"Openness through Sound": Dualcasting on Irish LGBT Radio

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This article explores how Ireland's first LGBT radio station, Open FM, attempted to offer LGBT radio in a heteronormative media landscape. It uses semi-structured interviews with two of the stations founders as well as posts from online LGBT message bulletin boards to argue how Open FM ultimately became ambivalent about its LGBT status and adopted a dualcasting strategy. Despite its ambitions to be a community-led radio station for Ireland's LGBT community, the dualcasting strategy of the station framed many of its endeavors between the mainstream standards of radio broadcasting and the community of interest that their licence claimed to serve.

Open FM was a temporary community radio station that aimed to serve an Irish LGBT audience. However, in terms of the vision for the station, the production practices it adopted, and its reception by the audience, Open FM was ambivalent about its LGBT status. Initially intended to be a platform for queer resistance and one that would contest the broader heteronormative Irish radio landscape, the authors argue that Open FM ultimately adopted a dualcasting strategy, which attempted to appeal to both the gay community while also maintaining a heterosexual audience. Sender (2007, p. 305) coins the term "dualcast" to theorize the connections between programs and imagined audiences. Sender's study of gay-themed programming on U.S. cable network Bravo argues that it "dualcast" in order to attract fragmented audiences; in short Bravo ensured that the same show appealed to different audiences. The authors further contend that a similar strategy of dualcasting was deployed in the context of Open FM. For this reason, it is our intention to expand upon the application of the idea of dualcasting to describe how Open FM reached its audience, but also fostered a dualcasting approach to the vision for the station and within its production practices, whereby it tried to

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accommodate both heteronormative and homonormative positions simultaneously. As defined by Lauren Berlant and Michael Warner, heteronormativity

> identifies the way social and political institutions assume the most desirable forms of kinship to be based on a monogamous intimacy between a man and a woman, who in turn reproduce the norm through the regulative institution of the heterosexual family. (Berlant & Warner, 2002, p. 194)

Homonormative, as Lisa Duggan refers to it, is "a politics that does not contest dominant heteronormative assumptions and institutions, but upholds and sustains them, while promising the possibility of a demobilized gay constituency and a privatized, depoliticized gay culture" (2002, p. 179).

Despite its ambitions to be a community radio station that was openly LGBT, in reality Open FM's vision, program content, its production staff and its imagined audience were all directed at the maintenance of heteronormative broadcasting values. Similarly, the configuration of LGBT sexualities on-air, in terms of content and radio packages, were homonormative. Moreover, the reception of the station by the LGBT audience further underscores how the station only partially met the needs of its alleged community-audience, as documented in the listener's online discussions of the station's relationship to the LGBT community. The production of LGBT themed programming did not primarily attempt to target gay audiences, a thread noted on the discussion forums ("Open FM LGBT Radio Station, 2010; "An LGBT Radio Station," 2010). Heteronormative approaches were taken to make the content and the station more appealing to the dual audiences that the station was ultimately

Open FM Schedule	
Weekdays, 10:00 a.m.–12:00 p.m.	Breakfast Booster
Weekdays, 2:00 p.m.–4:00 p.m.	Afternoon Delight
Weekdays, 4:00 p.m.–6:00 p.m.	Drive It! With Riyadh and Nicole
Saturdays, 4:00 p.m.–6:00 p.m.	Sat Nav
Saturdays, 8:00 p.m.–10:00 p.m.	Vinyl Touch
Sundays, 6:00 p.m.–8:00 p.m.	The Panti Show
Sundays, 8:00 p.m.–10:00 p.m.	Electrolook

striving to target. Despite the purpose of the initial license being aimed towards serving the LGBT community, Open FM did not deploy a strategy of gay narrowcasting, but instead targeted two specific audiences: the LGBT community and heterosexuals. Finally, the reasons this strategy was adopted, the authors position, was political and economic. With regard to the former, marriage equality was becoming a controversial political issue in Ireland at the time, and the founding members of the

station were conscious of making Open FM appealing to heterosexual audiences, in an attempt to shift attitudes and mindsets regarding the "acceptability" of LGBT people. The sample schedule for the show highlights the attempts to replicate other radio fare in Ireland.

