both advantages and disadvantages for community programmers. Both women believe that the new system would initially be more intimidating for new broadcasters without previous computer or knowledge because it requires more familiarity with basic computer skills than the previous system and there is more on-screen information to process. The new system has two computer screens rather than one and these screens contain more information in a variety of coded forms, like colours, symbols, words and numbers. The new computer system provides an example of the increasing skills-threshold required for new broadcasters to make it to air, and for existing broadcasters to remain on air. While in practice the new system may be only a little more complex than the previous one, there is a vast difference between adding a few extra steps to an already familiar process and learning a process from a place of complete unfamiliarity (as anyone who has tried to introduce the mysteries of computers to a complete novice can testify). The station is also experiencing some difficulties with the new system, which one staff member described as ‘buggy’. While some of these can be put down to ‘teething problems’, relying on computers always carries the risk of ‘overloading’ and ‘crashes’, and the station has had to publish instructions for programmers about dealing with such events (Airtime, 2003:4-5). The potential for computer crashes and the steps needed to deal with them add yet another element to broadcaster training.

92 The requirement for existing broadcasters to retrain when new equipment is implemented also means an additional commitment of time, a resource that some broadcasters already find in short supply (see Chapter Five).
My purpose in exploring the issue of technological development at Plains FM is to demonstrate the difficulty of its position with regard to technology and professionalism. Like every other media outlet, a community access radio station like Plains FM must constantly reassess its technological position. Plains FM is to a certain extent caught in an cycle of obsolescence that requires regular updating of equipment because computer and communications technologies are developing so quickly. The dilemma that faces community stations like Plains FM is how to embrace and utilise the opportunities offered by new technologies while still maintaining the station’s community-centred approach, its alternative nature, its ‘freshness’ and ‘difference’.

As Bastow (1998) and Pauling (1997) indicate, achieving the balance between these two objectives may require the station management to be wary of ‘technology seduction’ and to approach the question of new technologies by asking whether they are needed, whose needs they will serve and whether or how they can be made accessible to all communities that wish to use the station. Plains FM staff say that they are well aware of these technological dilemmas. They suggest that the key to managing technical change and staying accessible lies in training, and particularly in ‘tailor-making’ the training process and the level of technical participation to suit individual needs. If individuals want to broadcast but do not want to learn technical skills, they can regularly pre-record shows in the studio. One staff member says, ‘training is ongoing and free’ and new broadcasters are given as many opportunities as they need to practice off-air before going live with their shows. Once they go on air, ‘more often than not staff assistance is available immediately or by phone’ if broadcasters strike problems in the studio. Another staff member says that ‘staff are constantly trying to find ways to help broadcasters to feel more comfortable with all aspects of broadcasting. This is in the front of our minds constantly.’

Professionalism and funding
Based on extensive research, US media theorist Robert White (1984:22) argues that in order to survive in the long-term community media organisations need ‘a stable means of financing that avoids dependence on commercial income’. A key strength of the community access radio sector in Aotearoa/New Zealand thus far has been its relatively secure funding from NZOA. Although some stations like Plains were established before NZOA, the system by which NZOA contracts with access stations to provide programming
for Section 36c groups has allowed stations to develop and sustain their provision of airtime to underserved communities. The fifty to sixty percent of its funding Plains FM that generally receives from NZOA allows the station to subsidise airtime costs for Section 36c groups and to prioritise access programming for some of the most socially and economically disadvantaged groups within the wider Canterbury community. Given that some Section 36c broadcasters struggle to fund their programmes even with such subsidies (see discussion in Chapter Five), it is clear that without them many groups would be unable to broadcast at all. Plains programmers like Laura argue that 'without a strong funding base access stations would really struggle' to survive and to continue the 'access concept' - a position that the Australian experience seems to support.

Irma Whitford (1992:2) argues that funding difficulties have led many Australian stations to rely increasingly on commercial sponsorship. She suggests that this commercialisation negatively affects station content and schedules, introducing a 'pressure to be popular' in programming because sponsors prefer to support shows with larger audience numbers. She believes this pressure is likely to reduce stations' willingness to experiment with content, formats and techniques, and may spell the demise of specialist programmes aimed at small niche audiences. In her view, the changing of programming to attract sponsorship signals a 'shift away from the audience to the advertiser', a move antithetical to the philosophy of community access media (1992:2). Similarly, David Melzer argues that Australian community stations are now under considerable pressure to 'operate in a business-like manner in order to survive and develop' (Melzer, 2000:1). The problem is that, in the 'economic rationalist' parlance that dominates Australian media discourse (Thompson, 2000:30), a 'business-like manner' means maximising audiences, which in turn means becoming more 'professional', that is, more 'slick' sounding, more like commercial stations (Matthews, 1998). Melzer (2000:1) rejects this conflation of professional with commercial, saying that while stations should 'aim for high production values and sound business practices', prioritising 'slick production values' and making money should not be the primary objectives of community broadcasters. Instead, he says, stations should focus on 'the nature of community broadcasting,' which includes 'being part of your community, encouraging participation and providing a diversity of programming choices.'
However, as the conversation I overheard in Hobart indicates, not all Australian community broadcasters share Melzer’s opinion. Some see professionalisation in a commercial sense as a sensible survival strategy for their stations. Thompson says that a new breed of ‘much more commercial focused’ community radio, based on ‘effective marketing’ and ‘slick production values,’ is emerging to challenge the ‘traditional’ community-access focused model (2000b,7). In his view, the financial and competitive pressures on the sector, and the commercial success of some new breed commercialised community stations, are tempting more community stations to ‘reject the traditional “access” inspired model in favour of formula-driven formats believed capable of attracting larger audiences’ (2000b:7). He argues that a focus on audience numbers and commercialised formats imposes ‘inevitable restrictions’ on effective community participation, and threatens future funding for all community radio. Melzer (2000:1) agrees, saying that ‘if the principles of independence, diversity and access are not pursued’ within the community sector, ‘there are few arguments to justify the sector’s existence’ and therefore its use of spectrum and funding.

Thompson, Melzer and Whitford suggest that commercialising community radio stations is a risky endeavour. Thompson (1998) argues that by commercialising their programming stations not only risk their relevance and usefulness for the local communities they serve, they also risk their own survival. In his view, community access broadcasters who are ‘content to emulate the safe, tired formats of (their) commercial competitors’ will inevitably end up ‘sounding like inferior, synthetic copies of the original’ (1998:5). As a result, he says, they will be decimated by commercial competition. This position is supported by White (1984:24-5), who argues that trying to compete with commercial outlets for mass audiences has been one of the historical pitfalls of alternative communication movements. He says that the history of alternative communications ventures shows that groups who try ‘to beat the multi-national corporations at their own game by becoming more professional and technically sophisticated with appeals to a mass audience’ are likely to disappear, while groups that remain ‘alternative’ and retain their ‘grassroots qualities’ have more chance of survival (White, 1984:24-5).

