The Media and Indigenous Policy

How news media reporting and mediatized practice impact on Indigenous policy

A preliminary report

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Further information about the Australian News Media and Indigenous Policy-making 1988-2008 project is available at http://www.canberra.edu.au/faculties/arts-design/research/active-research-groups/public-communication/Indigenous-Policymaking

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Executive Summary

The *Media and Indigenous Policy* report is presented as a series of essays addressing the outcomes of six independent but interlinked research projects. Each paper addresses a different research question in a particular policy field, utilising a range of qualitative research methods. Together, these essays shed light on the complex relationships between Australia's news media and the development of Indigenous social policies.

- Our research concludes that the way Indigenous issues are portrayed in mainstream news media does impact on the way Indigenous affairs policies are developed, communicated and implemented. Australia's news media exerts its power over the policymaking process in complex and multifaceted ways.
- Taking a policy-specific approach has demonstrated that news media impact on policy is variable and inconsistent across policy fields.
- Between 1988 and 2008, Australia's news media paid very selective attention to Indigenous policy issues, unless they were the site of controversy or politically salient. Indigenous broadcasting policy received virtually no public attention, while health and bilingual education received occasional intense media attention.
- Newspaper journalists told the story of Indigenous health policy through a small number of routine and predictable news frames.
- Reporting Indigenous affairs is a complex and difficult sub-field of journalism. Journalists faced a range of barriers that impeded their ability to report on the full range of Indigenous voices and experiences.
- Sections of the Australian media have engaged in campaigning journalism that can be seen to have made direct incursions into the policymaking process. Our case study of *The Australian's* coverage of the Northern Territory Emergency Response (NTER) documents the strategies used in campaigning journalism.
- Policymakers working within government departments were media experts who have adopted 'media logic' in their practices. They pre-empt, monitor and use news media strategically in their policymaking practices. These 'mediatized' practices varied in intensity between policy fields and moments, but our project concludes that this is a significant manifestation of media power in the policymaking process.
- The 2007 Northern Territory Emergency Response (NTER) was the template for media-driven policymaking.
- It is difficult for Indigenous people's voices to be heard in the policymaking process, but Indigenous policy advocates utilise media practices to keep alive the intractability of Indigenous policy issues and influence government policy outcomes. This finding challenges dominant understandings of 'intractability' in policy, leading us to conclude that maintaining the intractability of an issue can have constructive policy outcomes.
- In the field of bilingual education policy, think-tank experts opposing bilingual education became increasingly prominent and influential in mediated policy debates across the 20-year period under investigation, whereas academic voices were rarely heard.
- Waller's research with Yolngu people on bilingual education policy has demonstrated how Indigenous research goals, methodologies and ethics can be incorporated into journalism and policy research, resulting in new models of research and journalism.

- Our policy-specific case studies identified gaps in understanding among the media-related practices of Indigenous policy advocates, public servants, journalists and academics. Further research in a wider range of policy settings is required to develop protocols for understanding and bridging these gaps.

About the researchers

Kerry McCallum

Associate Professor Kerry McCallum is first chief investigator on the *Media and Indigenous Policy* project and Head of Discipline of Journalism and Communication at the University of Canberra. Her research focuses on public opinion, media and policymaking practice in Indigenous affairs and related social policy. In 2009 Kerry was awarded an ARC Discovery grant (with Michael Meadows) for the 'Australian News Media and Indigenous Policymaking 1988-2008' project (DP0987457). She led a team of researchers investigating the relationships between news media representation, the 'mediatized' practices of policymakers, journalists and Indigenous policy advocates, and how these operate together to impact on policy outcomes. Kerry is actively involved in the field of communication and media studies in Australia, as President (2010-2011) of the Australian and New Zealand Communication Association (ANZCA), and organizer of the 2010 ANZCA conference: 'Media, Democracy and Change' at Old Parliament House, Canberra. Kerry is staff representative on the UC Research Committee and an inaugural member of the News and Media Research Centre. She is a Member of the Australian Institute for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Studies (AIATSIS), and has held visiting fellowships at AIATSIS and at George Washington University, Washington, DC. Prior to entering academic life, Kerry worked in federal politics as policy and media advisor to the Parliamentary Secretary to the Treasurer, and as an electorate officer to Members of Parliament in the ACT, NSW and SA. She brings this professional experience to her teaching and research, and maintains an active interest in Australian politics, 'mainstream' and Indigenous.

Michael Meadows

Professor Michael Meadows worked as a print and broadcast journalist for 10 years before moving into journalism education in the late 1980s. Since then, his research interests have included media representations of Indigenous affairs in Australia and Canada, Journalism theory and practice, media representations of the Australian landscape, and community media audiences, policy and practice. He has published numerous academic and generalist articles dealing with his work and three books: *Songlines to satellites*, with Helen Molnar, *Voices in the wilderness* and more recently, with co-authors Susan Forde and Kerrie Foxwell, *Developing dialogues*. He is based at the Griffith Centre for Cultural Research, Griffith University, in Brisbane.

Michelle Dunne Breen

Michelle Dunne Breen joined the University of Canberra's Faculty of Arts and Design as a Teaching Fellow in journalism and communication in 2011. Her PhD research explores the Australian print media's coverage of the Northern Territory Emergency Response 2007, between its announcement and enactment. Michelle's areas of research interest include social justice, Aboriginal affairs, journalism practice and journalism's democratic role, and she is a devotee of Norman Fairclough's dialectical relational approach to critical discourse analysis. She obtained her undergraduate degree in sociology and German (Mod. Hons.) from the University of Dublin, Trinity College, in 1991, before training as a journalist. Michelle has worked as a journalist for newspapers and magazines (both political and lifestyle) for more than 20 years, in Australia, Britain and Ireland. Her most recent staff position was at *The Canberra Times*, where she edited the Saturday news review and analysis section *Forum*. This year Michelle has been convening UC's second-year print journalism units while simultaneously grappling with the implications of the ongoing industry changes both for her PhD research and her students' futures.

Lisa Waller

Lisa Waller began her career in news as a student of journalism at the University of Canberra in 1986. She returned to the University of Canberra to undertake her PhD in Communication in 2009, after a 20-year career as a reporter and editor on some of Australia's leading newspapers. *The Canberra Times* editor-at-large, Jack Waterford, was her mentor as a young journalist, so for Lisa it is most fitting that he is also the distinguished journalist on the advisory board that has overseen this project.

After working as a journalist on newspapers including *The Canberra Times*, *The Australian* and the *Australian Financial Review*, Lisa is familiar with the practices of journalism and the workings of newsrooms. Her interest as an early career researcher in journalism studies is not so much what happens on editorial floors or on journalists' rounds, but conceptualising how journalism affects different areas of society. She is particularly interested in theories of how media power operates. Her work on the 'Australian news media and Indigenous policymaking 1988–2008' project documents how news has shaped the Northern Territory's bilingual education policy. Another recent research project at Deakin University, where she lectures in journalism, examines how media power is exercised by journalists through the changing cultural practice of shaming people who come before the courts accused of minor offences. Lisa aims to contribute to the discipline of journalism studies through research that develops new theories and methodologies and advocates for the media rights of marginalised people. She also writes works of academic journalism using the methodologies she has developed, based in her research findings. *Inside Story* and *Arena Magazine* have published some of the journalism written as part of the *Media and Indigenous Policy* project.

Lisa is an award-winning textiles maker and examples of her work can usually be found in The Alice Springs Beanie Festival exhibition, which is held each June. She has conducted a number of workshops with Anangu on the APY Lands in South Australia, at Ernabella and Mimili. These workshops produced beautiful work which is part of the national Beanie Festival touring exhibition. Her ongoing relationship with Anangu, the first people to have a bilingual education program in Australia, inspired her to focus on an Indigenous language policy for her PhD study. She is pleased to have undertaken research that advocates for Indigenous peoples' right to learn in and use their own languages and contributes to their struggle for self-determination.

Holly Reid

In 2009, Holly graduated from the University of Canberra with a Bachelor in Journalism and a major in Indigenous Affairs. She was the recipient of the *Australian Press Council Award* for the highest achieving print journalism student, and the *Deans Excellence Award* for obtaining a GPA of 7. She successfully applied for the *University of Canberra Honors Scholarship* and in 2010, graduated with First Class Honors in Journalism. Her thesis is a comparative frame analysis of the 2007 *Little Children are Sacred* report into child sexual abuse in the Northern Territory, its representation in the *Australian* newspaper and the subsequent announcement of the Northern Territory Emergency Response program. The paper, *A failure in the symbiosis of media democracy,* was awarded the *University of Canberra Medal* for the faculty of Arts and Design. After graduation, Holly began work as an assistant media advisor to *You Me Unity,* a campaign for the Constitutional recognition of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples, facilitated by Reconciliation Australia. In 2012, she co-authored a publication with her Honours supervisor, *Weighing In,* which was presented at the *Australian and New Zealand Communication Association* conference and awarded the *Christopher Newell Prize* for the best paper dealing with a social justice issue. Set against the backdrop of Australia's rapidly changing news media landscape, *Weighing In* provides evidence of the *Australian'* agenda-setting style of journalism and the intensity of the relationship between news media reporting and Indigenous affairs policy making in

Australia. In April 2012, Holly moved to Ghana, West Africa, as part of the *Australian Youth Ambassadors for Development* program, to volunteer as the Communications Manager for a child and maternal health NGO for twelve months. In July 2012, she established the *Jaynii Streetwise Campaign,* a fundraising initiative to provide disadvantaged Ghanaian children with access to basic human rights like safety, health and education. Holly plans to begin her PhD in the field of media, policy and Indigenous affairs in 2014.

Introduction

Introduction

Kerry McCallum

> … policy debates in the Australian media have presented Aboriginal issues as if they are unsolvable and intransigent and caused by 'deviant' characteristics inherent in Aboriginal communities. (Baum, Bently & Anderson, 2007)

Indigenous affairs policy is widely considered to be one of Australia's most 'intractable' policy fields (APSC, 2007), characterised by fierce policy battles, strongly-held ideological positions between political and advocacy groups, and sharp shifts in policy direction that impact on the lived experience of all Indigenous Australians.

Indigenous Australians say their relationship with government is highly public and problematic (Meadows, 2005). Issues that affect lives, such as child safety, or access to services, or particular health problems, are frequently debated via public media. Indigenous communities are often excluded from the discussion, with media and political leaders talking 'about' Indigenous people rather than 'with' them.

Analysts of Indigenous policy frequently point to sensationalist or biased reporting as contributing to the problematising of Indigenous issues and to poor policy outcomes, without fully analysing these factors. At the same time, both mainstream and alternative news and social media outlets have played an important part in holding governments to account for the way they develop and implement policies to deal with social issues such as Indigenous disadvantage. Intense media reporting has at times forced governments to address issues such as access to policing, alcohol abuse or school retention rates. In short, journalists' reporting practices would appear to both contribute to and reflect the intractability of Indigenous affairs policy problems.

Despite occasionally simplistic accusations thrown around in debates about media power in policy, it is not a simple task to tease out the elements and direction of influence. Nearly a century of media studies research concludes that demonstrating direct causes and effects of news media content on audience, political or policy responses is a fraught exercise. Attempts to demonstrate the influence of a single news story on public opinion, or impacts of news reporting on a government policy decision, have proven elusive (Koch-Baumgarten & Voltmer, 2010). But this does not mean that it is futile to study the relationships between news media and policymaking — in fact, it makes it even more important.

The *Media and Indigenous Policy* project was born of a desire to move beyond superficial accusations about the media's role in Indigenous policy development, and to tease out the factors that characterised Indigenous affairs policymaking in a 'mediatized' environment. A key concept in media studies, mediatization theory describes a media-saturated culture where media norms and resources become part of everyday activities (Lundby, 2009). As media studies researchers with professional backgrounds in journalism and public affairs, our approach to the debate can offer insights grounded in empirical evidence informed by media history and theory.

In contrast to more traditional approaches that see news media as an external influence on policy, we took a 'discursive' approach to policy analysis (Bacchi, 2009), starting from the premise that public discussion of Indigenous issues was central to the development of both policy problems and policy outcomes. More than most other policy fields, the development of Indigenous affairs policy is played out through public media, with journalists taking a central role in both constructing and representing Indigenous people and issues as problems to be solved.

We identify that Indigenous affairs policy is rooted in the bureaucratic process of

colonisation and the complex history of Australian federalism. It is inherently political and subject to strong partisan ideologies. Ministers are advised and supported by their public servants in the development of policy, but our project argues that mediatized practices occur throughout the political and the policy realms.

Our project also acknowledges that media engagement in the policy terrain is so uneven that it is necessary to take a policy-specific approach. Drawing on the work of Gamson (1992), Couldry (2009) and Bourdieu (1990), we have paid particular attention to the localised practices of policy actors in particular Indigenous policy fields. Some policy areas are of great interest to the media, but in fact many are of little or no interest unless they are perceived to offer scope for a story of crisis or controversy. Even within a politically sensitive field, such as Indigenous health, media interest waxes and wanes (McCallum, 2011).

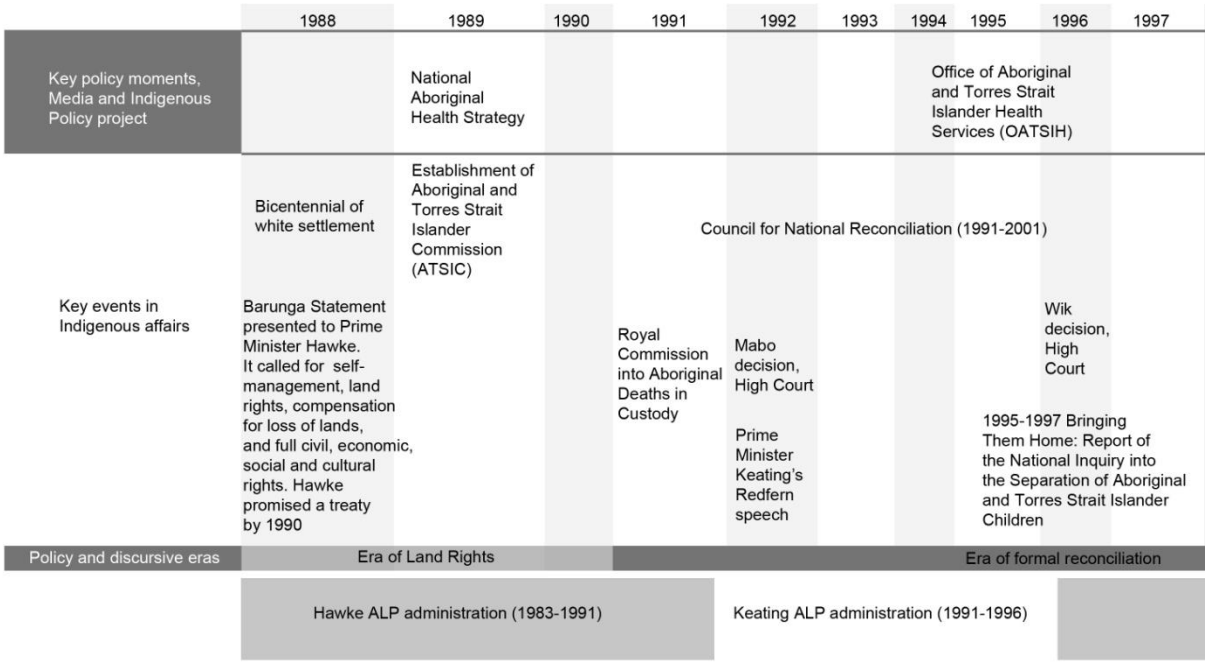
Our research concludes that the way Indigenous issues are portrayed in mainstream news media *does* impact on the way Indigenous affairs policies are developed, communicated and implemented. Australia's news media exerts its power over the policymaking in complex and multifaceted ways.

The *Media and Indigenous Policy* project

The *Media and Indigenous Policy* project team examined the relationships between Australia's news media and the development of Indigenous affairs policies. We addressed the following questions:

- How did policies in specific fields of Indigenous affairs shift between 1988 and 2008?
- How did Australia's news media report Indigenous affairs between 1988 and 2008?
- How did policy bureaucrats' mediatized practices impact on Indigenous policy?
- How did Indigenous policy advocates use media to influence Indigenous policy?
- How did news media reporting impact on the development of specific Indigenous affairs policies?

We recognised at the outset that no single research method was adequate to fully explore this topic. We drew on our backgrounds as qualitative media studies researchers to design a multi-method project to address our research questions.

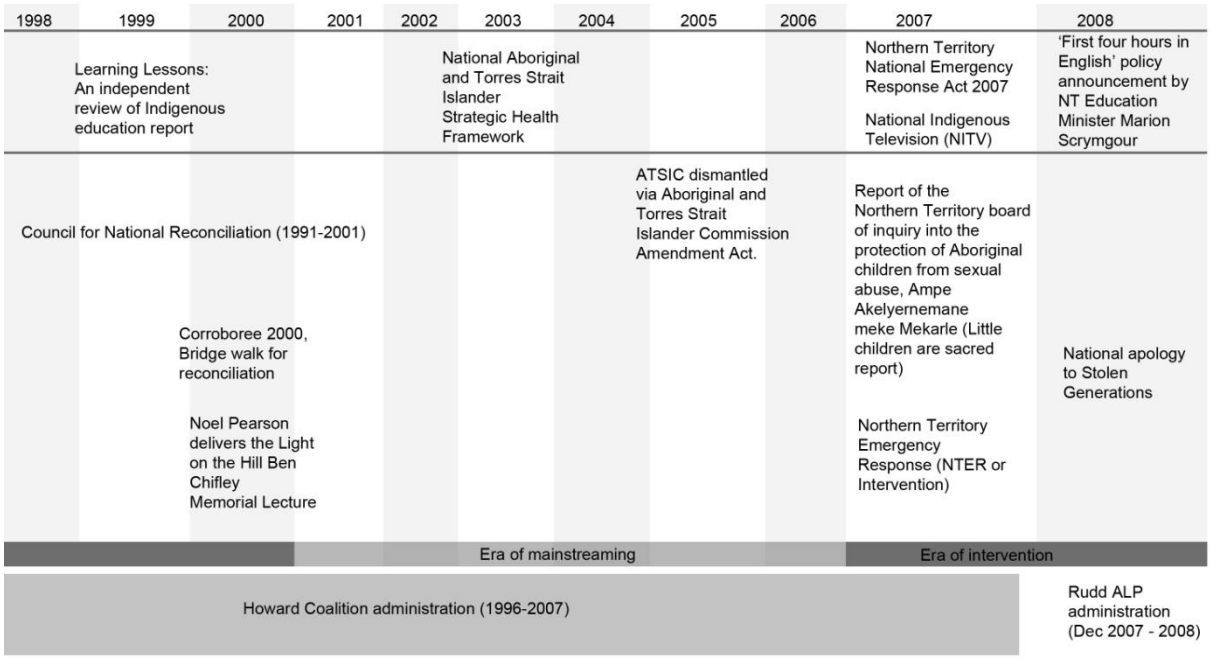


Indigenous policy timeline

We wanted to examine specific policies in their broader historical, political and discursive environments, so we chose a 20-year period beginning at the highly symbolic Bicentenary of Australian Federation and ending with Prime Minister Rudd's 2008 apology for the forced removal of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Children from their parents. As illustrated in the timeline below, the period between 1988 and 2008 can be separated into distinct policy eras across the Hawke, Keating, Howard and Rudd prime ministerships.