Secondly, a dualcasting strategy was deployed as a mode of economic survival within a competitive radio market. As a Dublin based station, Open FM operated within a highly competitive region. Not only did the LGBT station have to compete with the national stations, Newstalk, Today FM, and the public service broadcaster, RTÉ, but popular Dublin specific outlets such as 98FM, FM104, and Q102, not to mention the plethora of community and local stations within the region. Open FM was a temporary radio station, granted a 30-day license by the Broadcasting Authority of Ireland (BAI) in 2010, and while the license was granted on the grounds that Open FM would serve the LGBT community, the precariousness of running an ephemeral, temporary station within such a competitive environment, prompted a vision of the station that would target the larger heterosexual audience.

Irish Radio and LGBT Identity

LGBT content and production on Irish radio has existed since the inception of Ireland's first radio station, 2RN (later Raidió Éireann and now RTÉ) in the 1920s. However, LGBT identities have occupied a very marginal position within broadcasting schedules. One of the earliest examples of an LGBT presence on Irish radio was BBC Northern Ireland's domestic serial drama "The McCooeys," broadcast on the radio service from 1949 to 1957. As Pettitt (2005, p. 207) has noted, the drama featured stereotypically camp character Derek, a window cleaner in an unhappy marriage with his wife and was clearly implied to be gay on the show. Derek's evident transgressions on air eventually resulted in him being excised from the show by the producers at BBC Northern Ireland. In the Republic of Ireland, it was only with foundation of the Irish Gay Rights Movement (IGRM) in 1974 that the LGBT community sought increased media visibility (Kerrigan, 2017). The IGRM hoped to mainstream LGBT identities, as a way of reconfiguring Irish perceptions of gay people. For much of the 1970s and 1980s, various LGBT rights groups canvassed radio and television programs as an extension of their collective action and activism, to varying degrees of success.

In short, LGBT radio content was shaped by mainstream programming priorities and institutions, which configured and framed it through the lens of heteronormativity. There was very little space for LGBT communities within Ireland to take to the airwaves for an open discussion of identity. In the 2000s, alternative queer media in Ireland was still largely confined to print formats, with the most prominent example being *Gay Community News* (1988–) and *Gay Ireland* (2001–2003). A significant development for queer radio in Ireland finally occurred in 2007 when the commercial station Newstalk launched "The Global Village," a weekly magazine show presented by a lesbian, Dil Wickremasinghe. It aimed at platforming the voices of

Ireland's most marginalized communities and frequently included LGBT content. The following year, in 2008, RTÉ's digital radio channel, RTÉ Pulse, launched another LGBTQ focused series "The Cosmo." Despite these improvements, LGBT radio in Ireland today remains severely limited by mainstream heteronormative broadcasting values.

Open FM operated in the Irish context as a temporary community of interest station. In that regard the station had a duty to serve the needs of a specific community in Irish society. Community stations have, as a primary objective, a role to play in building communities by facilitating dialogue between different sections of the community (Forde, Foxwell, & Meadows, 2002; Martin & Wilmore, 2010; Siemering, 2000), by reflecting local culture (Meadows, Forde, Ewart, & Foxwell, 2005), by reinforcing a sense of place (Keogh, 2010), by reducing the social or cultural isolation of particular communities (Reed & Hanson, 2006), and by re-engaging marginalized groups to promote progressive social change (Baker, 2007; Barlow, 1988; Sussman & Estes, 2005). All of these objectives that are enshrined in the philosophy, policy approaches, and programming practices of community radio highlight the distinctiveness of the sector vis-à-vis commercial and public service broadcasters. In short, community radio breaks with traditional, mainstream models of radio production, ensuring that community members are not an audience in the usual sense. Instead, they are broadcasters, active participants in their own communication project. As will be outlined in more detail below, while Open FM fulfilled some of the remit of community broadcasting by including LGBT communities in the production of radio and in facilitating their voices being heard, the station's preoccupation with fitting the norms of commercial or public service stations and their dilution of LGBT identity in order to create a station for "everyone," negates the community representation imperative that should have been at the core of the station. Despite this, the station has been one of the main radio efforts in recent years to platform, at least to some degree, LGBT voices and issues. This is particularly important in the context of the failure of Irish radio nationally to serve or meet the needs of its LGBT citizens, who still wait to be served by a radio station, or at least something less ephemeral than Open FM.