What does all this mean for Plains FM? So far, the Aotearoa/New Zealand access sector has been cushioned from the full vagaries of market competition by government policy and
the relative security of its NZOA funding. However, political actions during the period of this research have raised questions about the future of access radio funding. One of the past strengths of NZOA was its independent source of funding from the Public Broadcasting Fee (PBF) paid by television owners. Although the income from the PBF did not keep pace with inflation, it did provide regular, guaranteed funding that could be spent only on public broadcasting. With the abolition of the PBF in July 2000, this funding security is gone, and NZOA must rely on funds allocated by government from general taxation. While the current Labour-dominated government is favourably disposed to public broadcasting and to the continuation of NZOA's existing work, and actually increased its funding in May 2003, the long-term future for both NZOA and the community access stations it funds is less secure. As former Broadcasting Minister Marion Hobbs points out, 'no public funding is sacrosanct' (NZBS, 1999:4). Therefore, the removal of the PBF means that the interests of the Section 36c audiences, a group already identified as underserved by commercial media, will in the future be subject to the political whim of the government in power. This political reality makes the Australian experience and White's warnings about commercialism highly relevant to the Aotearoa/New Zealand situation. The Australian situation offers a warning to stations like Plains FM of the difficulties of surviving and staying true to community access and community development ideals without a secure and independent funding base.

NZOA funding offers Aotearoa/New Zealand access stations protection from the creeping commercialism that many Australian stations have been experiencing and the risks to community access that it brings. Thus far, however much individual broadcasters aspire to achieve 'professional' production standards, Plains FM does not sound like a mainstream (commercialised) radio station. Its patchwork scheduling offers a variety of voices and languages and a diversity of music, cultures and styles impossible to find on commercial media. Its advertising is strictly limited and programmes vary in length from a few minutes

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93 Although exact levels of funding are not guaranteed from year to year, because stations have to re-apply annually for funding contracts, organisations like Plains FM have been able to plan on the basis of receiving 50-60 percent of their running costs from NZOA.

94 In an interview on Radio New Zealand (11/5/03) the broadcasting minister Steve Maharey voiced his own concern about the 'insecure' funding situation for broadcasting since the 'demise' of the PBF. He indicated that the government was trying to devise a longer term funding base for all public broadcasting through NZOA that would also remove the 'perception' that broadcasting funding is now 'less independent... from government involvement than it should be' (Maharey, 2003).
to several hour slots. In addition, its programming does not always run smoothly within or between shows, as inexperienced broadcasters make errors resulting in occasional moments of ‘dead’ air or jerky sound quality. These realities indicate that, to date, the station’s commitment to open participation is stronger than its commitment to mainstream ‘professional’ production values. However, in the less secure funding climate created by the removal of the PBF it may face pressure to do so in the future. Already, interviewees’ narratives reveal that individual participants’ desire for professionalism and their perceived ‘need’ to satisfy the expectations of audiences, funders and sponsors create a level of tension between the desire for open access/participation and the desire for consistent production quality. The Australian experience suggests that the way Plains FM negotiates the balancing act between these two elements will determine its community development potential for Section 36c groups in the future.

Valuing community in a “marketized” world

Early in this research I had an interesting conversation with a friend, an experienced practising social worker who was writing a Masters thesis in Social Work in her ‘spare’ time. Our topic was community development. I had worked as a community worker in the mid-1980s but had been out of the field for many years. I knew she had a background in community development approaches and hoped she could help me locate some recent community development literature. However, when I broached the subject, she laughed. Apparently, in the social services arena in which she works, community development is now widely seen as an ‘outmoded’ theory that is ‘too naïve and simplistic for a post-modern environment.’ According to my friend, the ‘community work’ practice model based on community development theory has been superseded by the ‘more professional’ ‘social work’ model as funding for social services provision in communities has become more ‘bureaucratic’. In her view, community development thinking is now ‘rare’ in the professionalised social work environment, primarily because its requirements and working style do not fit the accountability criteria of the tightly contested, competitive social services funding regime developed by the government during the late 1980s and 90s 95. However worthy its objectives, in a neo-liberal, ‘new managerialist’ social funding

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95 This perspective was supported by my recent discovery that, according to several current social work students, ‘community development’ features minimally in social work training courses at the University of Canterbury.
environment, she suggests, community development has become a bit of a 'lost cause' because it is difficult to fund. Consequently, community development approaches are now usually found only within some local government bodies, non-governmental organisations and relatively poorly funded 'self-help' groups, like mental health support groups.

I found the above conversation particularly interesting for two reasons. Firstly, it shed some light on why I had been unable to locate much recent Aotearoa/New Zealand-generated community development literature. Secondly, it highlighted for me the challenges facing a community development focused organisation like Plains FM in the current economic environment, where it seems that all organisations are expected to operate like businesses (Lyons, 2001). My friend's comments suggest that the ideals and practice of community development have been undermined almost to the point of ridicule within some Aotearoa/New Zealand public policy arenas as discourses of neo-liberal economics have become dominant. Jim McGuigan, (2001:126) supports this view when he says that neo-liberal market discourses are now so globally 'all-encompassing' that they 'make it virtually impossible to think outside of them'. He argues that the dominance of their 'powerful language of money and efficiency,' within which all value is 'reduced to exchange value,' has led to 'the marketization of everything' including social and cultural policy and communications media (McGuigan, 2001:129). The difficulty facing community development organisations like Plains FM is that their fundamental ideals, objectives and working styles are marginalised and undervalued within the largely marketized environment in which they are obliged to operate (Easton, 1997; Herman and McChesney, 1997; Lyons, 2001) 96.

In a marketized environment, a community access radio station like Plains FM is like a 'square peg in a neoliberal hole' (McChesney, 2001:np), because there are many ways in which it does not 'fit' dominant organisational norms. From a business-centred perspective the only kind of organisation considered legitimate and efficient is the profit-making firm

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96 I am not denying that valuable community development work happens in Aotearoa/New Zealand. The Christchurch City Council, for example, is strongly committed to community development and its Community Relations Unit employs a team of Community Development Advisors to service different areas of the city and suburbs. I am, however, suggesting that community development discourses are marginalised within the discursive fields of national public policy and social services provision where the language of business efficiency has become entrenched over the last two decades.
(Lyons, 2001), whereas Plains FM is a non-profit venture that makes money to survive rather than surviving to make money. Where profit-making firms emphasise the 'bottom-line' and compete with one another to generate short-term 'private' gains for investors, Plains FM aims to work collaboratively with its participant communities to produce longer-term community-centred or 'public' gains. Where neoliberalism favours large-scale operations with national and global reach, Plains FM is independent, small-scale and locally-focused. Where market approaches emphasise products, Plains FM is more concerned with community development processes.

Plains FM shares many of its 'differences' from the dominant business norm with other 'third sector' organisations, whether or not they have explicit community development philosophies. According to Lyons (2001) the 'third sector' is comprised of a range of formal, private, non-profit, democratically controlled, primarily voluntary, community based organisations that are not part of the public or business sectors. He argues that third sector organisations have their own 'special operating logic' because they 'engage with the world in a different way' and have 'different goals' than businesses (Lyons, 2001:223). For that reason, 'bottom-line' business measures of organisational effectiveness are 'a totally inappropriate measure' of success for third sector organisations (2001:227). The problem for Plains and other third sector organisations is that non-business objectives and measures of success are marginalised within a marketized environment. Consequently, while those individuals and communities participating in third sector organisations value them highly, the managers of the organisations often have difficulty conveying and promoting their objectives, projects and successes to policy-makers and funding bodies.