The range of portfolio areas within the Indigenous policy field is diverse and broad, so we took a policy-specific approach. This enabled us to explore in fine detail specific policy developments over the 20-year period. Policies developed within each of these fields are marked by a few big announcements, at times by political leaders via news media, that radically changed the direction of the policy. Our research tracks those policy changes and the roles played by news media in their development, announcement and implementation.

1. A key social indicator program, *Indigenous health* is arguably the most 'intractable' of all Indigenous policy issues. McCallum chose the suite of policies around the delivery of primary health care, with particular reference to Indigenous community-controlled health as her case study of news media representation and influences on policy.
2. Waller's doctoral research focused on key moments in the policy of *bilingual education* in the Northern Territory and how challenges to the policy had been played out in public media. First implemented in the 1970s, bilingual education policy in the Northern Territory has undergone a number of shifts in direction, characterised by periodic attempts to abolish bilingual education programs for Indigenous children.
3. Meadows continued his long engagement with federal *Indigenous broadcasting policy*, with a particular focus on the announcement of the National Aboriginal Television service (NITV) in 2007.
4. One policy moment stood out beyond all others — the 2007 *Northern Territory Emergency Response* (Intervention, or NTER) — whereby on the eve of a federal election, the *Racial Discrimination Act (1975)* was



suspended and the military was employed to 'stabilize, normalize and exit' remote communities in the Northern Territory (Altman & Hinkson, 2007). This radical five-year policy agenda has recently been consolidated by the Gillard Labor government in the 10-year *Stronger Futures* legislative program. The Intervention provided Reid and Dunne Breen with a unique policy moment in Indigenous affairs and an exemplar of mediatized Indigenous policymaking.

We argue that in order to understand the media-policy relationship it is necessary to hone in on the media-related practices of policy actors within specific policy fields. Couldry (2004) defines this approach as disarmingly simple: 'what do people do with media and what do people say about media'. We asked those questions in relation to the development of policy to the following groups of policy actors:

- *journalists* working for newspaper, broadcast, Indigenous community and online media organisations — a small minority were specialist health or education reporters;
- *public servants* and policy advisors working in federal, state and territory agencies — we made a strategic decision not to focus on the relationships between journalists and political offices, but to explore the media-related practices of those deepest inside the policymaking process; and
- *Indigenous policy advocates* working for non-government community-based organisations.

The project team developed a project-specific set of research methodologies to explore these key policy moments and policy actor perspectives. We examined policy documents, media reporting, and the practices of those actors involved developing, communicating and implementing Indigenous affairs policies. We drew on two broad research approaches from media studies to conduct our enquiries.

1. *Textual analysis of policy and media texts*. The Media and Indigenous Policy database (see Appendix 1) was developed to house more than 4,000 media and policy items on Indigenous health between 1988 and 2008. Quantitative content analysis was conducted to map the extent and nature of reporting, and qualitative analyses identified dominant frames and discourses.
2. *Policy actor Interviews*. Underpinned by a 'media as practice' methodology (Couldry, 2004), interviews with more than 50 journalists, bureaucrats, Indigenous policy advocates and academics provided rich insights into the ways in which policy actors 'read' mediated texts and how news media reporting was incorporated into their policymaking practices. Interviews were conducted in Darwin, Townsville, Sydney, Melbourne, Adelaide, and Canberra, with a small number of telephone interviews.

The project received approval from the University of Canberra and Griffith University Human Ethics committees, and was overseen by an advisory committee of Indigenous and non-indigenous experts. Indigenous perspectives and methodologies were incorporated into the research methodology through close participation with Yolngu participants, and a major outcome of the project was to address Yolngu participants' self-determinist aims for the research.

Structure and content of the report

The essays included in this report summarise the key findings of the *Media and Indigenous Policy* project. Our report is designed for wide public dissemination and complements findings presented in academic conference presentations and journal articles (see Appendix 2), and is a precursor to a longer academic monograph.

Managing the optics of Indigenous policy, by McCallum and Waller, presents a key finding of the project. Interviews with those deepest inside the Indigenous health and bilingual education policymaking fields — federal and Northern Territory public servants — demonstrated that not only were these policy actors acutely aware of

media content, but that the media had been incorporated into their policymaking practices. For many, their role as policy developer or implementer had been usurped by their role in managing the 'policy optics'. Drawing on quotations from the interviews, this essay describes the features of the 'mediatization' of the policymaking process.

Meadows takes a policy focus in *When the stars align*, documenting how the policies around Indigenous broadcasting were developed in isolation from mainstream media attention. His historical analysis and interviews with key policy managers and Indigenous media policy advocates highlights the 'strategic dance' played by actors in the policymaking process.

Statistics on how Indigenous health was reported in three Australian media outlets between 1998 and 2008 is depicted in graphs in *Indigenous health reporting 1988–2008*. *Framing Indigenous Health, 1988–1995* presents the findings of a news frame analysis of reporting of Indigenous health in the Hawke and Keating eras, and how changing news frames correlated with a shift from self-determinist to mainstreaming policies.

Dunne Breen extends these analyses of news media reporting to explore in fine detail media discourse around the 2007 NT Emergency Response. Using critical discourse analysis (CDA) (Fairclough, 1992) that locates Indigenous affairs reporting in its broader political, social and industrial contexts, she identifies how a changing media landscape impacted on the reporting of the Intervention and theorises the impacts of that on public policy.

In *From little things big things grow: campaigning journalism and Indigenous policy,* Reid examines the role of Rupert Murdoch's flagship newspaper, *The Australian*, in setting news agendas and framing nationally-significant Indigenous policy stories for its audience. Analysis of *The Australian's* coverage of the *Little children are sacred report* (Anderson & Wild 2007) demonstrates how selective framing of issues is central to its campaigning style of journalism.

Waller's doctoral research took as its case study bilingual education policy in the Northern Territory, with a specific focus on how the media-related practices of those responsible for developing policy played out for the Yolngu people of North-east Arnhem Land. Taking a 'media as practice' approach focusing on the way people use media (Couldry, 2004), Waller draws on interviews with Indigenous community members, policymakers and media professionals to document the media's powerful role in the development of bilingual education policy.

McCallum, Waller and Meadows show in *Intractable or indomitable? How Indigenous policy actors keep issues alive and contested* how Indigenous policy advocates, such as those involved in the community-controlled health sector and the bilingual education lobby, have been able to harness sophisticated communication practices to keep policy issues alive. Importantly, this essay challenges the assumption dominant in Indigenous policy studies that Indigenous health and education are 'wicked' or 'intractable' policy problems to be solved, suggesting instead that Indigenous policy advocates keep complex policy issues alive in the interests of better policy.

In *Academics, think tanks and journalists: the trouble with expert opinion, empirical evidence and bilingual education*, Waller asks 'who has a voice' in a mediatized Indigenous policymaking process, finding that, in the case of bilingual education, media and policymakers overlooked the 'evidence' of academic studies and opinion, instead turning to a small number of think-tank spokespeople such as Noel Pearson and the Centre for Independent Studies' Helen Hughes. This essay opens up questions about the future of academic engagement in the policy process in an online media environment.

The report closes with Waller's reflexive essay, *Reciprocity and Indigenous knowledge in research*. Indigenous perspectives and research methodologies have been central to her work (Connell, 2007), with close collaboration with Yolngu researchers informing Waller's approach to

methodology and analysis. This essay challenges researchers and policymakers working in this field to listen and incorporate Indigenous research perspectives into their practices.

Outcomes and future directions

Our research provides a better understanding of the interplay of the media practices of policy actors — Indigenous policy advocates, bureaucracts, journalists, academics — in the Indigenous policymaking field. In summary, our key findings are:

- News media impact on policy is variable and inconsistent across policy fields.
- Through their reporting practices, journalists both contribute to and reflect the intractability of Indigenous affairs policy problems.
- Reporting Indigenous affairs is a complex and difficult sub-field of journalism. We found that reporters who cover Indigenous affairs face a unique set of challenges and we have documented those challenges and the changes specialist reporters believe would improve reporting.
- Media reporting amplifies the already problematic relationship between Indigenous Australians and their governments.
- It is difficult for Indigenous people's voices to be heard in the policymaking process, but Indigenous policy advocates utilise media practices to keep alive the intractability of Indigenous policy issues and influence government policy outcomes.
- Government managers, policy advisors and communication officers are media experts who pre-empt, monitor and use news media strategically in their policymaking practices.
- *The Australian* newspaper was found to be the most influential media player in the field and our project documents how that influence is exerted through the investments it makes in covering Indigenous issues and the ways in which it presents them.

The *Media and Indigenous Policy* project has opened up a range of new research complexities and possibilities. We confronted a range of theoretical and methodological challenges when researching such vast disciplinary terrains as policy studies, journalism studies, Indigenous studies, media and cultural theory, and political communication. We have drawn on all of these, but the project essentially sits within the field of communication and media studies. While we address policy issues and examine the practices of policymakers, we don't purport to be policy analysis experts. And while we were advised by, engaged and collaborated with Indigenous scholars, communities and research perspectives, the chief investigators are not Indigenous.

Our research was designed so that it would have tangible benefits for those involved in developing, influencing and reporting on public policy about this issue of national importance. It contributes to the body of Australian research examining the nature of media and government in Australia, and to informing contemporary media practice. To that end, we have built the *Media and Indigenous Policy* website, a publicly available repository for the data collected for the project. To be progressively updated, the website currently houses the media graphs, an annotated bibliography of newspaper reports on Indigenous health between 1988 and 2008, and a bibliography of key references as a resource for other researchers. It is our hope that the database and this report will provide seeds for future research to continue to address such a complex and enduring research issue.

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Policymaker Perspectives

Managing the optics of Indigenous policy

Kerry McCallum and Lisa Waller

> It was one of their favourite words, the *optics* of it. Have you heard that one yet? ... Optics, how it looks to the outside. Yeah, do you hear that? It's a very public servant word … The optics. When you're dealing with stakeholders and do you something, it's the optics. How will this be seen out there in the world?

A major outcome of the *Media and Indigenous Policy* project has been to identify and document the ways in which news media practices have increasingly been incorporated into the development, communication and implementation of Indigenous affairs policymaking. We found that at every level, from Minister to junior bureaucrat, news media routines, priorities and practices have been internalised and embodied by bureaucrats working on Indigenous affairs policies. Rather than policy professionals simply reading and responding to mediated messages, however, they had adopted a 'media logic' into their practices (Althiede & Snow, 1979). We conclude that the portrayal of Indigenous issues in mainstream news media had a significant, but indirect, impact on specific Indigenous policies in the 20 years between 1988 and 2008.

This essay outlines how 'mediatized' policymaking practices operate in particular fields of Indigenous affairs. A key concept in media studies, mediatization theory, describes a media saturated culture where media norms and resources become part of everyday activities (Couldry, 2008; Silverstone, 2007). It is the process whereby 'everyday practices and social relations are historically shaped by mediating technologies and media organisations' (Lundby, 2009, p. x; Davis, 2007). This emphasis on mediated policy practice contrasts with traditional approaches to policy analysis whereby news media is frequently understood as an outside, unidirectional influence on policy (e.g. Cook et al, 2009; Althaus et al, 2007). This essay draws upon mediatization theory to explore and map the discursive environments in which specific Indigenous affairs policies are developed. This has enabled us to reconsider the way policy is developed in a mediatized world and to re-theorise how the media can play a key role at certain policy moments.

The extreme example of mediatized policymaking was the announcement via the news media of the Northern Territory Emergency Response (NTER or Intervention) in June 2007, whereby Australia's Prime Minster announced a military-led incursion into NT Indigenous communities to instigate a suite of policies that fundamentally changed the direction of Indigenous affairs policy (Allen & Clark, 2011). This dramatic policy announcement was made in the wake of intense publicity surrounding the shocking but by no means new documentation of child sexual abuse in the Northern Territory. As Meadows points out in his essay for this report, not all policies are developed with such political scrutiny or media attention. Meadows gives the example of remote Indigenous broadcasting as a policy area that has developed in a 'vacuum'. This point is reinforced by the graphs in the *Indigenous health reporting 1988–2008* section of this report that demonstrate that, more often than not, Indigenous people and issues are ignored rather than attended to by Australia's news media. Koch-Baumgarten and Voltmer (2010, p. 219) concluded that 'any shade of media influence is possible, from 'non-existent' to 'high'. Moreover, even within a policy field, long periods out of the limelight may be interspersed with short bursts of media attention'. But the participants interviewed for the *Media and Indigenous Policy* project argued that behind this apparent lack of media and political

interest in Indigenous affairs lies a deep political sensitivity to Indigenous issues in Australia.

We have therefore taken a policy-specific approach to understanding the media's role in the policy process. This essay focuses on two distinct policy fields — Indigenous primary health care and bilingual education. Our examination of Indigenous health policy since 1988 takes as its focal point the delivery of primary health care through the network of Community Controlled Health Organisations. Four key 'policy moments' were chosen that characterise the tendency for governments to propose dramatic policy changes to tackle the Indigenous health 'crisis':

- the 1989 National Aboriginal Health Strategy, which placed Indigenous self-determination through community control at the heart of health service delivery;
- the removal of Aboriginal health from the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Commission in 1995;
- the declaration by Minister Abbott in 2006 of a policy of 'new paternalism' in Aboriginal health; and
- the 2007 Intervention which proposed mandatory health checks on Indigenous children.

Bilingual education provides a second example of a policy field characterised by periodic radical policy announcements. First introduced in the 1970s, bilingual education policy in the Northern Territory has undergone a number of shifts in direction:

- In 1999 the NT government backed down on a decision to abolish its bilingual education programs following community opposition and the independent Collins Review of Indigenous education.
- In 2008 the NT Minister for Education announced by media release a policy that the first four hours of the five-hour school day would be in English only, a move that effectively shut down bilingual education programs.
- In late 2012 bilingual education policy was reintroduced by the new Country Liberal Party Government.

Interviewing Federal, state and territory bureaucrats about their media-related practices has enabled us to tease out the precise way they incorporate news media practices into their everyday routines. In this essay we summarise the results of our analysis of interviews with public servants working in Indigenous health, education, and related social policy areas about their understanding of the news media's role in policymaking. Rather than, say, ministerial advisors or politicians, we chose to speak with the public servants responsible for developing, implementing, and promoting Indigenous affairs policies. We wanted to access the local knowledge of a group of people whose roles were not traditionally oriented towards media and public opinion, but whose primary functions included providing expert policy advice on behalf of their departments to their portfolio Ministers, and to implementing and communicating the policy decisions of their government. Drawing on Waller's innovative doctoral research, we took a 'media-as-practice' approach (Couldry, 2004), where we asked simply: 'what do people do with media and what do people say about media'. In this way, we have been able to explore the media-related experience of those deepest inside the policymaking processes.

Our participants spoke candidly and with extraordinary expertise about the way they orient their practices toward the Minister's office and the public. A number of themes emerged from the analysis of the interviews. The first finding was that Indigenous policy bureaucrats were media experts with a sophisticated knowledge of news media processes. They described in detail their operation at the political, Ministerial, communication and policy levels. Secondly, they explained the localised media practices of their policy field. They identified that policymaking practices had become increasingly media oriented over time, with the Northern Territory Intervention given as an

extreme example of media-driven policymaking. They rarely had any direct contact with a journalist, but they were, nevertheless, media experts who could monitor news, anticipate how an issue might play out in public media, adapt their practices to pre-empt the public response to their policies, react with skill to negative and positive news stories, and use the news media strategically to develop publicly-successful policies. Finally, through their interviews, policymakers revealed a high level of reflexivity about the media-related nature of their policymaking practices, and its impact on policy outcomes over the 20-year period between 1988 and 2008.

Media experts

Policymakers have a fine-grained and sophisticated understanding of news media processes. They are passionate about their area of policy responsibility and they follow the content of print, radio, television and online media. Many of the public servants we spoke to could be described as media experts with a good understanding of why journalists cover controversial or prominent issues. A former communications officer said of the 2007 NT Intervention: 'Whether you were for or against the Intervention as a journalist, it was just a big story and go in and cover it.' A senior manager revealed an intimate working knowledge of the *Australian* newspaper, and a close, if indirect relationship with its Indigenous affairs journalists. She told us:

> Because the *Australian* doesn't have the same parochial interests as states, it has a greater ability to determine, perhaps more so than its readers, its particular campaigns, where it will go in hot pursuit. It's often referred to as a campaigning newspaper.

Many were critical of media practice, and related examples of where the media 'got it wrong' or misrepresented a policy issue they were working on. Some of those who worked closely with Indigenous communities found the constantly negative, sensationalist reporting, and the recycling of the same issues, frustrated their efforts to realise policy solutions. One manager in NT Health bemoaned that 'media … don't tend to report on good things that happen or the strengths in a community … ' Another observed:

> They're incredibly complicated issues, and the media is just light years away from getting its head around how, in these days of hype and public grabs, how do you present public issues in a way that will raise public awareness, or bring people to an understanding to share the solutions? It's hugely challenging.

Some of those who worked closely with Indigenous communities found the constantly negative, sensationalist reporting, and the recycling of the same

KEY POINTS

Indigenous policy bureaucrats:

- demonstrated a high level of policy commitment and accountability to their Minister and the Australian public
- had increasingly media-oriented policymaking practices
- were media experts with a sophisticated knowledge of news media processes
- saw the NT Intervention as the extreme example of media and politically-driven policymaking
- monitored news, anticipated coverage, pre-empted and adapted policies to negative and positive news stories
- used news media strategically to develop publicly-successful policies
- Revealed a high level of reflexivity about the media-related nature of their policymaking practices, and its impact on policy outcomes.

issues, frustrated their efforts to implement policy solutions. A senior manager in Indigenous policy told us:

> What gets frustrating is where you get deliberate mischievous behaviour in media, which can happen ... Like there is a continual pulling forward of, you know, you wasted all this money on consultants, you're expending this huge amount of people, very selective presentation of information.

Policymakers, for whom accountability is central to their professional practice, were bemused by journalists' perceived fickleness — that they could campaign so strongly on an issue, and then a few weeks later take an almost oppositional stance in their reporting. A former communications officer gave the media's intense campaigning against the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Affairs (ATSIC) as an example:

> Journalists, who were almost the same people who'd helped get rid of ATSIC, suddenly said, 'Oh, this bloody government's got rid of ATSIC, now they're doing all these terrible things'. The next lot of scandal.

Monitoring

Policy bureaucrats explained in precise detail how they incorporated media practice into their daily routines. They described how they monitored media coverage of issues they were working on and accepted that monitoring media coverage was an integral part of their job, not one that was left to the domain of the department's communication specialists. In doing so they revealed that there was a much closer distance between journalism and policy practice than we had previously assumed. A former public servant in bilingual education told us:

> Folk in the ministerial environment … and at senior levels in bureaucracies are scanning media endlessly and responding to it endlessly, and shaping themselves in relationship to what is increasingly intimate dialogue, because journalists' storytelling … is through this close relationship with the political environment.