Beyond Ireland, there is a considerable amount of research on the representation of LGBT sexuality on screen (Beirne, 2012; Dyer, 1990; Gross, 2001; Russo, 1981) as well as analyses of LGBT screen audiences (Dhoest, 2016; Kern, 2014). With the exception of a few key texts (Caldwell, 2008; Mayer, 2016; Moore, 2009), LGBT production of media has been less extensively researched and a focus on radio is even rarer. Recent key work on queer production studies has been focused primarily within the U.S. context. Ben Aslinger (2009) examined programming strategies within the U.S. cable channel Logo TV, which caters to an LGBT audience. Using an institutional analysis, Aslinger argues that Logo's attempts to market itself to diverse queer audiences are undermined by a struggle to meet programming diversity. Himberg (2014) similarly examined programming practices surrounding lesbian programming on cable TV networks Bravo and Showtime, examining institutional practices and beliefs surrounding lesbian content. The work of Martin (2015) looks at

the production of gay black characters on the black-cast sitcom, using interviews with writers to examine the processes by which they created and produced black gay characters. Paratextuality, the study of how audiences make sense of media texts through extra-textual materials such as trailers and marketing campaigns, has also become a site of research within queer production studies (Cavalcante, 2013; Draper, 2012).

It is important to note that the above examples are focused primarily within television studies and that queer production research within the field of radio is minimal. As queer radio historian Phylis A. Johnson (2008) has noted, "the history of gay and lesbian radio is far from complete." In fact, it was Johnson, along with Keith (2001), who made a significant intervention in the field of queer radio studies, with their book *Queer Airwaves: The Story of Gay and Lesbian Broadcasting*. This work gave significant attention in marking the role of radio to early U.S. gay liberation movements, illustrating how the Stonewall Riots encouraged a new freedom across radio in the United States. Eric Boehlert (1992) notes that LGBT radio is important because it provides anonymity for both the listener and on-air guest. In international contexts, Tanja Bosch (2007) explores LGBT radio in Cape Town, South Africa and argues that the LGBT community extended their activist struggles for equality and acceptance through community radio program "In the Pink." Bosch (2007) argues that the program built its own LGBT community in a number of ways: by bringing individuals together to produce radio; by creating a community of audience members who listened; and by sustaining a synergy between the producers and their audiences. In these ways, "In the Pink" acted to connect the LGBT community with others. However, by narrowcasting to a targeted LGBT community, the program risked being exclusionary, tacitly closing off supporters or ironically ghettoizing gay identity (Bosch, 2007).

Martin further argues that the dimension of radio that is most significant to conceptualizations of LGBT listening (and we argue here also to production) is radio's "liveness" which "works to tie the listener to the outside world" (Martin, 2017, p. 2). As Couldry notes, "liveness" allows us to gain access to something broader, "worth accessing now, not later;" so in a connected way, liveness contributes to the formation of a "representative social group" (2004, p. 356). Martin's idea of the co-creation of "synchronicity" (p. 250) echoes Bosch's idea of a "synergy" (2007, p. 225) between audience and producers that is based on the capacity of "liveness" to create a connection amongst potential community members. In this way of conceptualizing LGBT radio, stations can be understood as generators of "remote intimacies" wherein community formation coheres across airwaves (Gray, 2009).