The difficulty of measuring 'value' and 'success' for community access stations becomes a problem when broadcasters are trying to fund their programmes and when stations are attempting to promote their work. The Australian situation suggests that it is this difficulty that leads some community stations to fall back on mainstream media definitions of professionalism, quality and success in broadcasting. Thompson (2000b:5) suggests that in Australia's marketized mediascape, 'the whole notion of community broadcasting is under challenge' as stations feel pressured to adopt business values at the expense of community development goals. The key issue for many stations is that measurable audience numbers generate revenue, whereas the term 'community' is seen as a 'dirty word' by many, and a
focus on community is therefore ‘not easy to explain or market’ (Melzer, 2000:1). In this climate, proponents of the ‘traditional’ model of community access media like Thompson are constantly forced into ‘justifying’ the social and cultural value of their sector and arguing its need to remain different from the commercial and public sectors (Thompson, 2000a:5).

As yet, community access radio stations in Aotearoa/New Zealand have not needed to fight for their right to broadcast spectrum or funding because of NZOA’s statutory responsibility under the 1989 Broadcasting Act to provide funding and practical support for access broadcasting. As part of its role it has developed a list of characteristics or ‘hallmarks’ of access radio that delineate the ways in which the access stations it funds must be different from other Aotearoa/New Zealand media. These hallmarks are very similar to the objectives and policies of Plains FM and are consonant with community development principles. While NZOA continues in its present form with a comparable level of funding, access radio stations like Plains FM have the support they need to enable them to continue to operate as community development ventures. However, because as a crown entity NZOA is vulnerable to changes of policy direction, I would argue that the dominance of neoliberal business-focused discourses in the wider public sphere remains a potential danger to their future functioning. If the definitions of professionalism and success in community stations come to be measured on the basis of market values, community stations will not survive. The Australian experience suggests that the struggle to construct an alternative and sector-specific definition of professionalism may be vital to the survival of community media. As commentators like Whitford, Melzer and Thompson point out, it is only by actively promoting the value of an alternative professionalism based on community building, community participation, diversity and distinctive audience-centred programming, that community access broadcasters can justify and sustain their existence. Without clearly articulated and sector-appropriate definitions of ‘quality’ and ‘professional broadcasting’ that emphasise their distinctive qualities, and the unique character of their contribution to their local communities, community access stations like Plains may have difficulty differentiating themselves from mainstream media forms and maintaining their ‘special significance’ and financial viability in an insecure broadcasting funding environment.
Conclusion:

In this chapter, I have focused on notions of professionalism at Plains FM in order to highlight some of the tensions and dilemmas that arise for the station from its hybrid construction as a media and a community development venture. These tensions and dilemmas are significant for this thesis because they have the potential to constrain the station’s ability to achieve its key objectives of community access, community participation and community development. The narratives of women broadcasters at Plains FM suggest that, at present, a diverse range of individual women and community groups are using Plains FM as a vehicle for access, skills development, community-building and community transformation. However, like any organisation, the station faces a number of structural constraints on its work. White (1984:26) argues that:

*the difficult task of people working to build a participatory system of communication is to integrate an idealistic commitment to long-range policy objectives, a continuing analysis of the structural factors influencing their movement and response to structural constraints.*

This ‘difficult task’ is one that Plains FM staff, broadcasters and volunteers negotiate on an ongoing basis. Structural and contextual factors like the commercialism within mainstream broadcasting, the influence of dominant understandings of broadcasting professionalism on listeners and broadcasters expectations, the business-first priorities of politicians, constant technological developments and the growing divide between those with and without technological skills all have the potential to impact on the ways in which Plains FM can operate now and in the future. Staff members say that, within these contextual constraints, they are constantly ‘juggling expectations’ and working to achieve a balance between the professional reputation and standards of the station and their commitment to community participation.

White (1984:22-3) argues that the process of juggling different and sometimes contradictory expectations and of managing the structural constraints within which participatory communications organisations must operate can be eased if certain key ‘political and economic conditions’ are in place. These include:
a) An administrative structure which preserves direct popular control or at least control through an institution with a close identification with this movement.

b) A stable means of financing that avoids dependence on commercial income.

c) Training of non-professional producers so that these are able to adapt the medium to their own uses and exploit all of the artistic and entertainment potential of the particular medium.

d) A legal status that legitimises participatory communications as normative or at least as a valued alternative within the national communication system.

e) A system of participation which can represent an increasingly pluralistic body of media users without allowing powerful minorities to dominate.

f) A philosophy of participatory communication which clearly distinguishes this communication system from conventional centralised communication but at the same time makes clear that participatory communication is consonant with the value traditions of a given national culture. (1984:22-3)

At the moment, Plains FM and other access stations in Aotearoa/New Zealand have some of these conditions in place at a national level. For example, 'a stable funding base' and 'legal status' is available to them through the legislation that makes NZOA responsible for the funding and existence of broadcast programming for Section 36c groups. The NZOA development of 'hallmarks' of community access radio also attempt to enshrine a 'philosophy of participatory communication' into national public broadcasting practice. Plains FM as an organisation attempts to ensure participation in its administrative structure through the existence of the Community Broadcasters Society (CBS) that represents broadcasters' needs to the management. The station's governing body, the Canterbury Communications Trust (CCT), the CBS and the station policies and rules also act as a means of ensuring that all broadcasters are able to be represented in decision-making and that no one group dominates the station culture and decision-making. The Plains FM formal objectives and policies attempt to enshrine the station's community participation and community development philosophies within the station's everyday operations. A staff member says that the station management also attempts to maintain the balance between participation and professionalism by only employing people at the station who have a
strong commitment to the 'spirit of Plains FM', meaning its community development and community access goals. In her view, the most important factor in maintaining that spirit of Plains FM is the staff awareness of the need to constantly balance the station's 'listenability' demands with its commitment to community 'participation'.

While all these measures make positive contributions to the station's community access objectives, my concern in this chapter has been to highlight the possibility of one or more of these measures changing in the future and to explore the potential implications of such changes for the station's work. I do not attempt to provide answers to the dilemmas I am discussing, but rather to suggest that the issues raised in this chapter need to be part of ongoing debates within the community access sector in Aotearoa/New Zealand.
A conclusion... and a beginning

Many a researcher would like to tell the whole story but of course cannot; the whole story exceeds anyone's knowing, anyone's telling.

Robert Stake, 2000:441

Plains FM is a work in progress, a constantly evolving dynamic entity with an ever-changing participant population of broadcasters, volunteers, staff members, governors, broadcaster representatives and listeners, all of whose motivations, values, practices and priorities influence the operations of the station during any period of time. This thesis explores experiential accounts of Plains FM, stories constructed in a specific time and place by some of its women participants about their experiences as broadcasters, volunteers or staff members at the station, which are then interpreted through my researcher's 'eye/I' (Kondo, 1990). This account does not attempt or claim to present 'the truth' or even 'a truth' about Plains FM or any of the women who participate within it. Neither is the full story of Plains FM told in these pages because there are many, many stories of Plains, past, present and future, that are not told or included here or have not yet unfolded.