Government departments have established routines for monitoring media interest in their policy area. Communication sections of each department employ media specialists to formally monitor media activity. Ward (2007) has described the growth of communication and public affairs within the Commonwealth, but our study found that these functions take place within policy areas as well as in specialist communication units. One senior manager described in detail how the monitoring of news occurred in his section:

> Okay. So physically every morning I have somebody that comes into my office. So we have a communications branch, there's a team in there. We buy a media monitoring service. That team pulls together clips. I've got a team in my group that particularly focuses on issues we know will be running. I can log onto my email at 8.00 and I'll see the news clips. We're very regular stories on the weekend, so I have a little text message service that comes to me from the communications area about what's on page 3 of *The Australian* etc.

Anticipating, and pre-empting

We were surprised to learn the extent and closeness of the working relationship between senior managers and the communications sections of their departments for the implementation of new policies. One senior Northern Territory bureaucrat said:

> Media management and media interaction just became a necessary part of the functions, and particularly in terms of dealing with Indigenous remote contexts with all of the overlays … of the Intervention.

Another commented that the communications team was also involved to some degree in policy development:

> I … guess it's some of the core of your work … the media was seen as absolutely hand in glove with

> successful policy implementation. Not necessarily so much policy development, although there had been in the policy development before it was decided, a fully comprehensive consultation — public consultation, site by site. So that had involved the full-blown media.

Another described the centrality of media routines to policy work:

> So we do run on a media cycle every day, we check media … we do our media response work. We need to get our media response back so that you can get back into press the next day if you need to refute a story.

This senior manager highlighted how, at the highest levels of the department, practices were oriented outwards. A key function of her job was to pre-empt the outcomes of policy decisions that might cause trouble for the department or the Minister. We were told that 'in an area such as the bilingual education policy normally there would have been heavy consultation with the media…' Likewise, a health department bureaucrat told us that her area would adjust their policy advice or the announcement of a policy, depending on 'the optics' — their fine-tuned understanding of how a policy would be 'seen out there in the world'. As another explained:

> You have to be aware of the political implications of what's going to happen if something you do goes public. Is it a good news story or a bad … if it's not saleable to the general public … it won't happen, or it will be defused, rather than put in place something that … the talkbacks or the tabloids might get hold of.

Reacting

While they understood the news values that drove media outlets to sensationalise controversies in Indigenous health, policy professionals argued that this frustrated their ability to implement long-term policy issues. Policymakers were divided in their levels of cynicism. One relayed the advice of an older colleague:

> I was in the hot seat and suddenly we had that one picture of a kid with a needle in Redfern … it made the entire world spin on its axis and suddenly we went off in this other direction. And [my colleague] used this as an example to me to say, 'you can go to all these meetings 'til the cows come home but decisions are made on talkback radio and in the paper', and it certainly seemed that way to me …

In 2008, poor national numeracy and literacy results in national testing became the subject of intense media focus, which was seen to put political pressure on the education minister and her department to change its bilingual education policies. A former education department CEO said this 'was absolutely a critical lever in the series of events that then impacted on the bilingual program':

> I mean the media was actually the trigger behind all of that policy change to go from bilingual to a four-hour full-on English experience, and it was the national publication of results, the Northern Territory's need to respond to look like they were on top of this and handling it … so it was part of that role out of responsiveness to the media.

Most participants accepted that responding to media stories was an integral part of their job. If the monitored news is perceived to have political significance, '… then that means we go into a media response arrangement. So we will pull together the information that's required in order to respond to the story in a timely way'. This very senior bureaucrat was pragmatic, saying, 'but the other thing also is, if one of those stories is mishandled, or the wrong information gets into them, it might put me out for a month if I'm there on the front page'.

Media and policy scholars Voltmer and Koch-Baumgarten (2010) say that increased media scrutiny leads to 'amplification':

> … the dynamic and direction of a policy can change dramatically. Increased media coverage usually

> intensifies conflict … Policy alternatives must then be formulated in a manner that suits the media's thirst for sound bites and catchy headlines, and since the conflict is now enacted in front of the public eye, compromises and backstage deals become less likely. (Voltmer & Koch-Baumgarten , 2010, p. 5)

Straddling political and policy realms

While senior policy bureaucrats oriented their practices towards their Minister's office, they made a clear distinction between the policy realm and the political realm. There were certain times when a policy announcement was so politicised that it was announced with minimal departmental involvement. Policymakers identified the 2007 NT Intervention as a 'template' for media-driven policymaking in Indigenous affairs. News media reporting, particularly the *The Australian's* coverage of child sexual abuse, was attributed with great significance in providing the Prime Minister with the justification for overriding the NT government and its own racial discrimination laws. This policy announcement was so politicised that even senior departmental officials were caught unaware:

> They're on their way … Everyone was shocked. It was a public announcement ... And these were senior managers, and they had to get ready for, who was it, the army, and God knows, was arriving on their doorsteps – 'Oh, God, no'. They were shocked. Scrabbling to find out what this was all about.

In such cases, departmental officers were required to adjust to the new policy direction and amend existing programs in line with the new policies. They may have been ambushed by the Prime Minister's reaction to the media's portrayal of the *Little Children are Sacred* report, but senior health department officials described how they were opportunistic about the Intervention announcement. Even before the dust settled, pragmatic departmental workers said they looked for ways of making the most of the pot of funding for Indigenous health that was part of the package. One said: 'And, so obviously the decision had to be made about how the huge additional resource was to be used positively'. A health policy advocate told us that:

> … people in the Health Department were totally unaware of what was being done. So they're playing catch up and in a big way it's to Tony Abbott's credit, they came up with a hundred million straight away for the Intervention we kind of negotiated with the community controlled sector … I'm sure they would have been told the morning of the announcement, that's what I reckon.

Strategic

Policy scholars Schön & Rein (1994) and Gamson and Modigliani (1989) found that policy uncertainty occurs at those sites of most political controversy, over 'intractable' policy problems that are hardest to resolve. As the essays in this volume demonstrate, news media itself can amplify the intractability of an issue, or Indigenous advocacy groups can keep an issue alive and unresolved (see the essay, *Intractable or indomitable?* on p. 69 of this volume). In these situations, the media often provides the platform where the various stakeholders, including government departments, play out their policy battles. They work closely with Indigenous 'stakeholders' in their area and know their stakeholders' media strategies. One tactic is to ensure that the Minister's office is provided with information to counter a negative news story. We found that bureaucrats used their knowledge of how the news media operate to capitalise on opportunities for gaining positive attention for their programs. One explained:

> I use the media team the other way. So if I've got something like the minister's going to do a launch or something, open a new facility. We would do talking points and a media release. It would go to the communications area, they'd make

> sure it was well presented as a media release and then it would go over to the minister's office.

Our findings accord with international research that concludes increased scrutiny leads to intensified media management (Voltmer & Koch-Baumgarten, 2010). Journalists we spoke to talked of 'tight drip feeds' and 'laughing drains' of information, depending on whether the department wanted a story to be publicised or hosed down. One journalist described her experiences of trying to procure comment about bilingual education programs from NT education department staff:

> The education department … are real thugs. They have no hesitation in bullying, threatening staff. The department does not tell the truth, certainly not the truth as we hear it from other people who aren't being told what to say by the department. It's a really forceful, repressive, far from free speech environment.
>
> … And people who are at the coalface aren't allowed to speak and you get some trumped up director from whatever region, parroting the line. There's no resemblance to what the people on the ground are telling you.

Despite this 'strategic dance', most public servant have only an indirect relationship with journalists, adhering to departmental policy that generally allows only media advisors to speak directly with the news media. The relationship is indirect however; while public servants' practices are intimately involved with news media, very few outside of the communication area of the department or the Minister's office have direct contact with a journalist. A senior manager who worked on Indigenous policy explained:

> I don't know, there's certainly much more political sensitivity around responding to media and how it's portrayed. But I don't remember ever, in my time, it being the norm that public servants would have spoken to media.

Some journalists did claim that public servants spoke 'off the record', especially regarding a policy they thought the Minister had implemented without consultation, but they agreed that over time, governments had become increasingly expert media managers:

> We found it increasingly hard to get leaks, but there were still people who were ideologically just opposed to what was occurring under the Intervention. So on that grounds they were leaking and we got leaked a lot of stuff.

Reflexive

As media experts, policy professionals were surprisingly reflexive about the role of media in the policymaking process (cf. Tanner, 2012). They acknowledge their own role in a mediated policy environment and are aware of their mediatized policy practices. Study participants working on health and bilingual education policy accepted that the policy issues they worked on were highly significant and politically sensitive, the subject of scrutiny by interest groups and opposing political parties, and therefore the subject of media interest. But they understood the media's Fourth Estate role:

> Oh, look, I think media have a huge influence on policy … media tends to highlight the issue and demand that there be some result, which then I suppose, prompts the government to respond in a faster way, or at least be seen to be respond in a faster way …

Most participants were critical of practices of 'policy by press release', 'knee-jerk policy' and 'policy on the run'. They argued that the short news cycle encourages bad policy, discourages evidence-based policy, discourages genuine community consultation, and discourages risky or long-term policy decisions. They find these aspects of their jobs frustrating and frequently demoralising, but many have a passion for their area of expertise that enables them

to continue in the hope that they can make a difference:

> A policy bureaucracy always wants to be getting it right. I actually think there's a bit of a disease which is people want to move from one policy to another, there's not enough patience to say well, let's get it right, let's get it right with the community and let's think in five and ten years

They were also sensitive to the distinctions between the political and bureaucratic realms. The Minister's office operated on an agenda driven by political and public opinion imperatives, while these processes were less overt within government departments. Those working at the most senior levels of the department oriented themselves towards the Minister and his or her office and therefore towards those political imperatives. They understood implicitly that issues that were the subject of intense news media interest had the potential to reflect poorly on the Minister. As political issues, Indigenous health and education were more likely to require media management. They also saw that news media attention to an issue could, at times, force governments to attend to politically difficult issues:

> I guess their policies have produced a lot of sensitivity ... And that's where media actually questioned what the government was doing. So, yeah, I guess government give its reasons why ... yeah, I suppose media is a constant headache for government.

A policy bureaucrat commented that the sustained media campaigning around issues of violence in remote Indigenous communities helped focus government attention on policy issues otherwise ignored:

> We were grateful that some of this stuff was being promoted in the mainstream media, at least it meant that attention was being paid to it and that it might attract some Government attention.

Conclusion

This examination of policy bureaucrats' local understanding of the relationships between the news media and their health and education policy areas has found that mediatized practices had been incorporated into the very heart of the policymaking process. Contrary to our expectations, Australian public servants demonstrated a strong appreciation of the Fourth Estate role of journalists and media organisations. They were reflexive about their position in a mediated policy environment and acknowledged that their mediatized practices fed the journalists' routines, reacted to Minister's political agendas, and used the media strategically to promote their policies to the public. While they were at times uncomfortable about the outcome of 'managing the optics', they skilfully negotiated the changing technological, political and industrial media landscape as they developed, communicated and implemented government policy.

Our study has found that news media have played a vital role in the development of both health and bilingual education policy as a strategic and frequently tactical device in the discursive battle to define policy problems and solutions. The bilingual education policy example provides evidence of the 'intimate dialogue' between the media field and the policy field that shaped public and policy discussion of how best to deliver education programs to Indigenous children in some remote communities. The outcome of that mediated policy discussion, and the mediatized practices of policy professionals, had real and devastating impacts on the lived experiences of children and families living in remote NT communities. The decision to effectively axe bilingual education from the school curriculum has been widely understood as bad policy (Scrymgour, 2012). Likewise, the mediatized practices of health policymakers were found to have real impacts on the delivery of primary health care to Indigenous Australians. While Indigenous health was shielded

from the media spotlight, funding and commitment for Indigenous health grew. But a growing tension between players in the health policy field, played out against the backdrop of the media's sensationalist reporting of the Indigenous health crisis and child sexual abuse, culminated in the announcement of the dramatic policy shift towards 'new paternalism' and the radical policy announcement of compulsory child sexual health checks as part of the NT Intervention in 2007.

Participants told us that the Australian news media's short-term focus on sensationalised stories of community dysfunction, chronic disease and poor standards of literacy worked against good long-term policy development (Hunter, 2007). In the future we can expect Indigenous health and education policies will at times be driven by knee-jerk political reaction to media campaigns that fit the Intervention template. Most significantly, our study has found that media-related practices are intimately woven into the fabric of policymaking. Media logic operated at all levels of the policy process, from development, through announcement, to implementation. As media experts, skilled in monitoring, anticipating, pre-empting, responding to and managing news media, Australian policy bureaucrats working in Indigenous affairs portfolios have incorporated news media routines into their own policymaking practices. The permeation of 'media logics' into the everyday practices of Indigenous policy development has been found to narrow the range of policy options available for improving the health and educational wellbeing of Indigenous people.

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When the stars align: Indigenous media policy formation 1988-2008

Michael Meadows

> Policy is a wheel continually turning, a task never completed (Althaus et al., 2007, 40).

Introduction

The Indigenous broadcasting sector has been one of the most vibrant in Australia in terms of development since its emergence in the late 1970s. Although the Indigenous press has been present in various forms in Australia since 1836, it has been broadcasting that has tended to dominate the media preferences of Indigenous audiences and the policy domain (Molnar & Meadows, 2001; Forde, Foxwell & Meadows, 2009). Bennett (1989, p. 10) usefully defines the policymaking process as 'the organisational principles and objectives governing the activities of those agencies — governmental or private — active in the sphere of culture'. So how did this process play out with respect to Indigenous broadcasting between 1988 and 2008?

Ironically, Indigenous media as a news topic is virtually absent from broader public sphere discussion promoted by mainstream media. On a handful of occasions during this time has it received even cursory attention. In this sense, the policymaking processes involved in Indigenous communication differ markedly from other areas. As Althaus et al (2007, pp. 10-11) suggest: 'It has been said that policymaking is nine-tenths press release and one-tenth substance.' While the Indigenous media policymaking process has certainly generated its fair share of media releases, few have found their way onto public sphere agendas through mainstream media attention.

Indigenous media in Australia

Community radio and television have been the major communications outlets for Indigenous voices in Australia with more than 100 licensed radio stations in remote regions and a further 20 radio stations in regional and urban areas broadcasting around 1,400 hours of Indigenous content weekly. There is one Indigenous commercial radio station — 6LN in Carnarvon in Western Australia — and one commercial television station, Imparja, based in Alice Springs in central Australia. There are two Indigenous radio networks: the satellite-networked National Indigenous Radio Service (NIRS) and the National Indigenous News Service (NINS) (Molnar & Meadows, 2001; Community Broadcasting Foundation, 2009).

In 2012, an additional 80 Remote Indigenous Broadcasting Services (RIBS) produced a combination of radio and/or television transmission in the most remote parts of the continent. These RIBS units also re-broadcast the National Indigenous Television (NITV) service. Most of the small, remote stations are engaged in re-transmitting available satellite programming, both mainstream- and community-produced. In 1988, Imparja Television became the first Indigenous-owned and managed commercial television service in Australia and, arguably, the world. Since its launch, largely for financial reasons, Imparja has been able to produce minimal Indigenous content.

An Aboriginal-owned and run Indigenous community television service (ICTV) began broadcasting from one of Imparja's spare satellite channels in 2001. This innovative service featured close to 100 per cent Indigenous content, produced mostly by small bush communities and often in local or regional languages. It was initiated by the Aboriginal-controlled PY Media, and produced around 300 hours of new content annually from 2005. ICTV ran on an annual budget of about $70,000 and included contributions from PY Media, Warlpiri Media, Pilbara and Kimberley Aboriginal Media (PAKAM), Ngaanyatjarra Media, TEABBA and other local Indigenous

producers. Former PY media general manager Will Rogers (2009) reflects on the ICTV experience:

> ICTV was a real project started from the grassroots; an opportunity for the un-heard to have the freedom to say what it needed to. Another funny thing was, what was said was OK — it wasn't said in anger but just an opportunity to say something and show the pride of people that live in the bush and their lifestyles.

The launch of NITV in 2007 saw ICTV displaced from the airwaves, forcing it to seek alternative delivery systems. This caused great concern amongst remote Indigenous communities at the time but has led to some creative responses, including the launch of *Indigitube*, a database of Indigenous-produced videos available for viewing online. The federal government committed $48 million over four years to develop NITV and, late in 2012, it merged with Australia's national multicultural broadcaster, the Special Broadcasting Service (SBS). Following some intense lobbying by the Indigenous Remote Communication Association (IRCA), ICTV began broadcasting again on its own digital television channel also in late 2012. However, it will be seen only by remote and regional communities currently able to access the existing remote television satellite network (Meadows et al., 2007; Forde, Foxwell & Meadows, 2009; Meadows, 2010; Featherstone, 2012).

About $16 million each year is distributed by the Community Broadcasting Foundation (CBF) for Indigenous community radio and television program production across the country. In addition, in 2011, NITV was allocated $15 million as a one-year support grant until its transition to SBS has been completed (Garrett, 2010). The multifarious roles played by Indigenous radio and television in their communities makes this investment by government seem modest, particularly when compared with funding for comparable Indigenous media organisations globally. In Canada in 2011, the Aboriginal People's Television Network (APTN) had an annual budget of $37 million with an additional $7.8 million distributed for National Aboriginal Broadcasting program production by the Department of Canadian Heritage. Maori Television in New Zealand received $28.8 million with an additional $9.5 million allocated for Maori programming on radio and television (APTN, 2011; Maori Television, 2011; Department of Canadian Heritage, 2011; NZ on Air, 2011).

Despite concerted lobbying over decades, Indigenous broadcasting in Australia remains on the periphery. Westerway (2005, p. 300) suggests that the 'view from the Australian Public Service window' in the early stages of Indigenous media policy development was 'obscured' by 50,000 years of difference between Indigenous and non-Indigenous cultures:

> The well-intentioned settler policymakers tasked to address the issues were predominantly Anglo-Celtic, middle-class and middle-aged men. Aborigines — and particularly those who still lived in the heartland — were far too often perceived as 'backward', too varied in their cultures and ways of life, too much the Other to be easily understood.

Many would suggest that little has changed. But while the mainstream continues to have difficulty placing Indigenous media into the broader public sphere, Indigenous communities have long applied their own frameworks in producing media that reflect themselves and their lives. A study of the Indigenous broadcasting sector in 2007 revealed Indigenous and non-Indigenous audiences access Indigenous radio and television across Australia for various reasons. They identify Indigenous media as essential community services that play a central organizing role in community life. Indigenous media help to maintain social networks and play a strong educative role in communities in supporting languages and cultures, particularly for young people. They offer alternative sources of news and information without the prevalent stereotyping present in mainstream media and, in doing so, help to break down prejudices for non-Indigenous audiences. The stations offer a crucial medium for Indigenous music and dance and, arguably,

are the primary supporters of the vast Indigenous music industry. It is evident that Indigenous radio and television is playing a key role in facilitating cross-cultural dialogue between Indigenous and non-Indigenous Australia (Meadows et al. 2007; Forde, Foxwell & Meadows, 2009; Meadows, 2010).