Methodology

This research takes a single case study approach to understanding the contribution that Open FM made to disrupting heteronormativity and instilling homonormativity in the vision for, the production practices of, and the imagined audience of Irish

radio. This methodology carries with it the limitations of a small-sample, single-case approach, in terms of limits on the explanatory range (Yin, 2014). Nonetheless, well-chosen case studies can provide opportunities to produce important exemplars, generate practical context-dependent knowledge, and have merit in their proximity to studied realities (Flyvberg, 2006). As such, the intent here is not to offer a comprehensive account of the complex factors that shape queer radio practice, rather the researchers share insight to the experiences and understandings of a specific group of practitioners as they navigated the creation of a single queer radio service, Open FM. To that end, semi-structured interviews were conducted by the authors with Sam Lyons, the Station Manager and with Emma Carroll, the Assistant Station Manager, both of whom identify as LGBT. The schedule of interview questions covered issues such as: the founder's motivations in starting the service; their vision of an ideal audience; their approach to recruiting, training and including staff while honoring a sexual diversity mandate, and questions on the day to day running of the station. All interviews were audio recorded and transcribed. Due to the public profile of the station and the resulting identifiability of participants, anonymity was not offered. In gathering the data from the online bulletin message boards, all content that referred to Open FM was archived. To analyze that data, a content analysis was conducted on the key conceptual categories of production, imagined audience, and vision for the station. The key findings from the case study of Open FM, that it dualcast in terms of its vision for the station, through its production practices and in its approach to the audience, are each outlined in further detail below. However, extrapolating more broadly on the basis of a small, nation-specific sample is not viable and the research offers no such generalizations

Vision for the Station

Open FM adopted a dualcasting position with regard to its vision for the station. On the one hand it identified as an LGBT station but it effectively dualcast by trying to accommodate both heteronormative and homonormative positions concurrently. As has been argued by several LGBT media scholars (see Davis & Needham, 2009), broadcasting institutions reflect and reinforce discourses of heteronormativity. In the context of Open FM, this reinforcement of heteronormativity within an LGBT site of media production resulted in a somewhat confused articulation of the vision or objectives for the station. Dualcasting was operationalized even before going on air, when the station founders agreed upon a vision for the station that was not exclusively LGBT, but rather "open to everybody." Station manager Sam Lyons envisaged the station as one that "everyone would listen to and (where) you would be educated, learn something and by listening to it, you would have more empathy and compassion for other people in the world" (S. Lyons, personal communication, February 20, 2018).

Although the vision for the station did have an LGBT sensibility to it, the station managers were also conservative with regard to making Open FM a specifically or

exclusively LGBT entity. The target audience for Open FM was not what Martin (2017) refers to as a "queer listening public," nor was the station constitutive of a "subaltern counterpublic," which Fraser defines as a "parallel discursive arena where members of subordinated social groups invent and circulate counter discourses, which in turn, permit them to formulate oppositional interpretation of their identities, interests, and needs" (1990, p. 67). Rather, Open FM seems to have occupied a dualcast space between appealing to Ireland's LGBT community, while also trying to make the station a forum and space that would engage with broader heteronormative audiences. Assistant station manager Emma Carroll articulates the softness of the LGBT dimensions of the vision for the station, when she notes that the station was aimed "at those who wanted to learn more, (and at) people who may not actually be aware of LGBT issues but (the station would) hopefully pull them in and inform them" (E. Carroll, personal communication, February 1, 2018). Lyons similarly points out that the main ethos for the station was one aimed at education around diversity and identities, rather than straightforward LGBT issues.

The vision for the station resulted in the configuration of some on-air LGBT identities but within a conservative ethos. During a discussion on "gays and their pets" on "The Panti Show," which broadcast every Saturday, an interview with Seán "the handsomest gay vet in the country" provided such an instance. Panti questioned him on whether the stereotypes of "dykes and their cats and gays and their dogs" had any validity ("The Panti Show," June 13, 2011). Seán responded, noting that the stereotypes did not ring true. Even this example, which was an LGBT inflection on a standard item theme heard elsewhere on Irish radio, worked towards highlighting the "sameness" of Irish LGBT people to their straight counterparts. The attempt to educate the heteronormative audience, while also appealing to an LGBT listening public, positioned Open FM as an assimilative and conservative broadcaster, centered around respectability politics and the mainstreaming of Irish LGBT identities. The deployment of respectability politics has been similarly central to many social movements involving oppressed minorities. Higgintbotham (1993, p. 94) argues that a politics of respectability dictates that "in order to counter negative views of the dominant group, members of the oppressed minority must aggressively adopt the manner and morality that has been deemed virtuous by that group." In the context of Open FM, the vision of the station adhered to such mainstreaming, respectable strategies, with Lyons (S. Lyons, personal communication, February 20, 2018) stating:

We never wanted it to be gay radio, we didn't want it to be gaydio.... It was very much a case of that we were just people and to make people understand that it's okay and it's okay to fear it [homosexuality], there's nothing wrong with fearing it.