What then does this particular researcher-constructed study have to offer? My answer to this broad question is threefold. Firstly, this research brings into public focus the unique experiences, practices, perspectives and struggles of women participants within a community media organisation that is little known outside of its own locality. Secondly, the experiential accounts and theoretical discussion contained within this thesis contribute to the wider international body of academic theory about community/citizens media or participatory communications. Thirdly, this story of Plains FM presents insights into the roles and place of the station within the wider Christchurch and Canterbury community (and by extension the Aotearoa/New Zealand nation), as perceived by its diverse participants.

Learning from the single case?

This research is a case study of a specific organisation operating within a distinct historical, geographical and political context. Robert Stake (2000:439) argues that, within academic research circles, 'case study method has been too little honored as the intrinsic study of a valued particular'. In this thesis, a central aim has been to honour the unique qualities of an
intriguing and highly valued organisation. Plains FM became the subject of this case study because of my location in Christchurch, my personal experiences at the station and my broader interests in community organisations, the media and community development. From the beginning, I wanted to approach Plains FM on its own terms in order to understand what is important about the station ‘within its own world’ (Stake, 2000:439). The women interviewed for this study had their own agendas for the interviews, agendas that for the most part seemed to involve a strong desire to help me to understand why they are passionate about Plains FM and why the station is valued and needed. Key themes of birthing, participation and belonging thread through their narratives and through this thesis, shifting my initial perception of Plains FM as primarily a media-focused venture. When interview after interview raised the issues of inclusion and exclusion, the difficulties of living in ‘someone else’s country’ and the community, identity and self-esteem benefits of participation at Plains FM, I could hardly fail to see the whole research project differently and to re-focus on the station’s community development and transformative roles. I recognised strong points of connection across interview narratives, despite the huge diversity in participants’ backgrounds, experiences and personal motivations, and I was moved by their stories to make some connections with my own experiences and those of others in my acquaintance.

Following Stake (2000), I would argue that the potential for these kinds of connections to be made underscores the value and significance of intrinsic case studies97. In presenting my understanding and analysis of the station’s central issues, tensions and struggles, it is my hope that people will find in this case report ‘certain insights into the human condition, even while being well aware of the atypicality of the case’ (Stake, 2000:443). I would argue that it is the particularities of Plains FM (its hugely diverse participant population; its struggles to balance conflicting media and community development objectives; its non-commercial status within a commercially driven mediascape; and the dynamic personalities, passionate commitment and drive of its many participants) that make the station vital, intriguing and uniquely interesting. While this study is focused on those unique qualities, limited comparisons are nevertheless able to be made with other

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97 I refer here to Stake’s (2000:437) definition of ‘intrinsic’ case studies as those that focus primarily on the unique particularities of the single case as opposed to ‘instrumental’ case studies where the primary purpose of research is to highlight a wider issue.
organisations because the particulars within this thesis suggest the existence of some similarities and differences between Plains FM and any other radio station, any other third sector organisation or any other diverse, multi-ethnic, multi-cultural organisation. In particular, I hope that other community development organisations and community media practitioners will find some points of recognition, insight or comparison within this study.

For example, there are insights to be gained from the relative longevity of Plains FM. Like many other community media organisations around the world, Plains FM was set up in a wave of enthusiasm and passion for the idea of radio programming produced by, for and about ordinary Canterbury people. Establishing their own radio station and their own voices on the airwaves opened new avenues of communication and connection for those who identified with minority communities or special interest groups. Robert White’s (1984) research suggests that many community media ventures that begin with strong ideals and high levels of energy tend to founder over time, or are gradually co-opted by mainstream or commercial values. What makes Plains FM unusual is that, fourteen years on, its participants still feel the same passion for their station and the station still publicly promotes its original objectives of community participation and offering public space for minority voices and identities. Unlike those many other media ventures and other types of voluntary community organisations that run out of steam, fail to secure long-term funding or implode in a storm of bitter in-fighting, Plains FM continues to grow and attract new broadcasting groups. As an organisation, it may suffer the expected ebb and flow of participation and it may be flawed, but it is still functional and highly valued. Participants in this research are adamant that the loss of Plains FM would be an immense blow to the Canterbury community which indicates that something within the Plains FM recipe is working for these Christchurch people.
Community media theory: one case amongst many?

Ultimately then, practices of media production are relevant not only because of their introspective and inquiring potential at the individual level or because they constitute sites of creative exploration of identities and definitions of a collective self but also because they provide a site for social struggle and resistance. It is at this site that alternative images are created as well as the development of a communication proposal that addresses the group, the community, or the audience, through the identification of common goals (struggles, needs, entertainment, and pleasure).

Pilar Riano, 1994:123

Media researcher Nick Jankowski argues that utilising qualitative research methods for the study of community media ventures can be ‘the foundation of a better understanding of what community media are – and might become’, and he suggests that ‘most of the qualitative research on community media remains to be undertaken’ (1991:173). This study constitutes a contribution to the understanding of the potential of community media by shining a spotlight on the participation of women within Plains FM. It contributes to the international body of research and theory on community media practice by offering insights into the ways that participating in community radio can, as Pilar Riano suggests, have significant consequences at the level of the ‘individual’ and ‘collective self’, while also highlighting the social struggles and symbolic challenges that media like Plains FM can generate and the complex and challenging processes of attempting to create and sustain an alternative community development-driven media venture.

Station participants’ use of the birthing metaphor in Part Two suggests that, at the individual and collective levels, participation at Plains FM has the potential to be renewing and transformative. Individual women learn broadcasting skills that are transferable into other technical and public speaking arenas and, as the discussion in Chapter Three highlighted, these new skills and the social networks that women develop at Plains FM open doors to opportunities in other areas of their lives. Many of the women who broadcast at Plains do so in groups, as part of a community programme. The skills and confidence they develop spill over into their community interactions and the information that they
share with their listeners also circulates within their communities with the potential to seed community change and renewal.

Many women who participate at Plains FM also participate in other personal and community endeavours, taking their experiences at the station with them. The faces and voices of individual Plains FM participants, past and current, are recognisable in public places throughout the Canterbury and Aotearoa/New Zealand social, cultural and political landscape. They are active participants in local politics (Faimeh Burke, Fendalton-Waimari Community Board), national politics (Pansy Wong, National Party list MP and Asian Affairs spokesperson), National Radio programming (Ruth Todd and Morrin Rout, presenters of National Radio’s Bookmarks), local community funding bodies (Jeannie Pera, Community Organisations Grants Scheme) and various cultural committees and community boards. They are religious, cultural, business and ethnic community leaders; they are activists, school students, authors, craftspeople, philosophers, environmentalists, and lovers of a huge variety of musical traditions and styles.

For many, Plains FM has offered a stepping stone into new areas of endeavour, whether broadcasting school, employment in other radio stations, or university studies. One such broadcaster is Pacific programmer Niva, whose children became concerned watching her ‘mope in front of the television’ and talked her into becoming a Plains FM radio programmer. Niva asserts that the self-confidence and self-belief she gained from broadcasting her community programme fed into her later decision to begin the university study that led, during the period of this research, to her achievement of a bachelor’s degree. Another Plains FM success story is Pansy Wong, who won a New Zealand Radio Award for ‘Best Ethnic and Access Programme’ for the programme she co-founded and co-coordinated: Chinese Voice in the Garden City. Pansy developed many of her contacts and networks amongst the Asian and migrant communities while co-ordinating her Plains FM programme and went on to become a high-ranking National Party list member and Asian Affairs spokesperson.