The policy process

Indigenous media as an administrative entity has always found itself variously as part of an eclectic mix of sometimes disparate policy domains, although some suggest recent placements are more logical (Hart, 2011). A prevailing preference for a conservative broadcasting model — accompanied by a conservative political will — has shaped the policy environment in which Indigenous broadcasting has emerged, as longtime policymaker Peter Westerway (2005, p. 180) observes:

> The national sector model (taxpayer funded, non-profit, government controlled broadcasting intended for the general public and able to be received by commonly available equipment) had been the staple instrument of broadcasting policy for more than 30 years. Moreover, it was consistent with assimilation.

The nature of this cultural policy environment created a tension between Indigenous aspirations for an independent media sector and a preference by government policymakers for Indigenous media to be part of the mainstream. The varied input from participants makes this process complex: additional tensions and conflict between federal government departments and between Indigenous media producers from the bush and those from the eastern seaboard. All have an equally valid stake in the process but all do not have an equal voice at the negotiating table: the impact of 'quiet voices' and 'loud voices' impacts not only on the policymaking process, but also extends into mainstream media coverage of Indigenous affairs globally. Indigenous participants — like any non-government or 'third sector' entity — have always been disadvantaged in the process, despite the rhetoric from on high, and despite some notable examples where 'a friend at court' within a department has promoted Indigenous perspectives (Althaus et al., 2007, p. 18; Hart, 2011).

While some argue that within the Australian policymaking environment there are 'fresh calls for innovative cultural practices that deliver global solidarity at the same time as renewed local identity' (Althaus et al., 2007, p. 10), there is little evidence of this in the Indigenous policymaking process. In fact, it is notable by its absence. It underlines the marginality of Indigenous media when compared with the 'squeaky wheels' of social indicator programs — health, education, housing and justice (Featherstone, 2011a).

Others have argued the need for significant changes in the way policymaking in general is conducted in Australia. Edwards (2010,

KEY POINTS

- Indigenous media in Australia has evolved in a policy vacuum, marked by policy uncertainty and a lack of political will to acknowledge the place of Indigenous languages and cultures.
- Indigenous media as a news topic is virtually absent from broader public sphere discussion promoted by mainstream media.
- The key policy moment in Indigenous media policy was the decision to replace Indigenous Community Television (ICTV) with the $48.5 million National Indigenous Television (NITV) in 2007.
- Indigenous media policy advocacy has been marked by competing policy agendas and tensions between 'soft voices' of video producers from the bush communities and the 'loud voices' those based along the eastern seaboard
- There is a lack of understanding of the media-related practices of policy advocates and policy managers.

p. 60) suggests the public sector needs 'a different set of structures, principles and values to support collaborative arrangements, both within government and also with external partners and citizens'. She has urged the development of a more 'citizen-centred' environment to improve governance processes which include the possibility for greater exchanges of personnel between the government and the private and community sectors (Edwards, 2010, p. 61).

A preference for hard research data — in particular, quantitative studies — by government policymakers places the Indigenous media environment in an invidious position. All of the available research into Indigenous media processes and practice is qualitative — there are few, if any, numbers involved. It presents policymakers with the challenging task of making sense of 'values' rather than relying on 'evidence' in a narrow sense (Marston & Watts, 2003, p. 158). Ramirez' (2001; 2007) research into the use of information and communication technologies in Native communities in northern Canada reaches a similar conclusion. He argues for the integration of economic and social development goals in the policymaking process but admits there appears to be no set mechanism for 'policy learning and adaption'.

Indigenous media policy moments 1988–2008

Indigenous media in Australia continues to evolve in a policy vacuum. Despite efforts in the 1980s and early 1990s to develop a policy framework — guidelines were actually published in 1993 (ATSIC, 1993) — there is no current template from which the policymaking process appears to draw. Plans to launch Australia's first communications satellite, AUSSAT, led to several inquiries which identified Indigenous concerns, although most did not seek Indigenous input. The Satellite Program Services Inquiry in 1983 led to the eventual licensing of four Remote Commercial Television Services (RCTS). One of these was Imparja Television.

During 1984 for the first time in Australian policymaking history, Indigenous people were consulted over their preferred communication needs. And ironically, two separate inquiries operated in parallel — *Out of the Silent Land*, supported jointly by the departments of Aboriginal Affairs and Communications and *Aboriginal Use of AUSSAT*, commissioned by AUSSAT (Wilmott, 1984; Walsh, 1984). Both recommended Indigenous control of their own media production processes, with the Walsh report going into considerable detail on how the satellite might be configured as a consultative model to facilitate Indigenous access (Walsh, 1984). However, only the recommendations of the Wilmott report were adopted by the federal government, leading to the eventual rollout of the Broadcasting for Remote Aboriginal Communities Scheme (BRACS) in 1987. Many commentators and participants have observed that BRACS was set up to fail, based on a deliberate strategy to provide a cheap, low-quality package of communication equipment with no provision for training or maintenance, in accordance with perceived ministerial expectations (Molnar & Meadows, 2001; Westerway, 2005, p. 238). As Featherstone (2011a) observes: 'It was like a white elephant … and we see this a lot in communities: capital funding but no funding to make it work with the support needed'.

An Indigenous broadcasting policy

Initiated within the Department of Aboriginal Affairs (DAA) in 1989, an internal discussion paper flagged the first review of Aboriginal and Torres Islander broadcasting. Significantly, the opening paragraph stated what it described as 'an over-riding policy consideration' since the election of the Whitlam Labor government in 1975 (DAA, 1989, p. i): 'The first premise is that Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Australians have a right to consultation and self determination in their own affairs.'

The social justice argument predominated throughout but it was the beginning of a drawn out conflict with the Department of Transport and Communication (DOTAC).

The draft was sent to policymakers in DOTAC and an amended version was returned to the Aboriginal broadcasting section in DAA virtually stripped of social justice issues. DAA staff redrafted the proposal — replacing social justice elements — and sent it back to DOTAC. Resolution of the matter was delayed by the formation of the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Commission (ATSIC) in 1990 and, in August 1991, a 'substantially revised' joint discussion paper was released (Paton, 1989; 1990; ATSIC & DOTAC, 1991). It acknowledged six key grounds for the case for Indigenous broadcasting: equity considerations; efficiency of communication; cultural preservation and growth; enhanced self-image; training and employment opportunities; and educational needs (ATSIC & DOTAC, 1991, pp. 9-15).

With ATSIC back in control of the process, in January 1993, its Infrastructure Branch released a review report and a six-page draft Indigenous broadcasting policy (ATSIC, 1993). By the end of the year, the six-page document had been accepted as the first Indigenous broadcasting policy guidelines. Social justice elements featured strongly in the document along with a recommendation to support a new industry peak body — the National Indigenous Media Association of Australia (NIMAA) (ATSIC, 1993). Until its demise in September 2001, NIMAA steered the Indigenous broadcasting sector through sometimes troubled waters but achieved some significant advances using the basic tenets of the 1993 Indigenous broadcasting policy as guiding principles. One month after NIMAA's abolition, the Indigenous Remote Communications Association (IRCA) was formed to represent the interests of bush broadcasters. The remainder of the sector had to wait until the formation of the Australian Indigenous Communications Association (AICA), two years later.

Drawing from the basic principles of the 1993 Indigenous broadcasting policy, Aboriginal Affairs Minister Robert Tickner encouraged and oversaw the introduction of the National Indigenous Radio Service (NIRS) in 1996. It has been suggested by industry insiders that the low-key process adopted was a deliberate strategy by the Minister to avoid attracting attention from colleagues less enamoured by the potential of a national Indigenous radio network. Five years later — in 2001 — the National Indigenous News Service was launched, based in NIRS' Brisbane studios. All of these achievements came about largely because of the lobbying power of NIMAA and its reliance on the existence of clear Indigenous broadcasting policy principles.

Indigenous television policy debates

In May 1997, ATSIC commissioned the first full-scale review of Indigenous media in Australia. It was the first time that media other than broadcasting were included, based on NIMAA's five defined Indigenous media sub-sectors: BRACS, radio, film and television, print and multimedia (Indigenous Management Australia, 1998, p. 2). Undertaken by Indigenous Media Australia, headed by academic and consultant Dr Helen Molnar, the final report — *Digital dreaming* — was submitted to ATSIC in June 1998. The review team carried out extensive community consultations across Australia and urged ATSIC to read *Digital dreaming* in concert with two parallel reviews carried out at the same time: *The BRACS report*, compiled by long-time community media producer Neil Turner; and *Our culture, our future: proposals for the recognition and protection of Indigenous cultural and intellectual property* by Terri Janke. *Digital dreaming* alone compiled a massive volume of qualitative and quantitative data about the Indigenous media sector and ran to more than 500 pages. ATSIC declined to publish the full report, arguing that it was 'too emotional' in style. Following strong lobbying from sector representatives and the consultants, ATSIC eventually agreed to publish an edited version and, eleven months after the original review was submitted, the only published version of the report — edited by experienced policymaker Peter Westerway — was released (ATSIC, 1999). There were 130 recommendations including acceptance of the crucial principle that Indigenous media

provided communities with a first level of service. That critical point was reiterated in 2000 by a Productivity Commission inquiry into broadcasting in Australia. The commission report also acknowledged that Indigenous media in Australia was providing a cultural bridge between Indigenous and non-Indigenous audiences. Perhaps most tellingly, it was the first public acknowledgement of the existence of an Indigenous media sector as a significant Australian cultural industry (Productivity Commission, 2000).

By 2002, ATSIC had endorsed a key recommendation of the *Digital dreaming* report to establish a national broadcasting model. Within two years, the commission was disbanded by a conservative federal government and Indigenous broadcasting policy was again thrown into chaos. An ill-conceived review of the sector in 2006 essentially relegated Indigenous broadcasting to a 70s development model, ignoring the thousands of hours of innovative video production, particularly by membership of IRCA.

In fact, Indigenous media organisations in some remote communities — Yuendumu and Ernabella — had been experimenting with video since the late 1970s. Yuendumu began the first unlicensed 'pirate' television broadcasts in April 1985 and 'invented' a genre of video related to traditional cultural norms (Michaels, 1986). Policymaking around community television — particularly in remote Indigenous communities — was non-existent and would be absent for almost a decade. Following the example set by video producers at Yuendumu and Ernabella (now known as Umuwa), other bush communities began to take up the new medium. By 2001, the newly-formed IRCA had organised the first Indigenous Community Television broadcasts. The entity, called ICTV, remains viable today (Rogers, 2009; Featherstone, 2012).

Tensions between video producers from the bush communities and those based along the eastern seaboard were exacerbated by the establishment of a national Indigenous television working group in 2004. Although representatives from across the sector were involved, differences between the 'soft voices' (the bush broadcasters) and the 'loud voices' of urban and regional based producers soon emerged. Discussions over what format the proposed NITV would take tended to divide participants along cultural lines. Although ICTV was the pioneer of Indigenous television in Australia, it was being asked to move aside because policymakers in the Department of Communication, Information Technology and the Arts (DCITA) had decided that there would be just one national Indigenous television channel in Australia. Claims by some that ICTV productions were technically inferior and therefore unsuitable for broadcast on a national television service further deepened existing divisions. When Communications Minister Helen Coonan announced $48.5 million for the development of NITV over four years, the writing was on the wall for ICTV (Coonan, 2005). Policymakers made it clear to Indigenous video producers at several heated meetings that they could take it or leave it — there was no room to compromise over a single television channel.

This was one historic policy moment in Indigenous media development that did attract some media coverage, albeit muted and primarily online. The then general manager of IRCA, Frank Rijavec, published an open letter to Senator Coonan, condemning the displacement of ICTV, prompting Noel Pearson to weigh in with his own critique of NITV being irrelevant to viewers (Rijavec, 2007; Taylor & Gosch, 2007; Pearson, 2007). A few days later, Pearson's comments were refuted by Imparja chairman Owen Cole, Indigenous Film Australia chair Rachel Perkins, and IRCA board member Patsy Mudgedell (*Australian online*, 31 July 2007, 'Response to Noel Pearson's editorial, "More Uncle Toms than meet the eye"'; *Australian Associated Press*, 31 July 2007, 'Indigenous TV boss blasts Noel Pearson').

Despite last minute attempts to re-open the debate, ICTV was taken off the air on 12 July 2007. The following day, NITV began broadcasting although available only on

channel 31 in regional Australia and pay television in urban areas. The haste with which NITV was launched meant it had virtually no free-to-air delivery mechanism for most Australians. It was not until November 2012 that NITV moved to SBS and was at last available as a free-to-air service.

Negotiations between ICTV and NITV over bush program access collapsed in 2008 and the innovative bush community television service decided to go it alone, re-launching as an online entity in July 2008. Nine months later, ICTV launched *Indigtub*e — like an Indigenous *YouTube* — with a range of video programs produced by various bush communities available for viewing. In the same year, ICTV negotiated regional distribution in the Pilbara–Kimberley region through the Westlink satellite service. In November 2012, ICTV re-launched on a digital television channel for remote and regional audiences. Despite the prevailing preference to mainstream Indigenous television in Australia, ICTV may eventually be accessible to audiences around the country. Initially, however, its reach is confined to viewers of existing satellite television networks (Featherstone, 2012).

Responses to the policy process

> I suppose it was all done for money and power and the people that ended up with the buck didn't have the real passion to achieve what we did with ICTV. The strength of how it happened was maybe the small budget. We really achieved the unachievable without the dollar. So it was built with passion and hard work. (Rogers, 2009)

The struggle by Indigenous people for access to media that accurately reflects their lives and their life experiences continues. Although the two case studies I have included here are limited in scope, they reveal some key challenges facing participants in the Indigenous media policymaking process.

A lack of continuity in departmental representation remains a serious concern for Indigenous broadcasting personnel. Departmental staff in key positions seem to move regularly, meaning community media managers have to constantly 'train' new incumbents. The ephemeral nature of the policymaking process is not confined to Indigenous media (Hart, 2011). As Westerway (2005, p. 290) observes: 'Canberra is awash with the ephemera of policymaking.' However, the specialised nature of the sector with its extraordinary cultural diversity makes it a difficult portfolio to understand for someone with no background in Indigenous affairs and/or media. Overall, there is a perception that public sector staff have an ignorance of Indigenous cultural complexity with all but a handful reluctant to engage with communities on the ground (Rennie & Featherstone, 2008; Featherstone, 2011a).

It appears, too, that departmental policymakers often find it difficult to place Indigenous representatives into the policy process. From the communities' perspective, there is no opportunity for input when the process remains top-down (Featherstone, 2011a). Consultations tend to become advice about decisions already made rather than seeking expert opinion on how a particular policy decision might be better framed.

A perceived absence of political will to engage meaningfully with Indigenous media policy is widespread across the sector. Despite Australia being a signatory to the United Nations declaration on the rights of Indigenous people to access all forms of relevant media, Indigenous media policy remains on the margins — its crucial ability to access audiences that ignore other forms of communication seems to have escaped politicians and policymakers alike (Villaflor, 2011). Perceptions by politicians that there are no votes in Indigenous media are seriously misplaced.

Within the Indigenous media sector, there is a general lack of understanding on how government operates: decision-making appears to be arbitrary making it extremely difficult, if not impossible, to predict when particular 'policy moments' occur.

Policymakers acknowledge the existence of political pressures within the broadcasting

sector generally, which sometimes hamper their ability to pursue a particular policy trajectory. They argue that policymaking processes and outcomes must necessarily be broadly-based, beyond important ideas such as social justice. They argue that personalities and relationships are important dimensions — 'loud' voices versus 'soft' voices. It adds another variable to the equation, which complicates the process beyond simply responding to a discussion paper. Communities or organisations trying to participate in the policymaking process need a 'friend at court' —someone within a department who can promote ideas with a sound base of knowledge and understanding of the issues involved (R. Ashe (former director, community broadcasting section, Department of Communication and the Arts) 2011, pers. comm., 30 August; Hart, 2011).

Senior departmental policy advisers acknowledge that the imperative within the Indigenous media sector is for negotiations to be carefully paced. Former director of community broadcasting in the Department of Communications, Ruth Ashe observes, 'It's all about the conversation. Non-Indigenous people are only just coming to grips with that now. It's got to be done slowly.' But she and other policymakers acknowledge that often there is no time to do this with timetables being set by other departmental or political agenda.

Policymakers' advice to organisations seeking to participate more meaningfully is to have several projects on the table at any one time. If organisations are able to develop draft proposals relevant to communities' needs — and aligned with current global, national and local trends — then the likelihood of a positive response is far greater (R. Ashe (former director, community broadcasting section, Department of Communication and the Arts) 2011, pers. comm., 30 August; Hart, 2011). Another strategy suggested by several interviewees is to consider pooling resources with other like-minded agencies to strengthen a proposal.

Despite the best preparation in the world, the process hinges on 'the X factor'. As one senior policy adviser wryly observed (Hart, 2011): 'The stars have to be aligned.' It is a salutary observation but it is the way policy works (R. Ashe (former director, community broadcasting section, Department of Communication and the Arts) 2011, pers. comm., 30 August). The acting CEO of AICA, George Villaflor, agrees (2011): It's all about timing.' He argues for a return to 'source documents' — the United Nations declaration of the rights of Indigenous peoples: 'It should inform all policy as it means life and death for Aboriginal people.'

Conclusions

The uncertainty of policymaking in general, coupled with the institutional specifics of the Indigenous media sector, make it a difficult process to define. The vagaries of the policy decisions that have shaped the Indigenous media sector are testament to this. A continuing absence of acknowledgement of the special place of Indigenous languages and cultures in the Australian *Broadcasting Services Act* remains an outstanding policy obstacle. As Westerway (2005, p. 272) observes: 'Major policy change minimally demands sustained application of political will.'

It seems important to acknowledge that every policy decision has multiple perspectives. All participants must acknowledge the nature of the 'game', both in terms of the political will for change and differences within the sector. The evidence of innovation from across the Indigenous media sector suggests a need to 'make space for all parties to disagree and experiment' (Featherstone, 2011b). We can all learn from past experiences: history enables us to orient ourselves to a future. Genuine negotiation involving all stakeholders (as opposed to a cursory consultation after a decision is made) must be integral to the process. The complexities involved make this perhaps the most challenging aspect of Indigenous policymaking in general but the lack of dialogue between policymakers and sector representatives is acute (Featherstone, 2011a). Adopting

approaches that do work — for example, aligning meetings with existing community cultural events — might encourage more effective participation by stakeholders.

The sector itself has to engage with broader policy arguments. Hart (2011) observes that there is a tension between the Indigenous media sector's claim to a first level of service as well as being a cultural bridge and she concludes: 'Now that everything has become a niche, how does the Indigenous sector position itself in the new environment? The whole way of thinking about Indigenous policy needs to change.'

Although drawing from his experiences in working with Native communities in northern Canada, Ramirez suggests some important dimensions to consider. He argues that there is a critical need for the process to include negotiations of 'worthiness' (Ramirez, 2007). Ramirez (2007) reminds us, too, that no single actor holds the key to success — an observation that suggests that public policymaking is too important to be left to policymakers alone.