While mindful of the mainstreaming strategy of respectability, Deva Woodly notes "this kind of politics allows the images and interests of the most assimilable parts of the population to stand in for, and therefore obscure, the whole" (2015, p. 94). While

being an LGBT broadcaster, Open FM wanted to also be acceptable to a hetero-normative public.

The dualcasting vision proved a point of contention within the Irish LGBT community. As noted by the founders, several key figureheads within the community, including some prominent Dublin drag queens such as Shirley Templebar and Panti Bliss, disagreed with the vision put forward, and considered that the station should be an opportunity for resistance and political action. The focus on the straight-citizen public revealed not only the universalizing and minoritizing binary governing LGBT activism, but the attempts to produce a narrative of "sameness" around LGBT identities. This normativizing drive, as Anne Mulhall (2015) refers to it, works off the basis that "if lesbian and gay people are just like us, then they deserve what 'we' have." The LGBT reactions to the dualcasting vision of the station revealed tensions that undergird identity politics within LGBT communities more broadly. The approach to the station aligns with Eve Sedgwick's distinction between universalizing and minoritizing discourses surrounding sexuality. Minoritizing and universalizing discourses differ according to whether they view sexuality as relevant for a subculture or for an entire culture. Sedgwick writes:

> that modern homo/heterosexual definition has become so exacerbated a cultural site because of an enduring incoherence about whether it is to be thought of as an issue only for a minority of (distinctly lesbian or gay) individuals or, instead, as an issue that cuts across every locus of agency and subjectivity in the culture. (1993, p. xii)

Open FM's dualcast approach to its vision reveals the contradictory political and social tensions underpinning that approach. In terms of Sedgwick's universalizing/minoritizing distinction, Open FM became inexorably caught between its own dualities, trying on the one hand to offer an LGBT station for a specialized, minority social group, while on the other hand not overtly contest the heteronormative conventions of Irish radio. While Open FM tried to successfully purvey LGBT radio, the dualcasting approach attempted to configure LGBT radio as palatable for the mainstream.

The Imagined (And Actual) Audience

In a similar vein, the imagined audience for the station was conceptualized in a dualistic manner. It was envisioned as capturing a mainstream rather than specifically LGBT community-centric audience. As Lyons noted, "it was a radio station that we hoped everyone would listen to... The name did encapsulate the concept, which was an idea of being open and that everybody was part of the audience" (S. Lyons, personal communication, February 20, 2018). Carroll was clear that the focus was on gay participants, but this was strongly diluted with a sense of also making the station accessible to a mainstream hetero audience. As she puts it "our target

audience ... was kind of a 70% split of gay and those who would be allies and open-minded and wanted to learn more. We wanted to target people that might not actually listen, so we tried to make the programming as professional as anything" (E. Carroll, personal communication, February 1, 2018). The objective of this dual-casting approach was a strong desire that the radio station would act as a catalyst for increased insight and understanding of LGBT identity within the broader heteronormative listening public. As the manager noted, "We hoped everyone ... would be educated and you would learn something and by listening to it you would have more empathy or compassion for other people in the world." LGBT identity was not presumed to be a shared experience amongst the audience, instead as Carroll put it the station

> ... was all about this idea of celebrating diversity and ... creating something that everybody could feel that they could relate to or that they could talk [about] ... everybody's questions, everybody's thoughts, everybody's feelings, we were open to them and that was really important (E. Carroll, personal communication, February 1, 2018).

Within that context, the Irish LGBT community were still "othered" as a non-normative audience. They were the objects of understanding rather than the subjects of expression; they were still set apart rather than represented centrally and unequivocally within their own station.