The sense of personal achievement and community pride that derives from the radio awards was noted by more than one participant. Plains FM programmers have been named as top three finalists in the Best Ethnic and Access Programme category of the New
Zealand Radio Awards twelve times since 1993 and have won the award on five occasions. Pansy’s 1993 award was followed by a win for *Tama Atu Hau*, the Nuiean community programme run by Malotele Polata (1994); the *Kids FM* programme presented by children from Somerfield School (1996); *EFM* presented by Linwood High School Media Studies students (1997); and *Kiwiable*, a programme on disabled issues produced by Lesley Evans (2002). The achievement of an award or a finalist place signifies recognition of broadcasting excellence by the national radio industry and has been the occasion of great celebration within the station and the communities of the programmers. Winners and finalists receive plaques which are displayed prominently on the wall directly inside the station’s entrance where all station participants and visitors can see them. The significance of such public recognition is immense for at least one of those winners, who told me that gaining a Radio Award was the ‘highlight’ of her life: ‘I hang the little picture of my award on the wall and every day I look at it... and I tell myself, I achieved that... through hard work. At the end of the day you prove to yourself and prove to the people you represent, I’m just as good as anyone else.’

The individual benefits of participation in community media are supplemented by collective benefits for minority communities and communities of interest, as the Chapter Four discussion of the role of Plains FM in the preservation of minority languages and cultures, information sharing, community education, social capital building and the enactment of cultural citizenship highlights. These collective objectives of participation in community access radio lead me to support Nick Couldry’s (2002:29, 26) argument ‘for the centrality of alternative media for media research’; firstly, because alternative media provide rich insight into media power structures, and secondly, because alternative media have the potential to function as ‘media practices which contest the terms of contemporary mediated citizenship’. Following Scott, Couldry suggests that alternative media are the ‘weapons of the weak’ within a mediascape that concentrates symbolic power in large-scale global media institutions. He argues that, while alternative media practices tend to be dismissed by media researchers and theorists because they appear to be ‘weak’ and ‘cut off from wider structures of power’, in fact it is their ‘weakness that registers (in reverse) the vast power differentials at stake’ in contemporary structures of media power (Couldry, 2002:26). What Couldry is suggesting is that mainstream media power to monopolise representational resources is effective because it is invisible and taken for granted.
Alternative media projects like Plains FM are significant because they represent a refusal to simply accept media power and an assertion of the ordinary citizen’s right to ‘share in society’s resources for representing itself’ (Couldry, 2002:24).

As Couldry (2002:30) argues, to challenge mainstream media inequalities and exclusions by becoming a community media producer and naming the world differently ‘is not irrelevant dreaming; it is part of reflecting on who we are and who we can be.’ Through their offering of the ‘cultural gift’ of their ‘different eye’ on the world (Melucci, 1996), and their willingness to ‘dissent in the realm of the symbolic’ (Rodriguez, 2001:21), broadcasters at Plains FM constantly (re)construct what it means to be a member of a particular Section 36c community and to be a Cantabrian and a New Zealander. By using their programmes and their participation at Plains FM as a means to reach out to other communities and cultures, many of them also create the potential for cross-cultural dialogues and social networking. Their willingness to engage in such dialogues opens the possibilities for new understandings to develop within the space of the local public sphere that will interact with, and compete with, existing ‘commonsense’ assumptions and knowledges.

This research also adds to the body of literature on the ongoing organisational challenges that community media ventures face, an aspect of community/participatory media research that White (1984) and Jankowski (1991) have identified as requiring further attention. Discussion in Part Three suggests that one key risk an established station like Plains FM must constantly face is complacency. If the station staff and governors become complacent about, or lose sight of, the station’s community development objectives and if they allow its operations to tick over rather than constantly seek for new directions and new outreach potential, the station is likely to stagnate and become stale (just as staff suggest that programmes stagnate). Or worse, perhaps, the station may become indistinguishable from the surrounding commercial mediascape. Radio is by definition a dynamic medium, programmes are broadcast and lost to the ether, the schedule constantly moves on to another programme, another community perspective. In access radio, programmes and broadcasters also move on, the station population is dynamic and shifting, people and groups come and go as interest, motivation, energy and funding levels wax and wane. While some long term broadcasters were part of birth of the station, many new members
are unaware of the station’s history. The shifting nature of the organisation’s make-up and the diversity of its membership population at any one time make for a challenging mix, which also suggests a need to be wary of complacency in management practices.

In my Chapter Five discussion, I explored the notions of the station as a harmonious ‘family’ and ‘community’ that circulate within Plains FM. I suggest that participants’ narratives tend at times towards an overly idealistic assessment of the extent to which the ‘ideal community’ of the station has been achieved. The danger in such an assessment is that too strong an investment in the ideal will obstruct a clear understanding of the actual state of relations within the station. That is, the inevitable tensions and conflict that arise within any diverse community organisation will be unnoticed or even suppressed by participants in the interests of maintaining the appearance of harmony. This was, to a certain extent, what members of Lesbian Radio and Outwaves suspected the station staff were doing with regard to the Mr X situation when it became clear that complaints against Mr X had been made by several different broadcasting groups before any action was taken by the management. Plains FM will not feel welcoming or inclusive if its participants feel either that they cannot raise problems and questions about the station’s operations or that their concerns are not heard and dealt with when they are raised. Suppression or denial of conflict presupposes that it acts as a destructive force, whereas conflict and tension are an inescapable part of any group activity and can be highly constructive when they provide the provocation needed to move an organisation in creative new directions. In a sense, the Mr X situation did just that, because its eventual resolution re-affirmed the importance of maintaining a safe and inclusive environment for all participants in the station and led to changes in station policy and practice.
Plains FM, place and belonging

You always felt like you were part of it when you walked in the door, that this was “our place”.

Dianne, ex-programmer, Solo Mothers Speak.

While I raise the spectre of complacency as a potential risk to the community development objectives of Plains FM, for the most part the participants in this research are happy with the station and feel a significant sense of ownership in it. They strongly position the station as a wonderful asset to the Canterbury community and as a welcoming place where they feel a sense of belonging, where their differences are accepted and valued. This perspective on the station was voiced most vociferously by station participants who are also members of minority ethnic, cultural or special interest groups. This representation of Plains FM is supported by my observation that it is impossible to spend time at Plains FM without being exposed to a range of cultural information and interactions. The walls are adorned with posters and flyers promoting community events and messages in many languages and all sorts of people draw one another into conversation as they share station spaces. The station social events make the ethnic and cultural diversity within Christchurch colourfully and audibly evident, as Cook Island drummers share the stage with Thai musicians, Indian singers and Irish country dancers (for example), and the food served represents a range of culinary traditions.