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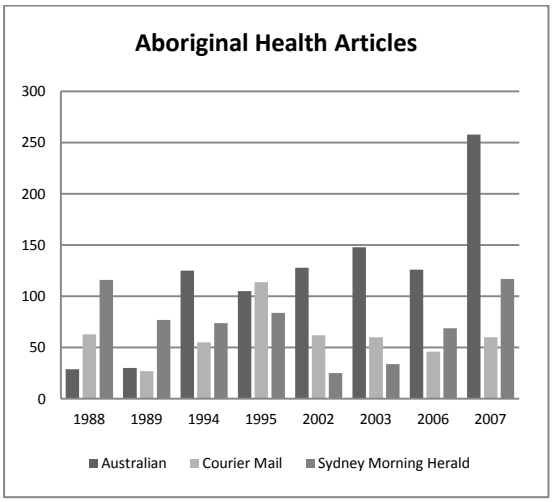
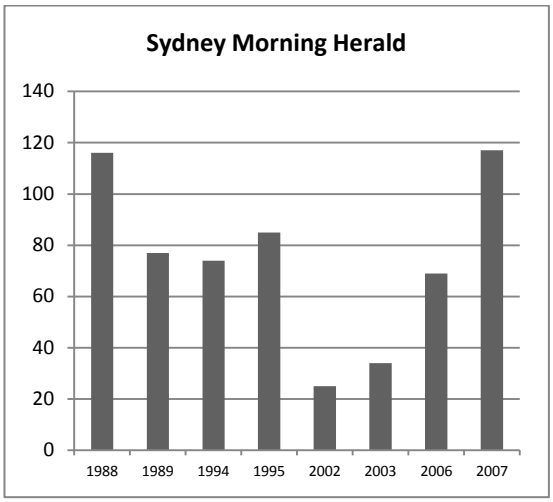
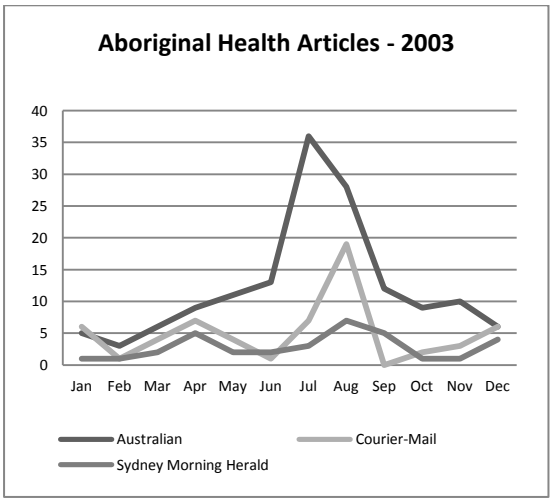
Media Perspectives

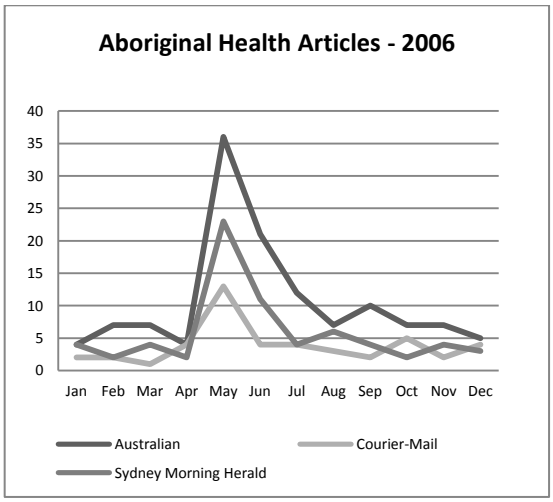
Indigenous health reporting 1988–2008

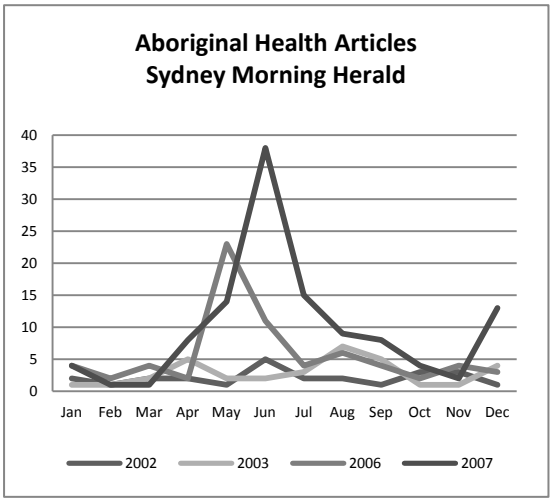
(derived from the Media & Indigenous Policy database)

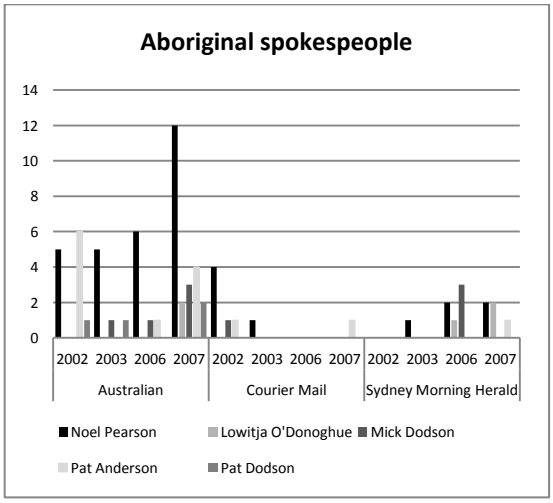


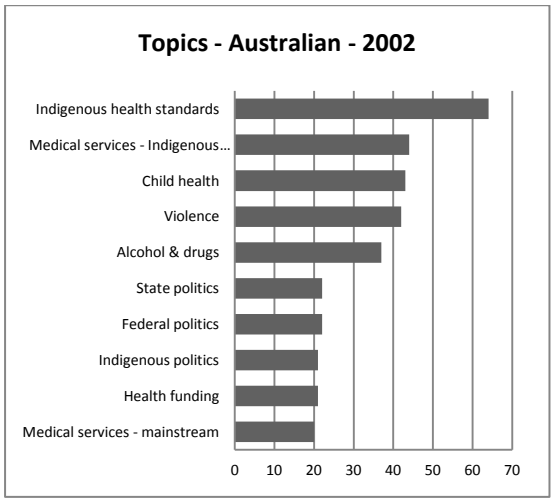








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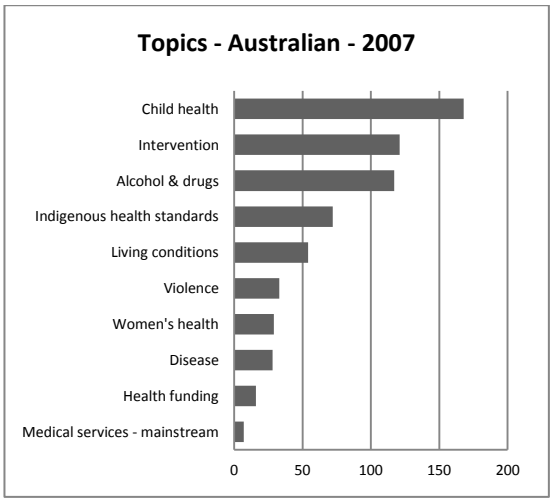
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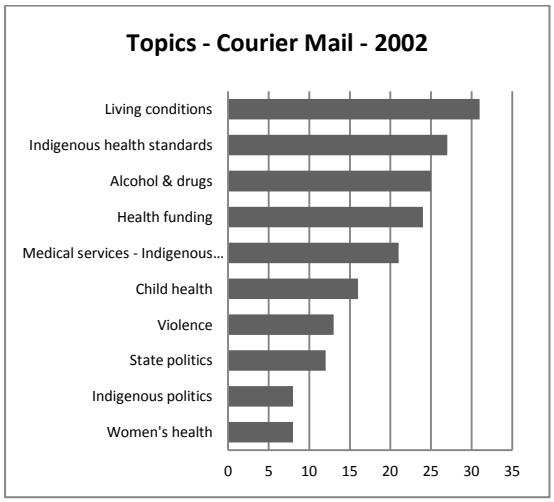
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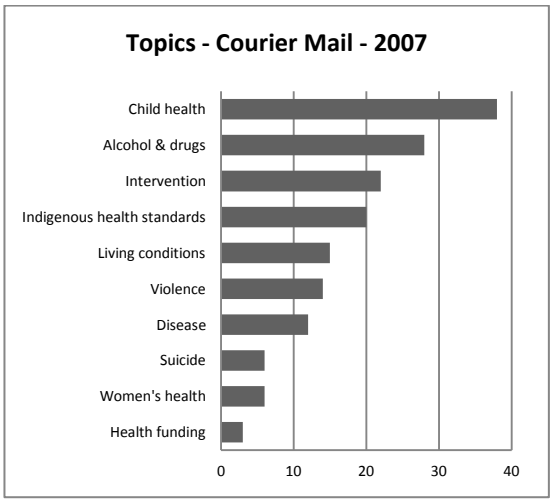
Topics - Courier Mail - 2007
Child health
Alcohol & drugs
Intervention
Indigenous health standards
Living conditions
Violence
Disease
Suicide
Women's health
Health funding
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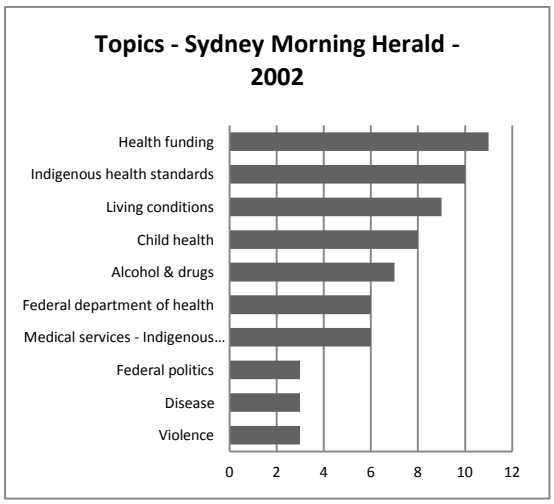
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Health funding
Indigenous health standards
Living conditions
Child health
Alcohol & drugs
Federal department of health
Medical services - Indigenous...
Federal politics
Disease
Violence
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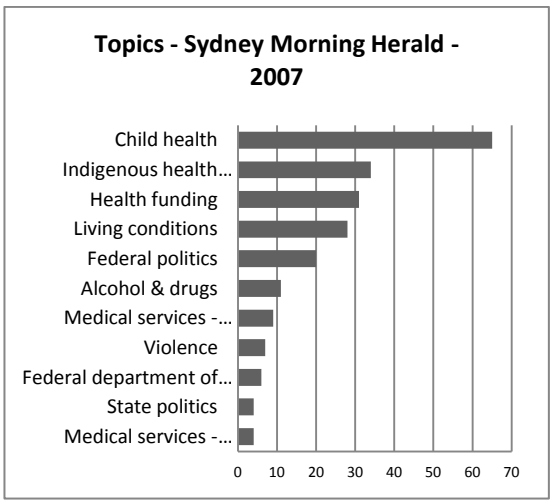
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Living conditions
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Alcohol & drugs
Medical services -...
Violence
Federal department of...
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Framing Indigenous Health, 1988–1995

Kerry McCallum

This essay documents how the story of Indigenous health was told between 1988 and 1995 by *The Sydney Morning Herald* (SMH) newspaper, and how news reporting provided a backdrop for a series of dramatic shifts in Indigenous health policy. Historical news frame analysis captures both the enduring and changing nature of reporting of Indigenous health in Australia. As Australia's oldest metropolitan newspaper, the *Herald* has paid only intermittent attention to Indigenous issues, most commonly when they have had national or local political implications. The way *Herald* journalists chose to report Indigenous health news during the late 1980s and early 1990s was found to reflect the reporting of Indigenous issues more generally, and was found to be conducive to changes of direction in Indigenous health policy.

Two key policy moments mark this period of Indigenous health policy: the launch of the National Aboriginal Health Strategy (NAHS) in 1989, and the decision in 1995 to establish the Office of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Health (OATSIH). The NAHS was commissioned by the Hawke Labor government in 1987 and endorsed by state and territory governments in 1989. The NAHS was a significant policy statement on Indigenous health; it was the first attempt to assess and co-ordinate the delivery of health services to Australia's Indigenous populations, and was underpinned by a philosophy of self-determination (NAHSWP, 1989). The strategy's central recommendation was the 'adoption of community controlled Aboriginal health services as the most appropriate service type, and for the transfer of primary level health services' to Aboriginal Medical Services (NAHSWP, 1989, p. 10). In a clear statement in support of Indigenous self-determination, the Commonwealth gave the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Commission (ATSIC) responsibility for the implementation of the NAHS. A remarkable policy shift in 1995 saw responsibility for Aboriginal health transferred from ATSIC to the newly established OATSIH, located within the 'mainstream' Commonwealth Department of Human Services and Health.

Reporting Indigenous health 1988–1995

The way an issue is framed in news media coverage has been found to influence political agendas, reflect elite agendas and highlight the public salience of an issue (Gamson & Modigliani, 1989; Altheide, 1997; Reese, 2007). The news framing approach provides both a theory and a methodology for the study of media representation of policy issues. Frames are understood to be the 'organising principles that are socially shared and persistent over time, that work symbolically to meaningfully structure the social world' (Reese, 2007, p. 150). Framing studies typically start by analysing the volume, topics and sources in a sample of news content, before qualitatively analysing news texts to identify the dominant, counter and contested frames, and the wider cultural discourses at play in the reporting of an issue (van Gorp, 2007).

This paper maps the features of Indigenous health news in *The Sydney Morning Herald* through an analysis of all news reports about Indigenous health in two time periods — 1988–1989 and 1994–1995. It identifies the major topics and sources of news, and the dominant frames through which Indigenous health was represented in the SMH (see also McCallum, 2011). It documents and analyses direct media incursions into the policymaking process in 1994 and 1995 and how these played into the decision to change the way Indigenous primary health care services were funded and delivered. These analyses shed light on

the practices of journalism and policymaking by documenting both the enduring and shifting framing of Indigenous health in public discourse. The paper demonstrates how news media provides the discursive conditions for sometimes radical, dramatic and controversial policy decisions on important national issues.

Analyses of health news have found that Indigenous health receives little coverage compared with other health stories (Sweet, 2009, p. 1) and with other Indigenous news (Roberts, 2008). But qualitative studies of media reporting have found that the way Indigenous health is reported has greater discursive significance than quantitative content analysis would suggest. Australian news media has been found to represent Indigenous Australians negatively, as problematic to the mainstream, and to reinforce dominant stereotypes (Jakubowizc, 1994; Mickler, 1998;, Meadows, 2001). Brough (1999) and McCallum (2010) found that media framing of Indigenous health in news media contributes to representing Indigenous health as a policy problem requiring radical policy action (see also Bacchi, 2009).

Media items were chosen to reflect the broad discussion of Indigenous health issues between 1988 and 1995. Analysis included all reports concerning Indigenous health from the SMH in 1988–89 and 1994–95. The number of Indigenous health news stories, the dominant topics, sources of news and spokespeople were coded in the Media and Indigenous Policy database.

1988–1989 202 health news stories
1994–1995 158 health news stories

1988–1989 Major topics:
Living conditions (101)
Health standards (69)
1994–1995 Major topics:
Health funding (78 stories)
Living conditions (64 stories)
Health standards (58 stories)

1988–89 Dominant news sources:
Politicians (47)
Police/court (38)
1994–1995 Dominant news sources:
Politicians (59)
Medical experts (39)

While mapping exercises can provide useful baseline data to understand the reporting of Indigenous health and its relationship to health policy, close analysis of the framing of Indigenous health news is needed to develop a more precise picture of how journalists reported on the issue. The following analysis of health news stories in 1988–89 and 1994–95 identifies news frames used by journalists in their reporting of Indigenous health and related policy issues, and how these frames were sponsored and promoted by policy actors.

Frame 1: Indigenous health crisis

Indigenous health was most likely to be reported through the dominant frame of the *Indigenous health crisis*. In both 1988–89 and 1994–95, stories about Aboriginal health standards and living conditions were the most frequent topic of news stories. Analysis of news headlines (McCallum, 2011) demonstrated that, in 1988-89, coverage of the Royal Commission into Aboriginal Deaths in Custody (RCIADIC) generated most news stories concerning Aboriginal health. Five years later, the Indigenous health crisis remained the most prominent frame for reporting Indigenous health. While the RCIADIC was no longer a source of news, government and academic statistical reports continued to provide journalists with news about the disparity between life expectancy of Indigenous and non-Indigenous Australians, as demonstrated by the following headlines:

> Aboriginal infant deaths are double national rate (SMH, 17 November 1988, p. 13)
>
> When life is 17 years shorter' (SMH, 28 April 1994, p. 11)

The *Indigenous health crisis* was the central frame when the Minister for Health, Senator Graham Richardson,

toured Northern Territory communities in 1994 with an entourage of journalists. Richardson gave the crisis story prominence, particularly when he promised that the federal government would provide $800 million to 'fix' the Aboriginal health crisis to 'right a horrible wrong'.

Frame 2: Australia's shame

While the *Indigenous health crisis* was the dominant and enduring lens through which Aboriginal health was understood, in 1988–89, news stories about Aboriginal living conditions and health standards were also likely to be framed as *Australia's shame* (Brough, 1999). Reflecting political discourse around the Bicentenary of Federation, journalists in 1988–89 tended to blame the crisis on a history of dispossession, racial discrimination and disadvantage, and contemporary systems of justice and government marked by institutional and individual racism towards Indigenous Australians. A January 1988 editorial about Australia's bicentenary celebrations attributed health standards to past racist policies:

> Aborigines have suffered dispossession, the destruction of their culture and racial discrimination (SMH, 4 January 1988, p. 8, 'The year of black protest').

By 1994, however, few news stories in the SMH were told through the lens of *Australia's shame*.

Frame 3: Policy failure

A third news frame evident in much reporting of Indigenous health was *policy failure*. Stories generated by the RCIADIC of appalling living conditions in Aboriginal communities also highlighted the policy priorities of local and state governments that denied basic facilities to Aboriginal communities. The following headline provides an example:

> Officials partly to blame, say Blacks (SMH, 12 April 1988, p. 9)

In contrast to earlier media framing of the issue, virtually every story in 1994–95 was reported through a frame of *policy failure*. Media reports reinforced that it was the responsibility of state and federal governments to address the crisis in Indigenous health. An evaluation of the NAHS (NAHSWP, 1994) found that governments at all levels had essentially ignored the recommendations of the report and that Indigenous health remained under-funded. This report received significant attention from SMH journalists, as it fed into the *policy failure* frame.

> Shantytown that shames politicians, bureaucrats (SMH, 30 April 1994, p. 6)
>
> Aboriginal health policy is a flop, committee admits (SMH, 24 December 1994, p. 4)
>
> Report damns black health system (SMH, 13 January 1995. p. 3)

By 1995 the failure of Indigenous health policy had become *the* story of Aboriginal health. Throughout 1994–95 the SMH relentlessly pursued the story of the

KEY POINTS

- The *SMH* paid intermittent attention to Indigenous health between 1988 and 1995, but reported through a narrow range of news frames.
- The decision to remove responsibility for Indigenous health from ATSIC to OATSIS in 1995 was played out through news media, with a range of policy actors sponsoring particular issue frames.
- The dominant and enduring framing of Indigenous health as a *crisis*, *Failure of Government Policy*, and *Failure of Indigenous leadership* was conducive to the decision to 'mainstream' Indigenous health in 1995.

failure of the Commonwealth Government to adequately deal with Indigenous health, as demonstrated by the following headline:

> Aboriginal Health Strategy "has failed" (SMH, 24 April 1995, p. 2).

Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Social Justice Commissioner Mick Dodson launched a scathing attack on government policy failure in his 1994 report, using the *Aboriginal health crisis* frame to engage the media. The perception of failure of government over Indigenous health policy was exacerbated when Minister Richardson resigned without securing his promised $800 million in funding for Indigenous health.

Frame 4: Individual blame

Stories highlighting the national responsibility for the Aboriginal health crisis were juxtaposed against stories that attributed health problems to the deviant behaviour of individuals. SMH journalists reporting on Indigenous health, alcohol and drug misuse adopted the frame of *individual blame*. Brough (1999) and McCallum (2010) found that news stories about alcohol and drug abuse in Aboriginal communities tended to reinforce a neo-liberal discourse of individual responsibility. For example, a series of reports from the RCIADIC in December 1988 focused on the role of alcohol abuse and the need for Aboriginal people to 'take responsibility' for addictive behaviours, as demonstrated by the following headline:

> Alcoholism among blacks "must be stamped out" (SMH 15.12.88:9).

The SMH typically used 'public opinion' to justify its argument that, despite the evidence of the RCIADIC, it was the responsibility of Indigenous Australians to change their behaviour, as spelled out in the article headlined 'Law, order and hope in Redfern':

> If Aborigines do not share the responsibility for ending violence and disorder in Redfern, they will have to share the consequences of an inevitable erosion of public confidence … (SMH, 25 May 1989, p. 14, editorial).

Frame 5: Failure of Indigenous leadership

In 1988–89 there was little focus on the role of Aboriginal leaders in health services, but by 1994 stories of corruption, dysfunction and financial ineptitude in ATSIC were common in the SMH. The institutionalisation of self-determination policy through ATSIC provided journalists with a lens through which to report all Indigenous issues, including Indigenous health. By 1995 a coalition of voices called for the removal of health responsibility from ATSIC (Anderson & Whyte 2006).

> ATSIC: a floundering masterstroke (SMH, 29 November 1995, p. 9).

A counter-frame was provided by Aboriginal spokesperson, Noel Pearson, from Cape York Land Council. Pearson weighed in on ATSIC's failure to manage Indigenous health, but ultimately laid the blame with the federal government when he famously said:

> To land ATSIC with the stinking dead cat of Aboriginal health is just unfair (SMH, 8 February 1995, p. 5, 'Warning on black health funds').

Frame 6: Medical hero

As the focus on remote Indigenous health increased, some SMH journalists sought out stories about the medical professionals and the administrators of Aboriginal Medical Services. These stories adopted a *medical hero* frame as they reported on the role that health workers played in tackling the Indigenous health crisis on the front line. They also highlighted the importance of Indigenous self-determination in the delivery of health services. Throughout 1994 and 1995 the *medical hero* frame was contrasted with the failure of political leaders, Indigenous leaders and bureaucrats on Indigenous health, with headlines such as:

An Australian disgrace: Filthy lives, early deaths and a car boot clinic (SMH, 8 February 1995, p. 5).

Health reporting and health policy

This overview of how *The Sydney Morning Herald* reported on Indigenous health between 1988 and 1995 provides some valuable insights for our broader project exploring the relationships between media and policy. Journalists at the SMH drew on a range of news frames to tell the story of Aboriginal health. *Indigenous health crisis*, *Australia's shame*, *individual responsibility*, *policy failure*, *failure of Indigenous leadership*, and *medical hero* frames provided news audiences and policymakers with contested ways of understanding the Indigenous health story.

The essay documents a significant shift in the way the *SMH* framed Indigenous health between 1988 and 1995. While the *Indigenous health crisis* and *failure of government policy* news frames have endured as lenses through which to tell the story of Indigenous health, other frames have risen and fallen in prominence, reflecting shifts in broader political and social discourse. In 1989 Indigenous health was frequently framed as *Australia's shame* and the result of individual and institutional racism, but by 1995 few stories were told this way. Likewise, 'good news' stories of outback *medical heroes* were marginalised in media and political discourse. By 1994, news reports about Aboriginal health in the SMH increasingly tied the *Indigenous health crisis* to the new issue frame of the *failure of Indigenous leadership*. Focus on ATSIC's failure to deliver primary health services can be seen to have aligned with the decision to remove responsibility for Indigenous health from ATSIC in 1995, and the ultimate demise of this 'experiment' in Indigenous self-determination. This finding also accords with Briggs and Hallin's (2010) finding that, for most metropolitan journalists, health is simply a non-issue until it becomes a political policy issue.

News media framing of Indigenous health as a political story of policy failure — by both Indigenous and federal leadership — can be seen to have intensified the pressure on governments to solve this 'wicked' policy problem (Blood et al. 2008; McCallum, 2010). A range of policy actors, including Health Minister Richardson, Mick Dodson, Brendan Nelson and Noel Pearson, capitalised on their public profiles by providing journalists with news stories and focusing attention on the *Indigenous health crisis.* Particularly in 1994–95, when the federal parliamentary press gallery was intensely engaged with the controversy over administrative responsibility for Indigenous health, pressure group advocates used the media strategically to focus political attention on the problems of Aboriginal health and to affect policy change. This finding accords with Herbst (1998) who found that policy actors both sponsored particular frames and 'read' news framing of policy disputes, suggesting a complex interplay of influence between journalists' and sources' framing of policy issues. But the ultimate policy decision, to remove responsibility for Indigenous health and establish and fund OATSIH, did not necessarily reflect the substance of these news sponsors' calls to increase support for community-controlled health services. Their calls for policy change were appropriated by media framing of Indigenous health as a *crisis* and *failure of government policy,* ultimately contributing to the understanding that Indigenous health was both an intractable problem and one that warranted a radical change in policy from self-determination to the mainstreaming of Indigenous health.

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Practice imperfect: media, discourse and intervention

Michelle Dunne Breen

Reporting of the Intervention before enactment

From John Howard and Mal Brough's announcement of the Northern Territory Emergency Response (NTER or Intervention) on 21 June 2007 and the enactment by Parliament on 18 August of the *Northern Territory National Emergency Response Act 2007*, the Australian media had a two-month timeframe in which to report on the policy for the citizenry and analyse it for its merits and faults.

This essay explores the print media's reporting of the NTER from announcement of this radical suite of policies to the enactment through legislation. From this analysis it is evident that at moments during the policy's development, many routine journalistic practices were not followed, with consequences including that government ministers were unchallenged in making unsubstantiated or misleading claims.

This analysis highlights some considerations around journalism practice that adversely affect the fair and equal representation of Aboriginal Australians, in what is characterised as a crisis situation in our transitioning newsrooms and, as a result, in our democracy.

Crisis has a dual meaning here. The release of *Little children are sacred: the report of the Northern Territory Board of Inquiry into the protection of Aboriginal children from sexual abuse* (2007) prompted then Prime Minister Howard and Indigenous Affairs Minister Brough to launch the NTER in response to what they said was a crisis in NT Indigenous communities. Meanwhile, media scholars and journalists have been characterising the ongoing print media industrial changes as a crisis in our newsrooms. Print journalists, whose industry is in crisis, had a brief timeframe in which to report on an emergency policy response provoked by an apparent crisis situation.

Media reporting in a crisis: through the lens of critical discourse analysis

Australia's newspaper industry is operating in a resources vacuum. It is reeling from losing to the online domain the 'rivers of gold' revenue from classified advertising, and it has yet to establish a viable online business model. Print journalism jobs are being lost at an accelerating pace. The journalists' union, Media, Entertainment and Arts Alliance (MEAA), estimated that, from 2008 to November 2011, 700 positions had been cut from newspaper workforces around Australia (MEAA, 2011) and that, over winter 2012 alone, 700 editorial jobs had been lost at Fairfax and News Limited combined (Wilson & Cubby, 2012).

It is at times of policy crisis that the policymaking and broader communities are reliant on quality journalism. Although always important, fact-checking — one of the routine practices central to 'doing' journalism — becomes absolutely critical for journalists grappling with the meaning, origins and consequences of a speedily evolving, unprecedented and controversial policy.

The media is commonly expected to perform a Fourth Estate role in a democratic society: that is, to enable an informed citizenry and act as a watchdog on government. While it is arguable whether this ideal was ever a reality anywhere at any time, it is demonstrable that neither of these roles is being adequately performed at this critical juncture for Australia's newspaper industry. A vacuum exists in the democratic process. Industrial pressures — including the dismissal of subeditors who, as non-generators of copy, are seen by proprietors as an obvious target in a

cost-cutting climate — are central to this crisis.

This essay's analysis seeks to bridge the gap between studies of representation through textual analysis and studies of news production and the structural constraints imposed by the political economy of the newsroom. Norman Fairclough's dialectical-relational critical discourse analysis (CDA) approach, which is a text-oriented discourse analysis, argues that analysing the contexts of texts' production, as well as the texts themselves, is necessary to understanding discourse, as texts are not produced in isolation (Fairclough, 1992). CDA is employed here to look primarily at the news report, then the journalistic practices involved in its production, and the wider cultural context.

Through the textual analysis of news reports about the NTER, with reference to the social context of newsroom practices, and the wider cultural context, this essay shows that one particular aspect (among others) of the Northern Territory Emergency Response policy — i.e. the rollout of health checks for NT Aboriginal children — was not adequately examined by the news media.

Routine journalism practice is learned in the culture of the newsroom and increasingly in the university classroom. These practices, indeed expectations of news reporters, include that they:

- get both sides of the story;
- ask follow-up questions to, for example, clarify statements or investigate claims;
- check facts;
- make an attempt to understand the context of what they are reporting on — i.e. they 'join the dots';
- hold those in authority to account;
- in their quest for accountability, attempt to get their sources on the record — i.e. that they use unnamed sources sparingly;
- keep on top of a running story, knowing who has said what when;
- question inconsistencies in their sources' stories and statements; and
- as news-writing style guides require, use 'the active voice' in news reports — a minor but significant detail.

Some critical instances of the breakdown of this routine journalism practice have been identified in the news reports of the Intervention between announcement and enactment. The context and consequences are illuminating.

This essay focusses on one key policy moment before the enactment of the intervention: the evolution of the child health checks.

Mandatory child health checks: the moment of change

It is common practice in newsrooms to monitor and incorporate the output of other media outlets, leading to the growing trend of 'inter-institutional news consensus' (Schudson, 2003, p. 109). This gives rise to media outlets referencing each other in their reporting. Although this essay's research focuses on the print media, the print media itself references other platforms. In the examples given below, ABC News online, news agency AAP, and broadcasters the Nine Network and the ABC are referenced in both Fairfax and News Ltd newspapers. This practice is illuminated by the CDA concepts of intertextuality and discourse chains (Fairclough, 1992), whereby meaning is constructed and reinforced by adoption and repetition.

Then Prime Minister John Howard announced in his speech launching the Northern Territory Emergency Response in 2007 that all Aboriginal children in the Northern Territory would be subject to mandatory health checks. These checks would include examination for sexual abuse ('Crusade to save Aboriginal kids — Howard declares "national emergency" to end abuse', *The Australian*, 22 June 2007, p. 1). Following criticism from the Australian Medical Association, among others, that such compulsory examination would in itself constitute abuse, (e.g. 'Abuse checks could be assault: specialist', SMH, 23 June 2007, p. 7), the government

said that the health checks would actually be 'voluntary' general health checks without a sexual abuse examination — that any suspicion of sexual abuse would be referred on. ('Voluntary' is deliberately in quotes here, as that aspect is open to question, see below.)

ABC news online reported on 28 June 2007 that the health checks for children might not be compulsory after all. However, three days later, on 1 July, AAP reported that Health Minister Tony Abbott in an interview with the Nine Network raised the possibility of parents losing benefits if their children did not attend for the health checks:

> [Abbott] raised the possibility of cutting off welfare payments to indigenous parents who refuse to allow their children's health to be checked.
>
> Prime Minister John Howard's crackdown on indigenous child abuse in the Northern Territory was intended to include 'compulsory health checks for all Aboriginal children', but Mr Abbott last week appeared to retreat from the position.
>
> However, he moved on Sunday to differentiate between imposing financial penalties on uncooperative families, and legal compulsion 'in the sense that a random breath test is compulsory'.
>
> He gave the example of childhood immunisation being compulsory because parents lost benefits if their children were not immunised.'Childhood immunisation is compulsory in the sense there is a modest payment for parents who have their kids immunised and there are some benefits which are conditional on childhood immunisation or an exemption certificate', he told the Nine Network. 'So there are different levels of compulsion, if you like, already existing in our system'.

These claims were repeated in other media outlets — for example, in *The Sydney Morning Herald* on 2 July 2007, under the headline 'Medical checks: dole cut warning' (p. 4)

Tony Abbott's comparison to the immunisation requirements is not explored in these reports. But this paper's analysis of the context to this claim demonstrates that the then health minister was giving a false impression, and was allowed to by the media who did not inquire into the immunisation policy that Abbott draws on as a template for compulsion regarding the health checks.

It is not compulsory for a parent in Australia to have their child immunised. Abbott alludes to 'an exemption certificate'. Such an exemption is easily obtained by any parent who fills out Medicare's one-page "Immunisation exemption conscientious objection form", which is freely available and which is just a signed statement of objection. It is clear that immunising your child is a choice, the signed statement declaring:

> I have a personal, philosophical, religious or medical belief involving a conviction that vaccination under the National Immunisation Program should not take place. On this basis, I choose not to have my child immunised.
>
> (Immunisation Exemption Conscientious Objection Form)

KEY POINTS

The rollout of Intervention health checks on children was not adequately examined by the news media.

Poor reporting was found to be due a combination of factors, including:

- Dwindling journalism resources due to the news industry crisis
- Failure to question information from government ministers
- Not following routine journalism practice, especially fact checking
- The media consistently underperforming in Indigenous reporting

A parent does not lose any benefits as a result of opting out. Prior to July 2012, there was a small payment made to the parent of a child who was immunised (this was substantially increased in July 2012), but nothing is now or ever was taken away.

One exception to the reporting of this was in *The Age* ('Abbott looks at compulsory health checks', 2 July 2007, p. 2), which reported that in effect Abbott was offering a cash incentive to parents to have their children immunised — something very different from the scary spectre of welfare cuts. However, even this report failed to make clear that Abbott, regardless of his intention, was being misleading.

There were two very interesting reports in *The Australian* on this issue on 2 July, by two different journalists but containing very similar language and one message: that the government was not imposing sexual health checks, and that it had not been its idea to do so in the first place. In the first report, spilling from page 1 onto page 4, under the headline 'Welfare penalty for bad parents', Patricia Karvelas reported:

> The plan to force children in indigenous communities to undergo health checks has been altered amid concerns that mandatory examinations could amount to assault.
>
> The Government has also backed away from a claim by the architects of the plan that the aim of the checks was to uncover and treat cases of abuse …

While on page 4 itself, Cath Hart reported:

> The plan to force children in Top End indigenous communities to undergo compulsory health checks has been modified significantly amid concerns that mandatory examinations could amount to assault.
>
> The Howard Government has also backed away from a claim by the architects of the plan that the aim of the checks was to uncover and treat cases of abuse …
>
> ('Forced check-ups "would be assault"', *Australian*, 2 July 2007, p. 4)

These two news reports (the similarity suggesting the incorporation of a government press release and the duplication, especially on the same page, going very much against good subediting practice) distance the 'Government' from the plan's 'architects' — obscuring the reality that they were one and the same. The Government was the plan's architect: it was the Prime Minister and the Indigenous affairs minister who devised it. The effect of *The Australian's* reporting here is to distance the Government from its own criticised plan.

The passive construction of the sentence, that the plan 'has been altered/modified significantly amid concerns', erases the agency of who it was that has done the altering. This passive construction, which is not normal journalistic practice for a news story, also serves to remove the Government from the picture.

By 6 July (the example here is again from *The Australian*, but other outlets were reporting this too), the story had apparently evolved: parents who did not allow their children to attend a health check would be subject to an investigation about their Centrelink payments:

> Indigenous parents who refuse to allow medical inspections of their children under the Howard Government crusade to stamp out Aboriginal child abuse will face welfare checks.
>
> Health Minister Tony Abbott yesterday conceded the checks of all children younger than 16 in targeted Northern Territory indigenous communities would be non-compulsory and non-invasive.
>
> But *The Australian* has learned that the Government will subject parents to stringent welfare checks if they refuse to allow medical inspections of their children. Officials will also investigate children's backgrounds for reports of previous abuse.

> And sources last night said that if the checks led to reasonable suspicion that a child might be at risk, authorities could take the child into custody for 48 hours and impose a medical check.
>
> News of the plan emerged after the Government confirmed it did not have the power to require parents to submit their children for examination, saying checks would not be compulsory.
>
> ...
>
> He [Mr Abbott] would not elaborate. But it is understood that where parents rejected the examinations, officials would put their welfare arrangements under close scrutiny.
>
> ('Welfare threat over health test refusal', 2007.)

This reads as a threat or a scare tactic (especially given the qualifiers *stringent* [welfare checks] and *close* [scrutiny]).There was no policy link between child health check-ups and adult welfare payments, whereby attendance at check-ups was required in order to continue to receive welfare payments. (There was, however, such a policy link between school attendance and welfare payments.)

Note also that this report, as do other reports on this day, relies upon anonymous sources, pointing to an off-the-record briefing from a senior official, perhaps even the minister himself: 'sources said last night ...'; 'News of the plan emerged ...'; 'it is understood that ...'

The Australian journalists' union's (the MEAA) code of ethics states:

> Aim to attribute information to its source. Where a source seeks anonymity, do not agree without first considering the source's motives and any alternative attributable source. (Media Alliance Code of Ethics, par. 3)

Not putting their name to a statement serves a purpose for an unnamed source: it obscures the lines of accountability. The claims or statements can be refuted easily later. And that is exactly what happened on ABC News online the day that *The Australian's* print report was published:

> [Then prime minister] Mr Howard says that under the Federal Government's intervention program voluntary health checks for children will only be carried out with the consent of parents or carers.
>
> He says it is a misunderstanding to suggest that there will be any penalty imposed on those who refuse the checks.
>
> 'There's no intention to have a special penalty for Indigenous parents who don't allow their children to be medically checked', he said.
>
> ('PM denies health check-welfare restriction link', *ABC News*, 6 July 2007)

However, although now denied, the threat has been made. It has circulated and is known. Such a threat would be a scary prospect in a community with a large number of welfare recipients, such as in many remote Indigenous communities. Furthermore, this news report's indirect construction itself is a very interesting one, in that it erases agency: Whose misunderstanding was it? Whose suggestion? These questions are unexplored by the reporter.