This dualcasting approach again proved contentious with the LGBT listening public, who were divided in their response. Threads on the online message bulletin boards, Gaire.com and Boards.ie, reveal some confusion amongst the LGBT audience. Gaire.com, which was a specifically LGBT site "for Irish LGBT personals, profiles, forums and classifieds," had a whole thread debating the merits of the station. At the crux of much of the commentary from the Gaire audience was some support for the homonormative approach, that Open FM should not strive towards re-enforcing stereotypes of the community by playing "All Kylie Minogue, all the time." A contributor to the thread noted that "all gays are not girly twinks who piss about the place. The music should be the same as any other radio station." Another stated: "I am uneasy with the LGBT community separating itself from the wider society. I'd prefer that lesbian or gay was seen as a normal part of society, rather than being seen as trying to create a different society for ourselves ("Gaire.ie, 2010)." This comment indicates that a minoritizing approach to the station, that focused exclusively on the LGBT dimension, could risk subjecting the LGBT audience and community to further discrimination within Irish society, or again, "other" them. A concern with othering reinforced and validated the station's dualcasting approach, which tried to accommodate LGBT identity while not unsettling mainstream or heteronormative ideas of the radio audience.

However, other members of the audience argued for the necessity for having an LGBT station within the Irish radio landscape. One respondent stated, "we are

different though," with another supporting Open FM because as a minority group, the LGBT community have "had to differentiate because of discrimination. Let's end discrimination and then the need to differentiate will disappear" (Boards.ie, 2010). The type of music that would be played on the station was considered central to the formulation of gay identities on Open FM, by both the station staff and the LGBT listening public. On boards, for example, a member of the Open FM management team contributed to a thread about the station, noting that

> Open FM has no plans of having their music formatting to what people may see as stereotypical "gay anthems." If you're tuning in to hear constant Kylie, George Michael, Gloria Gaynor, The Village People and The Weather Girls, you're tuning into the wrong station. (Boards.ie, 2010)

Despite this, parts of the community embraced the music that they perceived to be core features of the LGBT identity, with one user responding: "I fully expect the shows to be OTT [over the top], camp and fun. Oh, and loads of Kylie."

The discourses on the threads on both of the message boards highlighted both an assimilative approach being embraced by the gay listening public and an approach that wanted to celebrate the more minoritizing, culturally specific community characteristics. This confusion over Open FM's role for the Irish gay community, also evident in the vision for the station, resonated with the LGBT public or audience as well. For the station managers, content creators, and hosts, the aim of the station was to create LGBT content that was palatable to a heteronormative Irish radio audience, but without actually being very queer, in short, to dualcast to both constituent groups. Just as the station adopted a dualcasting position in terms of its vision and in how it defined its audience, so too in its production approaches was there a duality of embracing the heteronormative, yet occasional evidence of disruption of the norms of radio programming in Ireland.

Queering Production Practices?

Much of the content on Open FM was shaped by conservative, commercial, and mainstream programming priorities. Like the vision for the station overall, and the response of some of the audience, this practice around production within the station configured and framed LGBT Irish identities through a heteronormative and socially conservative lens of standard, institutionalized broadcasting practices with regard to programs, topics, the sound of the station, concerns with quality, and ideas about suitable guests. Conservativism manifested in terms of the approach to programming that was adopted by Open FM, which mirrored that of any commercial mainstream station. As the assistant manager contends,

"We ran it as close to being a professional and commercial set up as possible" (E. Carroll, personal communication, February 1, 2018). The manager agreed, stating, "I suppose the format was very similar to the main stations that were out there; we

wanted it to be something that was easy to listen to …" (S. Lyons, personal communication, February 20, 2018). Similarly, the preoccupation with "Quality" centered on meeting mainstream radio standards, rather than the needs or desires of the LGBTQ community. The former was core to the objectives of the station manager, as he says "if you turned on the station, the production quality was quite high on a lot of the stuff.… You didn't turn over straight away and go 'oh my God, I'm on a gay radio station.'"