What does it mean for Christchurch and Canterbury to have in its midst an organisation that is so deliberately and proudly diverse? As noted in Chapter One, Christchurch and the Canterbury region are less ethnically diverse than the Aotearoa/New Zealand average. Christchurch has also had its share of racially-motivated crime, discrimination and social disturbance ((Brett, 2000; Keenan, 1997a; Keenan, 1997b; Keene, 1998; McCarthy, 2003b). At Plains FM, the diversity of the station is used as a key promotional focus in the slogan that appears on its printed programme schedules and other flyers: ‘Discover a World of Difference’ (see Appendix A). Its public representation of difference is unrelentingly positive and celebratory, aiming to introduce Cantabrians to, and remind them of, the diversity within their region. Any kind of denigration on the basis of race, ethnicity, national origin, gender, sexuality, age, religion, dis/ability or political belief is officially
proscribed (Plains FM, 1997, 2000). While this clearly does not guarantee that such denigration will not occur, the culture of the station minimises the likelihood of such behaviour within the station, and its social and operational functions often encourage the interaction of people who would not otherwise be exposed to such different perspectives and worldviews from their own. Like many of those I interviewed, through my personal involvement as a broadcaster and CBS member at Plains FM, I have been introduced to individuals from a range of cultural groups, been invited to their community events and broadened my understanding of their worlds. In turn, when I am asked which programme I am affiliated with, I often confront station participants unfamiliar with lesbianism with my very ordinary lesbian identity. Small, everyday interactions like these have the ongoing potential to lead to small, everyday transformations.

This study highlights the significance of Plains FM’s community programming as a contributor to the diversity and to the local flavour of the Canterbury public sphere. Plains FM is, unabashedly, a local community station with a strong Canterbury identity that is promoted in the slogans it uses for the ‘station IDs’ that are liberally sprinkled through its programming, like ‘Made in Canterbury: community radio Plains FM,’ and ‘96.9: Bringing community radio to the local community.’ The station’s strongly local identity contributes to the reason why participants in this study feel they have such a strong stake and sense of ownership in Plains FM. For example, one comments: ‘You get such a strong sense of your own place here, of where you stand. That’s what makes us strong and getting stronger.’ Another suggests that ‘the wider you get out in the world and the bigger it gets, the more people actually want to retain their own identity, and I think Plains FM has an identity in Christchurch and people see it as a focus for a lot of what is going on for them.’ For this participant, the local identity of Plains will only make it ‘more important in the world of communications for Canterbury’ in the increasingly globalized future. This research documents the significance for participants of the local and their expressed need and desire to participate in the local public sphere where they can speak their languages and vocabulary, and explore and constantly renegotiate their cultural values, their identities and their place within Canterbury and Aotearoa/New Zealand.
Final Words...

This research is a case study of participation, based upon a community development understanding of what community access media are about. What this research does not do is analyse the content or explore audience reception of Plains FM community programming. As discussed in Chapter One, access stations like Plains FM are ‘alternative’ and fundamentally ‘different’ from mainstream media models because of their philosophical position that ‘the important thing about access is who broadcasts, not who listens’ (Cruikshank & Pauling, 2000: 12). For that reason, this study has explored the perspectives of those involved at the station as broadcasters, volunteers and staff members. However, from the point of view of several participants in this research, greater understanding of the way in which their programmes are received by their intended and actual audiences would be useful, both for a personal evaluation of the extent to which they are achieving their objectives and as a tool for raising programme sponsorship. Audience reception is also an area of research need identified by Jankowski (1991: 173), who argues that ‘the audience use of community programming is not well understood.’ For these reasons, an audience reception study would therefore be a useful follow-up to this research.

Other potential areas of investigation would be the discourse analysis study that I considered for this project (discussed in Chapter Two) and a comparative study across the community access stations in different regions of Aotearoa/New Zealand. A discourse analysis study could explore the discourses in operation at Plains FM, in participant narratives and in the programming that broadcasters produce. It would have the potential to more fully explore the discursive tensions within the station culture and within the experiential stories constructed by participants. A comparative study of access stations would draw out the similarities and differences in the achievements and the struggles facing stations with a range of different historical, geographical, socio-cultural, financial positionings and serving different mixes of ethnic, cultural and special interest-groups. Plains FM is only one of eleven stations throughout the country and its longevity, size, location in a main centre and its financial position make it one of the three most secure stations in the country (Pauling, 1997). Smaller stations in the regions have different everyday logistical issues to face and a different mix of participant populations. A comparative study addressing the range of needs and issues of access stations would be of immense benefit to the community access sector within Aotearoa/New Zealand as its
participants work towards achieving a more secure future for their stations and their community development mission. However, in the absence of such a study, this research provides specific detail and concrete examples from one station’s perspective to support the lobbying arguments made to government and funding bodies by the Association of Community Access Broadcasters (ACAB), the community access broadcasters’ national representative body.

At the end of this research journey, I am left with a kaleidoscope of impressions of Plains FM and its participants. If there is one stand-out image of the station that remains with me it is the one encapsulated by Brian Pauling in his life-history interview about “Growing Plains” (Cruikshank and Pauling, 2000:10); it is an image that for me captures the essence of Plains FM’s potential and its challenges:

Community access broadcasting is like education. If it’s not messy it’s not working. Learning by definition is a dangerous activity. All good learning is subversive and it’s messy and it causes trauma. As you discover in the learning process, you sometimes get shocked and you get afraid. All of those things are part of the human condition and they are part of access broadcasting. You’ve got to protect it, you’ve got to nurture it and allow that messiness to thrive. It’s very much like a mushroom pit; it’s got to have that fecundity in it to make it go.

Pauling’s mushroom pit metaphor emphasises that the relationships and processes of community access broadcasting and community stations will never be tidy and straightforward, but that their messiness and trauma do not have to be perceived as negative. Instead they might be understood as part of a creative, rich, organic compost that is nurturing new learning and new possibilities. This research suggests that the challenges facing Plains FM are to constantly operate on the edge, to keep its fecundity and messiness, to remain true to its grassroots community development goals and to keep open to new broadcaster groups, new technologies, new learning, new connections with other community organisations and to keep the pressure on government policy and funding bodies so that the community access crevice in the mediascape (Rodriguez, 2001) remains viable for those who most need it, those who have no other means by which to speak to their fellow New Zealanders.
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APPENDICES
Please Support Us!
Plains FM96.9 – Te Reo Irirangi O Te Maania - "The voices/languages in the air over the plains!"

To continue our valuable efforts to create true community broadcasting, we need your support. We are a charitable trust, so donations are tax-deductible. Please clip this form and return it to Plains FM96.9. If you require a receipt please include your address.

Yes, I wish to support Plains FM96.9 by donating: (please circle)

$100.00 $50.00 $0.00

Receipt required? Yes ☐ No ☐

My address is

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Thank You

Plains FM96.9 expresses its thanks to our major funder, NZ on Air, Irirangi Te Motu.