Where agency was erased in some reports, in another interesting case it was oddly imposed. Children were given little agency in the reports about the health checks. This is not surprising as children, being minors, are not typically given agency in news reports about policy initiatives — their participation would be subject to adults' inclusion of them. An exception to this is noteworthy:

> **[Headline] Kids queueing for checks**
>
> No Aboriginal parents have refused to allow their child to undergo a medical examination four weeks into the Howard Government's intervention into Northern Territory Aboriginal communities.
>
> ....
>
> "To the best of my knowledge, no one has refused health checks", Mr Brough said yesterday. "Doctors and

> medical teams are working flat out and the kids keep coming."
>
> ('Kids queueing for checks', *Australian*, 20 July 2007, p. 6)

The headline 'Kids queueing for checks' has the effect of erasing the adults' role in bringing their children for health checks, and also has the effect of contrasting children's alleged willingness with the reported potential wariness of their parents. (This also aligns with the overall enthusiasm by *The Australian* for the intervention demonstrated elsewhere in this report in the essay by Reid and McCallum.) This implies an oppositional relationship between the children and their parents — that by extension the parents do not have their children's best interests at heart. This can be understood as a construction which has a long and sorrowful history in official government policies relating to Aboriginal Australians — the Stolen Generations, whereby children were routinely taken from their parents to be raised in institutions, being the most widely known outcome.

In this news report, although the introductory paragraph mentions the adults' role, it renders them passive with the children active, and again puts them in an oppositional relationship to one another. The double negative of the sentence construction is noteworthy in this regard: "No Aboriginal parents have refused to allow their child to undergo a medical examination" could have been written positively instead — e.g. "Aboriginal parents are taking their children for health checks."

Eighteen days later, in response to criticism from former Northern Territory Labor MP John Ah Kit, a member of a delegation of Aboriginal leaders, that the legislation amounts to "genocide", John Howard told the ABC television news (and which is repeated here in an AAP report) that the 500 health checks undertaken by this point have uncovered some evidence of child abuse, including sexual abuse:

> Prime Minister John Howard said the cases of some children examined have been referred to child welfare authorities.
>
> 'I've been told that those screenings have led to a number of referrals to the child protection authority', Mr Howard told ABC TV.
>
> 'Whether that leads to police action, I don't know.
>
> 'I also know that some of them have led to further checking for sexually transmitted diseases, the outcome for those checks I do not at this stage know'.
>
> ('Intervention bill passes lower house', *AAP*, 7 August 2007)

Ten days after that, on being questioned about the results of the health checks, the taskforce commander Major General David Chalmers said that no evidence of sexual abuse had been uncovered and that no allegations of abuse had been passed to the police:

> About 850 indigenous children have received health checks across the Northern Territory in the first phase of the Howard Government's intervention into Aboriginal communities.
>
> The operational commander of the taskforce, Major General David Chalmers, revealed yesterday that the checks had uncovered a range of medical concerns, including high levels of dental problems and skin, ear, nose and throat infections.
>
> But Major General Chalmers said he was not aware of health workers notifying authorities of any cases of child sexual assault. No allegations of abuse have been passed to Territory police since the intervention began.
>
> ('Child health checks progressing', *The Australian*, 17 August 2007, p. 8)

A small but significant element of this report is the use of the word 'But' at the beginning of the third paragraph. It sits at the beginning of the sentence (which is in itself grammatically incorrect, an odd subediting oversight) and it does not refer to anything prior in the report as would be expected of its use. In critical discourse analysis this is referred to as a trace: it is a trace of a previous report in this

discourse chain. It refers to a previous claim that such abuse had been or would be uncovered. This previous claim is not referred to in the news report.

Crisis reporting and journalism practice

Bringing this back to routine journalism practice in general, and fact-checking (by both reporters and subeditors) in particular, as Sally White, in a widely used journalism textbook *Reporting In Australia*, under the subhead, 'Verifying Facts', wrote,

> Information which seems doubtful can be checked against other sources, either human or documentary. (White, 1996, p. 44.)

This is basic, routine journalism practice. This raises the question: Regarding the examples given above, on what count had practice fallen down? Was the information not 'doubtful' because it came from government ministers? Or was it not doubtful because of the crisis in our newsrooms, where the dwindling ranks of reporters and subeditors were having to do more work than before? Or was the information not doubtful because, as the research literature shows (e.g. McCallum, 2011; Waller, 2010; Meadows, 2001), when it comes to policy (and other) issues affecting Aboriginal Australia, the media consistently underperforms?

This essay concludes that it was a combination of these factors. Furthermore, this combination is working against routine journalism practice being followed and is proving fatal to the print media's Fourth Estate role — as watchdog and as public forum.

An aim of this research is to add to journalists' and journalism educators' understanding of how journalism practices and the Fourth Estate role of the media may be affected by the transitioning political economy of the newsroom, with journalists expected to do more work in less time (Finkelstein, 2012, p. 324) as newspapers' circulations are in freefall without a viable online business model yet established.

This research also aims to promote in news reporting the fair and equal representation of Aboriginal Australians and the forensic analysis of the issues and policies affecting them.

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Journalists, 'remote' Indigenous sources and cultural competence

Lisa Waller

Journalists working in Northern Australia who participated in the *Media and Indigenous Policy Project* have identified cultural competence as one of the key attributes of Indigenous reporting specialists. They say it enables these reporters to find their own Indigenous stories, cultivate and maintain strong contacts in the Indigenous public sphere and negotiate the obstacles in the field to get the story. ABC Darwin journalist Katrina Bolton said:

> If you don't know how to be culturally aware with traditional people especially, then it doesn't matter how much you try to make eye contact you're not going any further.

Cultural competence is a concept developed in social medicine (Betancourt et al., 2003, p. 44). It refers to an ability to interact effectively with people of different cultures. This involves being able to understand, appreciate, and interact with people from cultures and/or belief systems other than one's own. Cultural competence has four dimensions: awareness of one's own cultural worldview; positive attitude towards cultural differences; knowledge of different cultural practices and worldviews, and cross-cultural skills (Betancourt et al., 2003). Developing cultural competence results in an ability to understand, to communicate and interact with people across cultures.

Major news organisations and institutions, including the Australian Broadcasting Corporation (ABC) and the Australian Press Council, have developed in-house protocols and reporting codes for coverage of Indigenous people and affairs (Australian Broadcasting Corporation, 2009; Australian Press Council, 2001). These are regarded as important because 'on some fronts, journalists take these guidelines very seriously, and ... they can be seen to shape the way at least some stories are told' McCallum & Holland, 2010, p. 44). However, while they may offer more detailed guidance than the Australian Journalists' Code of Ethics (Media Entertainment Arts Alliance, 1999) they do not go so far as disrupting the underlying news values and assumptions that have been identified as problematic, nor do they require journalists to focus on the positive self-representation of Indigenous communities (Burns & McKee, 1999). For example, both the ABC's protocol (2009) and the Australian Press Council's guidelines (2001) are mostly concerned with avoiding offence to Indigenous people by using certain terms or interrupting cultural practices such as 'sorry business'. This appears to be more a form of cultural politeness designed to minimise obstacles to the journalist getting the story, rather than encouraging genuine attempts to understand, respect and reflect cultural differences.

Some participants commented that Indigenous reporting guidelines had improved news organisations' approach and their reporting, as McCallum and Holland (2010) have observed elsewhere. Chips Macinolty, who has been a Northern correspondent for newspapers and magazines including *The Sydney Morning Herald*, said:

> Back in the '80s there was pretty much outright refusal by Murdoch papers to even countenance the sort of restrictions on the naming of dead people and so on, and now it's part of the practice of the local Murdoch papers that they will enquire as to whether or not a person's name can be used. The ABC's been pretty good at it for a lot longer, so that's been a big shift.

Journalists spoke of a number of barriers that made it difficult to get Indigenous voices into their reports, from lack of cultural competence on their part, to the attitudes in their newsrooms. The ABC's Katrina Bolton said:

> The most difficult thing with Indigenous reporting is actually getting their voices. You want their voices but it's so hard to get Indigenous voices — getting people to talk with you and share with you stories, particularly if it's not a hip, hip-hooray story because you run into all sort of barriers, the shyness barrier, the is my English good enough barrier, the cultural barriers.

Macinolty, Fairfax Northern correspondent Lindsay Murdoch and the ABC's veteran Darwin-based indigenous reporter Murray McLaughlin all identified language as a significant barrier to reporting well on remote communities. McLaughlin said not being able to speak with people in indigenous languages was:

> ... a huge impediment to cutting through and being able to talk to people ... you rely on someone who has got a rough understanding of English … or on the rare occasion you actually hire a professional interpreter, or you rely on white people who have worked there long enough that they can speak the language. So all of that means stuff is necessarily filtered so … you can never really be confident that you're getting it right all the time.

Macinolty also commented on the lack of education of journalists on Indigenous culture, society and politics:

> I don't know any journalist since I've been here … who has made an attempt to learn an Aboriginal language, or who has made any serious attempt to go through some kind of orientation course or learnt anything much about kinship systems and political systems and so on in Aboriginal communities and it really comes out. I remember when Gorbachev came into power in the Soviet Union, within days every journalist knew how to pronounce his name, but you still get journalists who can't even get their heads around how to pronounce Aboriginal names, personal names or community names or language or whatever, and it's just sort of almost never ending that kind of thing.

Another barrier was the clash between newsgathering rituals and Indigenous practices. Bolton said:

> … the two are really quite directly opposed often, like your time frames and your budget and the time frames that pushes on you, are really like direct opposite to what is considered polite in Indigenous culture. But sometimes it's also knowing how to ask.

'Knowing how to ask' involves spending time with Indigenous people, which can be difficult for journalists for a range of reasons. *The Australian's* Tony Koch emphasises this as a most important aspect of quality Indigenous reporting (see accompanying story: *Tony Koch: the importance of listening and returning*). Murdoch commented:

> You can't just rush in bang, bang and get your interview. You've got to sit down, how you're going, what's going on, and then finally they might tell you what you want to know.

Koch and McLaughlin said patience was an important quality for reporters covering remote communities. McLaughlin said:

> When you go there under your own steam you've just got to have patience because people run their own timetable. It's no use saying I'll see you at two o'clock next Wednesday. It's a matter of rolling up on Wednesday and just sitting around and waiting and sometimes it never happens, and I've long learnt not to feel any frustration about that.

Newsroom racism was an issue some reporters identified as an obstacle in coverage of Indigenous affairs. It took several forms. The first was a lack of interest in Indigenous stories from news editors. Couldry (2006) contends that what is omitted from news agendas can tell us as much about the beliefs and values of media organisations as what is published. Meadows (2001) has shown that Indigenous people are routinely silenced by being talked about rather than heard in broadcast news on Indigenous affairs, which he describes as a form of racist discourse. Dreher (2010) argues that

entrenched news values and existing story agendas shape media discussion of marginalised groups — focusing on addressing the stereotypes and concerns of perceived 'mainstream' audiences, rather than providing an open forum where marginalised peoples' perspectives can be aired. McLaughlin said:

> … there is … a limited appetite for blackfella stories. I can remember I'd been up here not that long really, maybe a year, and I can remember my EP [executive producer] said to me, she said, now Murray we like your stories, but do you reckon you could get a few more white faces in there? That's the prevailing attitude.

Crikey's Northern correspondent Bob Gosford has lived and worked in Central Australia over many years. He spent two years of the study period based in Yuendumu and speaks some Walpiri. He said journalists from the Murdoch press who were in Central Australia to cover the Intervention sought out routine and predictable images and stories about Indigenous dysfunction (McCallum, 2007):

> *The Australian* had a bunch of journalists going around here who were basically out writing black … they wanted pictures of kids, snotty nosed kids with dirty nappies or naked, playing in the dirt with beer cans around, or old crones standing around drunk. And they got it because there's lots of that here.

Bolton recalled being deeply uncomfortable when she was sent to an Alice Springs shopping centre to get Indigenous peoples' reactions on welfare quarantining for a news story being produced out of the ABC's Canberra studios:

> It was awful. And in the end someone did talk because I kind of sweet talked/charmed/batted my eyelids into it and [they] also knew our camera man who actually happened to be Indigenous … But, it was just so contrived because of the speed and the urgency and the expectation that we could just snap our fingers and get Indigenous reaction ... I think it was worse because there were all these implicit assumptions: 'Hi, you're an Aboriginal person in the supermarket you must be on welfare.' It was just awful.

Indigenous cultural practices

Participants identified a range of Indigenous cultural practices journalists need to negotiate to get their story. McLaughlin said sorry business was 'the biggest disrupter of story ventures':

> The number of times I've turned up to a place and just can't do anything because of the... can't move around even because of this sorry business going on, or fortunate enough to learn about it before I go and have to cancel the trip. Sorry business prevails, that's the reality.

Other cultural practices are not so familiar to many journalists, such as who has the right to speak about certain land, certain business. Bolton said:

> So that whole thing, that whole cultural thing of not speaking out of turn, not speaking when it's not your land, not speaking when you're not senior enough, is really, really, really limiting.

She said many elders did not trust journalists and she would approach younger community members for information:

> There's no affection towards the media among some of the older people. When you blast in there and shove a camera in their face and want them to talk quickly or in brief answers, it's just so culturally clashing. So you get that problem where the sort of young articulate person … gives you a great background briefing and says all the things you need to hear and then says 'Oh, but I can't say it'.

Understanding the social dynamics of an Indigenous society can assist journalists in their quest for comment but this is not always apparent to reporters. Bolton described her approach on a court story at Borroloola:

> I just went and said, 'do you mind if I sit down with your mob' and everyone kind of just stayed fairly silent and I sat down. I didn't start talking straight away

> and slowly I did a little and not just to one person, but a few people, and suggested the idea that maybe they might talk with me and why. But also said things like if you want to sit together and pick one person to talk ... that's OK … Those kind of things are sort of barriers to people, but no-one ever really explains to you as a journalist that perhaps it might make — the camera men don't like it — it might make all the difference if people could feel that they're sitting together as a group and they pick who they want to talk out of that group, but they're physically there together. So that's important, might mean the difference between getting a piece from them or not.

Communication technology could also be a barrier. Bolton commented on the fact that often people in remote communities do not have a telephone journalists can call. Gosford said often people had no credit on their mobile phones and relied on text messages more heavily than other mobile phone users. He also said it was a widespread practice in remote settlements to give phones away and swap phones with family members:

> You have to talk to people through their institutions. A lot of people don't have home phones and if they do people are highly mobile so often it's the institutions that people work through or are represented by, so you pass messages through. That's changed a fair bit with mobiles in that — but again, because what might have been someone's good contact a month ago is now their daughter's contact. 'Ah, yeah, mummy' and people are still highly mobile. 'Mummy's in Alice blah, blah, blah'.

The range of indigenous voices

Study participants including Indigenous policy advocates, journalists, academics and policymakers commented on the lack of diversity of Indigenous voices heard through the news media. Many said the news media relied on just a handful of conservative Indigenous commentators. McLaughlin commented:

> If you're not Marcia Langton, if you're not Warren Mundine or Noel Pearson then you know, you're not a legitimate black voice.

This study shows it is too simplistic to attribute this to news organisations' ideological agendas alone. Macinolty said it was also due to journalists failing to cultivate a wide circle of Indigenous contacts, and the inconsistency and high turnover of journalists covering the round:

> When I was working for ministers and so on you'd have journalists who'd ring up and say 'Oh, X has happened, who should I talk to?' Every media organisation has its own black book sort of thing, but it's usually pretty poor when it comes to Aboriginal affairs.

Bolton identified two other aspects to the problems with getting a wide range of Indigenous voices in media reports. The first was a form of media burnout because individuals were being approached by journalists all the time. She said there was also a 'lot of thuggery' on communities and that people who spoke to the news media often got 'a hard time' because of it:

> … sometimes you've got people who do kind of speak up, but then the media demand is so great on so many issues that they're getting approached all the time on different topics and they feel why me, it's too hard, and they get shit from people. You know, awful pressure and nasty comments and that kind of stuff and that makes them reluctant to speak again.

Some journalists also commented that unlike other sources, who approached them with story ideas regularly, their 'remote' Indigenous contacts did not seek them out. McLaughlin said:

> … if they ever come to town it's very rare that they look you up, which is a pity. It's just not their way, they just don't do it … it's not their style to sort of come knocking on the door because I think they just naturally feel a bit intimidated.

Gaining cultural competence

A few journalists said they had gained cultural competence through their work for Indigenous organisations. Some learned in the field and from other professionals with deep experience working with Indigenous peoples. Macinolty attributed his excellent Indigenous contacts and well-developed sense for Indigenous stories to his experience working with Indigenous organisations for many years before writing for publications including *The Sydney Morning Herald*. He said he did not find it difficult to find agenda-setting issues:

> I remember when I was working for the Herald I was getting pages 1, 3 and 5 really regularly because the stories I was getting were really fantastic.

A few specialists described how they developed their cultural competence from other non-indigenous people with good knowledge of Indigenous cultures and people. Bolton said:

> I've talked a lot with people who work [with Indigenous people] — friends of mine and my sister who works as a lawyer down in Central Australia who has to talk to Aboriginals about usually really sensitive issues like assaults. I talk to her about how she does it. I've talked to a lot of white people in communities over the years about what faux pas I might be making without realising it.

Improving coverage: Cultural competence training

Participants offered suggestions for improving the level of professionalisation and specialisation in the remote Indigenous affairs reporting subfield. Several commented on the need for cultural competence education for journalists who report on 'remote' indigenous communities. Macinolty identified a strong need for reporters to undertake training in Indigenous languages, kinship and governance systems. Such courses are available, including Flinders University's Pitjantjatjara summer school, which runs for two weeks every January.

Another suggestion from indigenous reporting specialists was for large news organisations to invest in reporters' relationships with Indigenous contacts. One said major news outlets should:

> … say OK, take three weeks, go on a road trip, make connections, don't go out, like don't just fly in, film and [leave]. Just go out, talk to people, meet the people, find out what's going on, get phone numbers. And then it would be such a great investment in future stories and future relationships, because you need to be able to ring up … and go 'What's going on, I've been told this', and if you just constantly do the blast in blast out, you lose all that.

One suggestion was that the ABC's Darwin newsroom could be used by the corporation as a specialist training site for Indigenous affairs reporting and suggested those who were interested in developing these skills would need to be based there for a minimum of two years.

Developing practices of reciprocity was identified as a way of improving relations between reporters and their Indigenous

KEY POINTS

- It is too simplistic to attribute the narrow range of Indigenous voices heard in the news to media organisations' ideological agendas.
- Journalists identified a number of barriers to getting 'remote' Indigenous voices into their reports.
- These include large costs associated with travel; a clash of newsgathering rituals and Indigenous cultural practices; journalists lacking cultural competence and newsroom racism.
- Participants identified a need for reporters to undertake training in Indigenous languages, kinship and governance systems.
- They also identified a need for media organisations to invest in relationship building with Indigenous contacts.

sources by several journalists, including Tony Koch (see accompanying story: *Tony Koch: the importance of listening and returning*). Bolton said:

> … something happens at say, Borroloola. I've got a few people I can call because they've met me, I've dealt with them respectfully, I've done the follow-up which also wasn't supported at an institutional level, by like sending them a DVD copy of the stories that we've done and that kind for stuff. Like those sorts of things, even getting a CD I have to go and knock on someone's door and ask for one CD and one case and then I get grumbled at. When you do that then the next time you need to find out, or even get a barometer on almost anything that's going on, you've at least got one person, an Indigenous person you can call and say, 'hi, someone you know. Hey, do you know anything about this'. But without, yeah, there's just no time put in to developing these relationships or facilitating them so that they're there when you need them.