This reluctance to upset the apple-cart of the heteronormative standard was echoed in the program topics covered, which were not a radical departure from those covered on mainstream radio. As the manager describes those topics

> We tried to make sure, that definitely all of the main topics were covered. Like we went through a list of things, because you have to understand that, we tried to ensure that not only was there light programming, but there was also more current affairs style, so there was a good mixture of sport … to news, through to pop. You know, we did drive time and we did weekend shows. (S. Lyons, personal communication, February 20, 2018)

Specifically, gay topics such as Marriage Equality and LGBT travel were covered and as the assistant manager notes, "Pride would have thrown some content our way and they would have been very helpful in putting us in the right direction," but the there was no agenda to specifically target topics that might be controversial or cause conflict either within the LGBT community or between them and the hetero mainstream (E. Carroll, personal communication, February 1, 2018). As the manager put it, the station worked on the premise that "maybe we need to stop fighting, you know, this idea that we need to fight the gay fight. I suppose I had more of an idea that other than fighting, maybe we could create a space for celebration." Topics aired were more concerned with celebrating diversity than addressing LGBT concerns or challenging inequalities based on sexuality.

In terms of its production approach, there were some occasional instances where Open FM assumed its dualcasting approach to program making and undermined the norms of heteronormative radio production. In content creation the station played with a specific sacred cow of Irish broadcasting, a tradition whereby the public service broadcaster RTÉ plays the Roman Catholic call to prayer, or Angelus, at midday and 6:00 p.m. every day on both radio and television. Usurping this tradition was an invitation for listeners to understand that while the station appeared much like any other on the Irish broadcasting dial, there was a difference of attitude at play. As the station manager puts it, "we wanted to break some boundaries where we would play on certain things and fuck with people's heads" (S. Lyons, personal communication, February 20, 2018). To that end, the station developed its own midday slot called "The DJ Angelus" where—midway through the call to prayer—a DJ would breach the sanctity of the ritualistic broadcasting convention. This disruption of a very established cultural practice in Irish radio was designed to gently provoke a response in listeners, to alert them to the fact that Open FM, though

appearing to meet the norms, was actually willing to usurp them. As the manager recounts, "So if we had people who were maybe flicking over stations and would hit the Angelus … thinking that they had it on RTÉ Radio One and then suddenly a DJ kicks in …. we were trying to make it so that it gave people an insight into something that they didn't understand…." (S. Lyons, personal communication, February 20, 2018).

In a similar vein, through a strong emphasis on the production of specifically "live" programming, the station also departed the norms of mainstream radio by using live output to generate ties between the station, the queer listening public and the heteronormative audiences. The station consciously took an approach of having a majority of live on-air programming: "It was live 12 hours a day, 10 a.m.–10.p.m. was live." As the station manager notes, "We were 60% chat … 90% of that was live and our music programming and all our DJs were live. I would say that we hit … around 70% live as far as I remember" (E. Carroll, personal communication, February 1, 2018). The commitment to live production was not an expedient one for a station that had only a temporary broadcasting contract and was significantly under-funded and under-resourced. Nor was it however a naive decision, taken accidently, rather it was an explicit tenet of the alternative approach. As Lyons offers, "We felt it was important, offering people that opportunity to connect." Through its "liveness," Open FM created a "synergy" amongst the station and its listeners and in this way offered "remote intimacies" (Martin, 2017) amongst the LGBTQ community who could cohere, albeit temporarily, through the airwaves. As Lyons clearly states, "… there's a difference between live radio and pre-recorded. We allowed our listeners to text in and comment, so being live let them know that they were a part of something. It was trying to increase and create that community feel." In these ways, the programming content, through the subversion of some normative production practices and through the emphasis on live radio broadcasting, offered a sense of departure from the normative in order to prioritize connection amongst the LGBT community of producers and listeners, and also the heteronormative audience that coalesced around Open FM.