Visit them at www.nzonair.govt.nz

Programme Schedule August 2003

PO Box 222-97
Christchurch 8001
Phone 365-7997
Fax 340-0967
Studio 340-0969
Email info@plainsfm.org.nz
Web www.plainsfm.org.nz
MONDAY

8.00am BBC WORLD SERVICE 60 mins
9.00am CATHOLIC RADIO 60 mins
9.30am CARTOLINA 30 mins
11.00am BBC WORLD SERVICE 60 mins

TUESDAY

8.00am BBC WORLD SERVICE 60 mins
9.00am CATHOLIC RADIO 60 mins
9.30am CARTOLINA 30 mins
11.00am BBC WORLD SERVICE 60 mins

WEDNESDAY

8.00am BBC WORLD SERVICE 60 mins
9.00am CATHOLIC RADIO 60 mins
9.30am CARTOLINA 30 mins
11.00am BBC WORLD SERVICE 60 mins

THURSDAY

8.00am BBC WORLD SERVICE 60 mins
9.00am CATHOLIC RADIO 60 mins
9.30am CARTOLINA 30 mins
11.00am BBC WORLD SERVICE 60 mins

FRIDAY

8.00am BBC WORLD SERVICE 60 mins
9.00am THE VOICE OF PACIFIC WOMEN 60 mins
10.00am FRANCOFOLIES 60 mins
11.00am BBC WORLD SERVICE 60 mins

SATURDAY

8.00am BBC WORLD SERVICE 60 mins
9.00am CATHOLIC RADIO 60 mins
9.30am CARTOLINA 30 mins
11.00am BBC WORLD SERVICE 60 mins

SUNDAY

7.30am DANCE ADVENTURES 60 mins
8.00am THE VOICE OF PACIFIC WOMEN 60 mins
9.00am CATHOLIC RADIO 60 mins
9.30am CARTOLINA 30 mins
11.00am BBC WORLD SERVICE 60 mins

Mondays

Plains FM great music 6.55am
9.00am BBC WORLD SERVICE 60 mins
9.30am CATHOLIC RADIO 60 mins
10.00am PBS Screen Show with Sue Frey and Judy Pyne 30 mins
11.00am BBC WORLD SERVICE 60 mins

Tuesdays

8.00am CATHOLIC RADIO 60 mins
9.00am BBC WORLD SERVICE 60 mins
10.00am PBS Screen Show with Sue Frey and Judy Pyne 30 mins
11.00am BBC WORLD SERVICE 60 mins

Wednesdays

8.00am BBC WORLD SERVICE 60 mins
9.00am CATHOLIC RADIO 60 mins
10.00am PBS Screen Show with Sue Frey and Judy Pyne 30 mins
11.00am BBC WORLD SERVICE 60 mins

Thursdays

8.00am BBC WORLD SERVICE 60 mins
9.00am CATHOLIC RADIO 60 mins
10.00am PBS Screen Show with Sue Frey and Judy Pyne 30 mins
11.00am BBC WORLD SERVICE 60 mins

Fridays

8.00am BBC WORLD SERVICE 60 mins
9.00am THE VOICE OF PACIFIC WOMEN 60 mins
10.00am FRANCOFOLIES 60 mins
11.00am BBC WORLD SERVICE 60 mins

Saturdays

7.30am DANCE ADVENTURES 60 mins
8.00am THE VOICE OF PACIFIC WOMEN 60 mins
9.00am CATHOLIC RADIO 60 mins
9.30am CARTOLINA 30 mins
10.00am BBC WORLD SERVICE 60 mins

Sundays

7.30am DANCE ADVENTURES 60 mins
8.00am THE VOICE OF PACIFIC WOMEN 60 mins
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9.30am CARTOLINA 30 mins
10.00am BBC WORLD SERVICE 60 mins
Ideas, Culture, Music.

Plains FM96.9 is a non-commercial station dedicated to reflecting the changing face of New Zealand culture and ensuring that under-represented groups have access to a media outlet. Ideas, culture and music are positive motivators - and they're the reason people listen to and participate in our station.

Participation.

Plains FM96.9 is founded on the idea that participation and involvement in the media enables people in the community to create and deliver content that is important to them. Programmes are made by, for and about the communities that they target - we are a station for the community to use!

Most people begin with little or no experience and go on to become skilled and independent broadcasters.

Plains FM96.9 trains broadcasters in the technical aspects of broadcasting and all skills needed to maintain programmes - planning and presentation, sponsorship & advertising, interviewing, and media law.

Plains FM96.9 staff are accustomed to and enjoy working with people from different cultures and backgrounds.

Low Costs

We aim to keep costs as low as possible to keep the medium accessible. Broadcasters pay an annual subscription ($50 individuals, with group discounts available) and ongoing airtime costs (from $27 - $90 per hour depending on the programme). There is no charge for the actual training, or the use of our equipment. Actual costs will vary between different groups.

Radio is a fun and fast form of media. With professional training and equipment, Plains FM 96.9 helps minority / under represented groups to have access to, and a voice in, the local media. We guide you through the training process, and advise on funding options and promotion - all to help you make great local radio. If you represent an ethnic group that is not listed, we would like to hear from you! Please contact the station for more information.
Arabic
Saturday 7.00pm NIUROLHIDA Arab and Islamic culture, customs and history; information and advice for Arabs and moslems new to New Zealand; Presented by Hasan Toubat; 60 mins
Sunday 7.00pm THE ARABIC SHOW News, songs and talk; in Arabic; presented by the NZ Arabic Christian Fellowship; 60 mins

Cantonese
Sunday 11.00am HAPPINESS IN LIFE Buddha's Light International Association; in Cantonese and English; teaching, interviews; 30 mins.
Sunday 8.00pm CANTERBURY CHINESE VOICE For the Chinese community; in Cantonese and Mandarin; local and international news, comment, local events, music and entertainment; 2 hours. http://listen.to/ccxmln

Cook Island Maori
Sunday 6.00pm TE REO O TE VAIA TANGATA Cook Islands culture, music, information and devotions; with support from the Pacific Islands Radio Trust; 60 mins.
Monday 7.00pm TE MATO I PAO IA MAAU Current affairs and local events, information on health, law, housing, education, Cook Islands history and music; in Cook Island Maori; presented by Jeanne Peria; 60 mins

Dutch
Sunday 5.00pm ECHO RADIO For the Dutch community; in Dutch; presented by Theo Boekel and team; news from The Netherlands, music, local news; also broadcast on other NZ access stations; 60 mins repeated Monday at 10.00am

Fijian
Sunday 1.30pm LOTU KABURAKI For the Fijian community; Fijian songs, hymns, prayers, religious teaching; presented by Pastor Vilame Tuisoa, and Pene Naisau 60 minutes
5.00pm TANGI MAAU CJA information and music for the Fijian community; presented by Lui Nakaroi in Fijian; 60 mins.

French
7.30pm FRANCOFOLES French language and culture, presented by Caroline Francois and Martine Marshall for the Alliance Francaise; sponsored by the Cultural and Division of the French Embassy; 30 mins every second Wednesday - repeated 9.30am the following Monday

Hindi
Tuesday 7.00pm GEET MALA Hindi language programme with news of local events, information, history and stories for children. Presented by the Indian Social and Cultural Club; 60 mins

Saturday 9.00pm RADIO NAVTARANG Local events, music and fun for the Hindi speaking community; presented by Avinesh Naidu; 60 mins

Italian
Wednesday 7.30pm CARTOLINA Italian language, music, interviews and culture presented by Wilma Laryn from Societa Dante Alighieri of Christchurch; in Italian and English; 30 mins every second Wednesday - repeated 9.30am the following Monday.

