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Going Public: The Politics of Recognition at Digital Storytelling Launch Events

Community media and arts techniques such as digital storytelling provide significant resources for cultural citizenship whereby people associated with the cultures, communities and places that are marginalised or misrepresented in mainstream media are able to speak up, talk back and tell different stories. This paper analyses a series of public launch events which showcase the outcomes of Digital Storytelling and Urban Music projects run by Information Cultural Exchange (ICE). ICE is an innovative new media and community arts organisation working with young people, refugees and culturally diverse communities in Western Sydney. Key features of the launch events developed for these projects, such as publicity materials, the guest list, naming and MC commentary, invite acknowledgement and respect for the producers of digital stories. Via four case studies I unpack the tension between ideas of 'community' and 'public' evident in the 'listening spaces' created at ICE's launch events. I argue that the moment of 'going public' in community-based arts initiatives entails a complex politics of recognition combining risk and affirmation.