In terms of staffing the station, the emphasis was again on "openness" which was a shibboleth for duality of approach and not forcing any radicalism but instead seeking acceptability. As the assistant manager put it,

> There [was] nothing political behind it … it was just this safe space where people felt comfortable and they could voice how they felt or who they were in a nice environment … or maybe they were straight people and they were becoming very comfortable with interacting with gay people. (E. Carroll, personal communication, February 1, 2018)

The station successfully recruited over 100 volunteers. On the question of how volunteers were recruited, the assistant manager recounted that they approached

> radio students and media students and from there we did a bunch of interviews with people and just got their feelings—[asking] were they comfortable being in

an open radio station, we didn't want it to be a particularly gay radio station, just that it was open and [a] safe space for anybody was the main aim of it. (S. Lyons, personal communication, February 20, 2018)

The manager concurred, "We interviewed and looked-for people who had an interest and passion in radio and whether they were gay or straight, it didn't make a difference, just as long as they were interested in creating a space that celebrates openness." The only grounds on which people would be rejected for participation in the production of queer radio was based on whether they were in any way homophobic. As the station manager notes, regarding recruitment of presenters,

We told people to be genuine and to be authentic and that's what we were looking for, openness through sound, that was probably our only remit, that you tried your upmost to be genuine and authentic when you were on air. (E. Carroll, personal communication, February 1, 2018)

On air voices were not required to have any specific agenda or contribution to make around promoting queerness, instead importance was placed on an individualistic authenticity rather than a political position within a collective. As the assistant manager contended:

The big thing was, we didn't particularly want to have a massive label and we just wanted everybody to have a voice and be heard and feel that they were safe and feel that they could say what they wanted to say and have a lot of fun at the same time as well. (E. Carroll, personal communication, February 1, 2018)

That said, the volunteer basis of participation did not leave the station with much leverage in terms of implementing a vision. But in this case, the vision lacked the ambition of requiring presenters to be primarily concerned with offering a queer voice, in a broadcast context where such voices are all but entirely absent. However, there was a recognition that the station did allow volunteer workers to access a platform tied to gay identity with which they might not have been in a position to engage otherwise. The manager says it best here, when describing the station's outreach:

We had ... producers from all over Ireland. ... We even did broadcasts over the telephone from different parts of Ireland ... we even visited a few ... of the country-wide Pride festivals with the team, so we tried to get out. We tried to widen our reach...

Conclusion

While Open FM undoubtedly brought LGBT voices to an Irish radio scene that had utterly overlooked the need to represent minority sexualities, in many ways the

station was more preoccupied with being mainstream and acceptable by heteronormative broadcasting standards than it was concerned with serving the needs of the LGBT community. In terms of its vision, its approach to the imagined audience, and its production practices, the station frequently met standards of commercial broadcasting rather than agendas set by LGBT identity. Some frustration with this approach was voiced by the listening public who aired their concerns in online fora. While Open FM struggled against the usual under-resourcing, and voluntary nature of any community station, they framed many of their endeavors between the mainstream standards of radio broadcasting and the community of interest that their license claimed to serve. This was problematic because the station operated on a community license, which brought with it certain expectations for the LGBT community. The dualcasting approach deliberately, through a process of segmentation, attempted to commit to two key audience demographics. As these two demographics were both mainstream and niche respectively, the LGBT centered approached of Open FM became compromised as it grappled with LGBT audience demands while trying to survive in a competitive radio environment. Open FM's dualcasting strategy as a result may be an example of the fragility of LGBT radio in a commercial media environment, a space where LGBT content is compromised in favor of have a radio station that is more commercially viable and maintains good audience figures.

Since Open FM's 30-day run in 2010, there have been some attempts to serve LGBT audiences in Irish radio. Dublin City FM airs "LGBTQ Life" every Monday at 1:00 p.m. Up until 2015, RTE's digital radio channel, Pulse, aired LGBT show "The Cosmo," but it has since been pulled off air, due to controversy surrounding coverage of Ireland's Marriage Equality referendum in 2015. The show's presenter and producer Scott De Buitléir resigned from the show as a result of interference from RTÉ. The issue pertained to providing balance to both sides of the Marriage Equality debate on the LGBT radio show, with De Buitléir stating that he "couldn't bring myself to allow someone on an LGBT radio show saying why we shouldn't be equal" (Hennessy, 2015). There have been no attempts by the state broadcaster since this incident to reinstate an LGBT presence on Irish radio and with the exception of a small number of examples, there is no LGBT presence within Irish radio. To conclude, the experiment that was Open FM raises the question regarding the viability of an Irish LGBT radio station. The interviews and analysis presented here demonstrate how LGBT radio must grapple between a community demand and economic stability.

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