Japanese
Tuesday 10.00pm TIPSTOCK ZIPANG A fun show full of the latest music from Japan and survival info for students from Japan
Wednesday 9pm NIHONGHO RADIO for Japanese speakers in Christchurch with local and international news, hints on speaking English, events, music and information; 55 mins
Sunday 10.30pm JAPS DOWN UNDER FROM JAPAN Yuji Hiruma and Naoko Kudo report from Japan; 15 mins

Korean
Monday & Wednesday 10.00pm RADIO KOREA Korean language and culture programme for Korea living in Christchurch; 60 mins
Friday 9.00pm RADIO KOREA Youth show with music and fun for young Koreans living in Christchurch; 60 mins

Mandarin
Saturday 8.00pm GARDEN CITY SOUND OF HWA HSIN Asian culture and news especially Taiwanese; in Mandarin; 60 mins

Samoa
Friday 10.00am SAMOA E LE GALO Presented by the Samoa e Le Galo Trust; news, music, talkback, interviews; in Samoan; 5 hours
Saturday 7.00am UA TUSIA Samoan Seventh Day Adventist Church devotions; culture and music; in Samoan; 60 minutes
Sunday 8.30am UA TUSIA Samoan Seventh Day Adventist Church; 60 mins.
Friday 3pm FAATAUAINA O AIGA (Focus on the Family) - tips for parents, recipes, interviews, issues concerning families, presented by Tagisa Fau; 60 mins; weekly.

Scottish
Saturday 12.30pm BAND CONCERT Pipe band music, local and international contests, presented by Jim Fraser for the Canterbury Centre Royal NZ Pipe Band Association; sponsored by Robbie's Bar and Bistro; 30 mins every second Sunday.

Sunday 12.30pm SCOTTISH HALF HOUR Music of Scotland; with Bruce Lawson and Gordon Steele; 30 mins every 2nd Sunday.

Shetland Islands
Sunday 12.00pm THE SHETLAND CONNECTION Discover the Shetland Isles and what their descendants are doing to keep alive Shetland's diverse culture; every two months; 30 mins

Somali
Mondays 5pm SOMAU COMMUNITY RADIO Somali culture and music; 60 mins - returning soon

Spanish
12.00 noon ASI ES LATINOAMERICA News, music and people from the countries of Latin America; produced and presented by the ALE team; in Spanish; 60 mins

Tongan
Saturday 8.00pm GARDEN CITY SOUND OF HWA HSIN Asian culture and news especially Taiwanese; in Mandarin; 60 minutes

Thai
returning soon VOICE OF DHARMA A programme for all Buddhists by the Thai Buddhist Trust of Christchurch; 30 mins

Tuesday 6.30am LEO O TAKA I FONUAMAHU Translating issues of interest to the Tongan community; with news; music links with Auckland and Wellington access radio and with Tonga and Australia; 90 mins

Saturday 6.00pm AMAI SELF AWARENESS Aims to minimise cultural differences, strengthens the family unit, in Tongan and English; presented by Sione Lei for Amai Development; 60 mins

Saturday 10.00pm MO'UI IA KALAIASI Preaching the gospel to the Tongan community; with Rev Amone Tongilava and Viliami Taufoou; 90 mins

Friday 10.00pm VOICE OF THE FRIENDLY ISLES News, interviews and music in Tongan, presented by David Kolo, and Amanaki Misia and Noel Ofa; 2 hours.
Radio Women - a case study of Plains FM as a vehicle for women’s access to broadcasting

Researcher: Rowan Jeffrey  
MA student,  
University of Canterbury  
Phone university 366 7001 ext 7968  
home 3859764

Supervisor: Dr Julie Wuthnow  
Phone 364 2702

You are invited to take part in a research project focusing on the experiences and perceptions of women working at Plains FM. I am interested in why women choose to work at Plains, in the skills and experiences they bring with them, and in the personal, practical and professional benefits they gain through their involvement in the station. I want to know what roles women perform in the organisation and how they perceive their personal contribution to the organisation, to programming, and to the community. I am also interested in women’s perceptions of the role Plains plays in the wider community. In particular, I want to know how effective women believe the station is in meeting the needs of women listeners and providing a voice for women.

If you agree to participate in the study, you will be asked to meet with myself, Rowan Jeffrey, for an interview of no longer than one hour. This interview will take place at a time and place convenient to you, and will be tape recorded and transcribed. As a follow-up to the interview you will be asked if you want to check the interview transcript because it is important to me that your comments are not misrepresented and that confidentiality is maintained.

If you take part in the study, you have the right to:

a) Refuse to answer any particular question, and to withdraw from the study at any time  
b) Ask any further questions about the study that occur to you during your participation  
c) Provide information on the understanding that it is completely confidential to the researcher, and that you will not be identified in any reports prepared from the study without your consent  
d) Examine the transcript of the interview, amend details which may compromise confidentiality, and indicate any part of the transcript that you do not wish to be used  
e) Be given access to a report of the findings from the study when it is completed and published  
f) Determine the disposal of interview tapes, transcripts of interviews, and personal documents made available to the researcher

Information collected during this project will be used as the basis for my MA thesis at the University of Canterbury. I will summarise the findings in a report to Plains FM and possibly in future publications for academic journals or a conference presentation.

I hope that you will agree to participate and that you will find the experience useful. Please feel free to contact me, or my supervisor Dr Julie Wuthnow (Ph 364 2702), if you require further information.

This project has been reviewed and approved by the University of Canterbury Human Ethics Committee.
INTERVIEW CONSENT FORM:

Radio Women - a case study of Plains FM as a vehicle for women’s access to broadcasting

Researcher: Rowan Jeffrey
MA student, Department of Feminist Studies
University of Canterbury

I have read and understood the description of the research project. On this basis I agree to participate as a subject in the project. I consent to being interviewed and to the interview being taped. I agree to the publication of the results of the project with the understanding that I will not be identified without my consent. I also understand that I may withdraw from the project at any time and that I may withdraw any of the information I have already provided.

Signed .......................................................... 

Date ............................................. 

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Interview Questions for Broadcasters:

Can you tell me how you got involved in Plains?

Can you tell me about your programme?
- Who works on it?
- What is the aim?
- What does it offer your community?
- What sort of issues does it cover?
- Do you have any special parts/items for women?
- (given 36c) Is it important/necessary to have special items for women?

Can you tell me how you got involved in Plains FM?
- Motivations?
- What have you learnt? Has it been helpful to you personally?

Is it easy to get other women involved in your programme?

Are there any things that might make it difficult for other women in your community to approach Plains?

What is your experience of the staff and systems at Plains?

Do you think it’s important to have a place like Plains for ordinary people to use?

Is access radio important for women?

36c and women: is it important for women to be included in this category? [explain]

What do you think Plains offers women audiences?

Do you think the station does enough for women?

Do you listen to other programmes on Plains? What? Why/not?

Do you listen to other radio stations? What? Why/not?
Interview Questions for Staff Members:

What do you think attracts women to Plains?

Do you think men and women come for the same reasons?

Are there any particular barriers women might face in using Plains?

[Do these barriers limit the type of women who participate in Plains?]

What do you think Plains offers women audiences?

Do you think it is necessary to have the category of women in the 36c criteria? Why?

What is the role of Plains FM in the general mediascape of New Zealand?

Do you notice any differences in the way women and men approach volunteering or programme making?

Is gender relevant to participation at Plains FM?

Can you tell me about the ethnic and minority community programmes on Plains FM?

How do you deal with broadcasters that do not follow station rules?

How do you deal with conflict within the station?