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Tony Koch: the importance of listening and returning

In her book, *The Tall Man*, which tells the story of the Palm Island death in custody of Mulrunji Doomadgee, Chloe Hooper discusses the news media coverage of the case. She makes the observation that, of the 'fifteen or so journalists at the inquest', only *The Australian*'s Tony Koch did not stay with the police but rather 'with a local family and went out on the street reporting' (Hooper, 2008, p. 92). Mason (2012) says staying with an Indigenous family made his source relationship with the police 'less routine and certain' (2012, p. 173). Our research explores Koch's expertise in negotiating Indigenous public spheres and draws on his approach to suggest the directions in which Indigenous affairs reporting needs to move.

Koch has been visiting indigenous communities in the Gulf Country, Cape York and the Torres Strait for 25 years. Hooper's observation of the way he operated on Palm Island is an example of how these communities are not just a part of his reporting round, but the homes of longstanding professional sources and friends. He chooses one as his holiday destination every year. Koch says his passion for Barramundi fishing helps his reporting:

> I take my holidays up there ... every year I go to one of them. I've got a brother who's a mango farmer up in Bowen and he's a good boatie, so we just hook up and we go to one of the communities, stay there and we're always with the locals. Go camping with them and getting turtle eggs and everything else. Just living with them on the beach, having a great time. Meeting all their kids.

The time Koch spends on holidays relaxing and fishing with his brother and the locals helps him to maintain trust with the communities he writes about, which he says takes time and a lot of work because 'people are sick of journalists coming in and writing horrible things about them'. He says many of the reports he has written over the years on topics including violence and alcohol could be classed as quite negative, however, unlike many other journalists he is responsible to the people he writes about because he has connections with them that go well beyond the conventional reporter-source relationship. He is always returning to the communities he writes about and sits down with people face-to-face to discuss his work. He says he has had to justify himself to individuals and communities on many occasions, explaining his reasons for what he has written and why he believes an issue or event needs to be part of the national conversation. In academic research, this discussion and negotiation can be understood as a process of gaining and maintaining peoples' consent for their continuing involvement in his journalistic research. Smith discusses the importance in indigenous research of the Māori concept of *kanohi kitea* or 'the seen face', which means '…being seen by the people – showing your face, turning up at important cultural events … it is part of how one's credibility is continually developed and maintained' (Smith, 2004, p. 15). In Australia, Indigenous researchers point to the different layers of entry that must be negotiated when they seek information, while others describe their research as involving long-term relationships which are established and extend beyond a research relationship to one involving families, communities, organisations and networks (Rigney, 1999). Koch describes his journalism research in these terms.

(Continued on next page.)

According to Koch, geographical distance is a major challenge to the Australian media's ability to report well on remote indigenous communities in northern Australia, as the major news outlets are in the south of the country and policy is made in Canberra, but implemented far away. Meadows (2005) emphasises the importance of journalists learning how to navigate indigenous public spheres and Koch provides some examples of how he does this. He says an important part of his round is ensuring that he knows when people from remote communities are attending conferences and other major meetings in Brisbane or regional centres. Koch says these events are crucial for him to find out about current issues and maintain contact with communities. Despite the significant distances and expense, Koch also underlines the importance of reporters spending time and building relationships with remote communities to do their jobs well:

> With visiting Aboriginal communities, the first couple of years you don't hear much or see because they don't trust you. They don't know you. In Queensland there's this term, they call us 'seagulls'- politicians and journalists. Because they say that we fly in, shit on them and leave. So you have to get over being a seagull, and the only way to do that is they have to see you coming back all the time... unless those reporters get off their butts and go out, and not just go out with the minister flying in the government jet and you know, be a seagull, drop in for a couple of hours and be given the candy coated version …You've got to go to the communities and spend some time there, spend some days there ... to listen to the people talk … to the old ladies … and find out what's really going on.

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From little things, big things grow: campaigning journalism and Indigenous policy

Holly Reid

Five years ago, on 16 June 2007, *The Weekend Australian* hit newsstands with the heated headline, 'Nation's child abuse shame: grog-fuelled sex attacks in black communities', running neatly across the front page. The article, a response to the release of an Inquiry into allegations of child sexual abuse in remote Indigenous communities, read that the 'sexual abuse of Aboriginal children is widespread across the Northern Territory (NT), fuelled by "rivers of grog" … a world where degrading pornography circulates freely and alcohol and marijuana are chronically abused' (Rothwell, 2007).

Authored by one of *The Australian's* most seasoned journalists in Indigenous affairs, Nicholas Rothwell, 'Nation's child abuse shame' was the first in a series of articles that, in the fortnight following the release of the *Ampe akelyernemane meke mekarle: Little children are sacred* report, would wage a concerted campaign in favour of interventionist policies in the Northern Territory (Reid & McCallum, 2012). Announced in the dying days of the Howard conservative government, the Northern Territory Emergency Response (NTER) followed intense publicity on the shocking — but by no means new — documentation of child sexual abuse in the Northern Territory. Enacted on 16 August 2007, the NTER Act 2007 placed racially exclusive regulations in 73 'prescribed' Indigenous communities (Cox, 2008), many of which remain today.

The release of the *Little children are sacred* report— and the subsequent announcement of the NTER — was a key moment in shaping contemporary Indigenous affairs. As such, it can be used to understand the intensity of the relationship between news media reporting and Indigenous policymaking in Australia. This article presents the findings of content and framing analyses of the *Little children are sacred* report and articles relating to the issue of child sexual abuse in *The Australian* national newspaper in the fortnight following the release of the report. It reveals that not only did the newspaper reappropriate the findings of the *Little children are sacred* report to align with its editorial position, but that it did so to press for one of the most radical interventions in Australian Indigenous policy history (Reid & McCallum, 2012).

The NT Board of Inquiry into the Protection of Aboriginal Children from Sexual Abuse was launched in 2006 in response to allegations on ABC's *Lateline* current affairs program that pedophile rings were operating in remote NT communities (ABC, 2006; Graham, 2012; Allen and Clarke Regulatory Specialists, 2011). Rather than simply documenting the occurrence of sexual abuse in the Northern Territory, the *Little children are sacred* report was commissioned by the NT government to 'examine the extent, nature and factors contributing to the sexual abuse of Aboriginal children ... [and] consider how the Government can help support communities to effectively tackle child sexual abuse' (Anderson & Wild, 2007). As such, the Inquirers determined that:

> Child sex abuse is serious, widespread and often unreported. Most Aboriginal people are willing and committed to solving this problem and helping their children. Aboriginal people are not the only perpetrators and victims of sexual abuse ... [and] much of the violence and sexual abuse is a reflection on the past, current and continuing problems which have developed over many decades. (Anderson & Wild, 2007)

The report examined many factors at play in the prevalence of abuse in NT

communities, which were condensed into twelve key areas, with 97 recommendations to the Government. They can be categorised under the broader themes of 'Individual Responsibility', 'Failed Social Policy' and 'Mutual Obligations' (Reid, 2010).

Individual Responsibility	Failed Social Policy	Mutual Obligations
Alcoholism	Education	Responses to Government Agencies
Substance Abuse	Housing	Law and Justice
Gambling	Health	Rehabilitation
Pornography	Poverty	
Unemployment		

Figure 1: Categorisaton of 'Areas of Causation' in the *Little children are sacred* report

Despite the sensitive nature of the report, *Little children are sacred* did not shy away from the impact of alcoholism, gambling and pornography — or 'Individual Responsibility' factors — on child neglect. Whilst documenting in graphic details acts of abuse and the effect of these on children, the report highlighted role of 'Failed Social Policy', such as the inability of successive governments to provide basic infrastructure and adequate healthcare, in familial breakdown. The inquirers argued it was 'Mutual Obligations' of both governments and Indigenous communities alike to respond to the issue, concluding 'it will be impossible to set communities on a strong path to recovery without dealing with basic services and social evils' (Anderson & Wild, 2007).

The release of the *Little children are sacred* report was a major news story for *The Australian,* which over the past two decades has assumed a 'vital role in alerting the general public to the breakdown of conditions of life not only in the Northern Territory but across the country' (Manne, 2011, p. 7). A 2007 study on the depiction of Indigenous violence in Australian media, for example, found that *The Australian* was the only newspaper to give sustained focus to issues of 'crisis' in Indigenous Australia, producing more than three times the volume of reporting on topics such as Indigenous violence and alcohol abuse than any other Australian newspaper (McCallum, 2007).

It is unsurprising then, that *The Australian*'s coverage of *Little children are sacred* was extensive, publishing 92 articles on the issue in the fortnight following the report's release. Less predictable, perhaps, was the newspaper's dismissal that child abuse was the result of multiple social, cultural and historical causes — effectively the core message of the *Little children are sacred* report and the rationale behind its recommendations. Not only this, but quantitative content and qualitative news framing analysis between 16 and 30 June 2007 reveals that *The Australian* employed a range of journalistic devices to align the issue with its editorial position and actively campaign for interventionist policies in the Northern Territory (Reid & McCallum, 2012).

Little children are sacred was first introduced in the 16–17 June 2007 edition of *The Weekend Australian.* The newspaper featured extensive coverage of the report, spanning hard news, comment, opinion and feature pieces. 'Report not for the faint hearted', an editorial by one of *The Australian*'s most senior Indigenous affairs reporters Nicholas Rothwell, was quick to clarify the newspapers' position: that personal responsibility in the issue of child sexual abuse cannot be overlooked and the publication of the *Little children are sacred* report should lead to immediate and consequential action.

> The agenda of personal responsibility sketched out by Noel Pearson of Cape York, and editorially supported by this newspaper, makes scant appearance

> in this document, which tends to view Aboriginal people as victims of a wide, all-encompassing social trap. (Rothwell, 2007)

Echoing this sentiment, an opinion piece 'Children are sacred' alleged that the report failed to hold individual men accountable for their behaviour and that:

> The report is an urgent call for action. There must be no attempt to silence the critics. (*Australian*, 16-17 June 2007, p. 13)

Also appearing in *The Weekend Australian* on 16–17 June was a comment piece by Indigenous lawyer Noel Pearson, examining the relationship between Indigenous communities and all levels of government. This signified the beginning of a trend in which Pearson's voice was not only the most prevalent compared with other Indigenous comments on the issue, but one that clearly supported *The Australian*'s editorial standpoint. For example, a news article appearing on 20 June ('Pearson at odds with abuse report') stated:

> Mr Pearson, who yesterday launched his own radical approach to reforming Indigenous welfare, said the Northern Territory report focused too much on improving education standards instead of attacking behaviour. (Karvelas, 2007)

Somewhat less delicately, an editorial published 21 June, 'Paternalism is not a term of derision', condemned critics of Pearson's response to *Little children are sacred*:

> *The Australian* supports Mr Pearson's view that the rights of the child are paramount. Thankfully, Aboriginal leaders such as Mr Pearson truly care about the fate of Aboriginal people and want to see them prosper. ('Paternalism is not an act of derision', p. 13, editorial)

As a well-known and influential Indigenous person, Pearson's presence in the debate is not unusual. However, quantitative content analysis shows that Pearson was afforded an audience through *The Australian* above any other Indigenous person (Reid, 2010). Further, alternate Indigenous sources quoted by *The Australian* were largely limited to a select few who, like Pearson, were supportive of interventionist action.

> Indigenous leader Warren Mundine says he is 'disgusted' that people are describing the Federal Government's intervention in the Northern Territory as an invasion. (*Australian*, 24 June 2007)

Compared with *The Australian*, other forms of media were less favourable of the NTER. The newspapers' glorification of Pearson's views — and those who supported them — failed to reflect resistance to the NTER that was integral to the public debate (Waller, 2010). On 16 June, for example, the *National Indigenous Times* published an email from

KEY POINTS

- The release of the *Little children are sacred* report (Anderson & Wild, 2007) and the subsequent announcement of the NTER was a key moment in shaping contemporary Indigenous affairs.
- Frame analysis found that the *Little children are sacred* report identified child sexual abuse as the result of multiple social, cultural and historical causes.
- *The Australian* newspaper reported extensively on the *Little children are sacred* report and the NTER, but dismissed the report's key findings and recommendations. Its journalists predominantly framed child sexual abuse as an issue of Individual Responsibility, with alcohol abuse the most common causal factor cited.
- *The Australian* actively campaigned for federal policy Intervention into NT Indigenous communities.

a key member of the inquiry:

> My concern is that … politicians already seem to be focusing on the sensational aspects of the report and seem, once again, to be using these things to push their own agendas. Politicians are again focusing on 'mainstream' punitive responses — jail, police, jail, police! (*National Indigenous Times*, 16 June 2007, letter)

Another editorial technique employed by the newspaper was to deride or dismiss opposition viewpoints (Manne, 2011). This was achieved through a series of opinion pieces, editorials and news stories with headlines such as: 'Slurs on PM's motives were predictable' (Shannahan, 2007) and 'A shameful protest' (*Australian*, 28 June 2007, p. 13).

On 22 June, *The Australian* launched the 'Howard's Blueprint' section of the newspaper, in which reactions from the government, non-government organisations and invited columnists were bundled into a dedicated segment. The two-page spread, which appeared intermittently until 30 June, sought to confirm *The Australian'*s position as a leading source of news on Indigenous current affairs and enhance the credibility of its reporters (Waller, 2010). This was made apparent on the first day of its publication, in which the left-hand column examined how 'Indigenous violence and abuse has been consistently documented by [journalists of] *The Australian'*. (*Australian*, 23 June 2007)

> Rosemary Neill: Won a Walkley for her coverage of Indigenous affairs in 1994 for a feature on domestic violence at a time when a 'code of silence' surrounded the issue. She wrote a book in 2002, *Whiteout*, which was shortlisted in the NSW and QLD Premier's awards. (*Australian*, 23 June 2007)

Although the collective reporting of these journalists was far outweighed by other, less prominent journalists over the sampling period (Reid, 2010), it is clear the newspaper sought to establish its role as a trustworthy source.

As political responses to the report began to deepen, focus shifted from the *Little children are sacred* report to those in positions of power and influence. Published on the front page of *The Australian* on 22 June, 'Crusade to save Aboriginal kids: Howard declares 'national emergency' to end abuse' outlined Prime Minister Howard's intentions for Federal Government intervention in the Northern Territory, including linking family welfare payments to school attendance, banning alcohol in certain regions, taking control of NT land, mandating child health checks and deploying extra police.

> John Howard will seize control of Aboriginal land in the Northern Territory, banning alcohol and pornography and using the military to attack the 'national emergency' of alcohol-fuelled sexual abuse of children. (Kavelas, 2007)

While *Little children are sacred* remained integral to the debate, the report became a stepping-stone, or 'justification', for discourse surrounding the NTER. This trend saw references to the *Little children are sacred* report condensed into a one- or two-paragraph synopsis, referred to as one factor in range of wider social or political implications.

> The unprecedented power grab comes a week after the release of a report that revealed rampant and often-unreported child sexual abuse in NT indigenous communities, with children as young as three exposed to hard-core pornography. It described frequent attacks on children by family members and their friends after parties featuring drug use and binge-drinking. (Kavelas, 2007b)

This technique reinforced the idea that alcoholism, pornography and substance abuse were at the heart of child sexual abuse in Indigenous communities.

> Canberra said the Northern Territory Government would be expected to develop a comprehensive strategy to

> tackle the 'rivers of grog' and a rampant pornography trade (Kavelas, 2007b).

Indeed, over the sample period, references to the causation of child sexual abuse in *The Australian* fell overwhelmingly into the areas of alcohol abuse, drug abuse and pornography (Reid, 2010). The newspaper almost exclusively framed child sexual abuse as an issue of 'Individual Responsibility' compared with 'Mutual Obligation' and 'Failed Social Policy', contradicting the conclusions of the very document *The Australian* reported on so heavily (see Figure 2).

A comparative frame analysis of *Little children are Sacred* and its representation in *The Australian* reveals alarming trends in the reporting of Indigenous affairs. It is clear from *The Australian*'s extensive coverage of the issue, especially in the launch of 'Howard's Blueprint', that the newspaper not only perceived, but took distinct pride in, its role in Indigenous affairs reporting and the expertise of its journalists. Despite, or perhaps because of, a philosophical commitment to covering Aboriginal affairs (Manne, 2011), *The Australian* can be seen to have reappropriated the findings of the *Little children are sacred* report to advocate for federal government intervention in NT Indigenous communities.

Little children are sacred presented a range of frames through which journalists could have reported the issue of child sexual abuse. The holistic nature of the report was not only at the crux of its recommendations, but recognition of the potential for the issue to become sensationalised and misconstrued by the media. Indeed, the inquirers noted:

> A constant theme from both Aboriginal men and women during consultations was that they felt deeply offended by the way the media and commentators had spoken about them and their culture. This had … potentially created a further barrier to addressing the issue of child sex abuse. (Anderson & Wild, 2007)

Effectively, the cumulative roles of 'Individual Responsibility', 'Failed Social Policy' and 'Mutual Obligations' factors in child sexual abuse was not a subtle undertone of the *Little children are sacred* report, but a clear and deliberate message to the media and Indigenous policymakers.

From the outset, however, *The Australian* rejected the findings of the *Little children are sacred* report that child abuse was the result of multiple social, cultural and historical causes, framing the story of child sexual abuse almost exclusively as an 'Individual Responsibility'. In this understanding, aberrant behaviours such

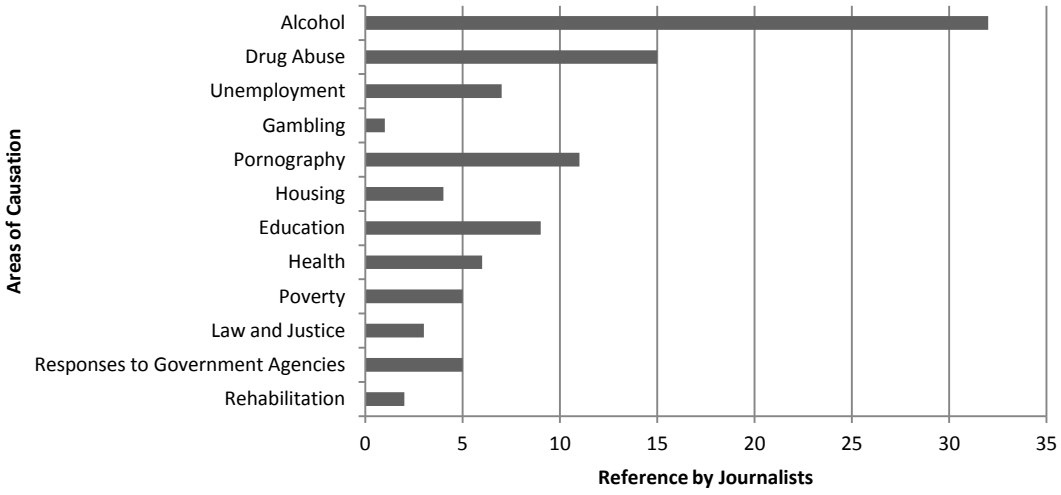

Figure 2: References to causal factors in *The Australian*

as alcoholism, drug abuse and the consumption of pornography were depicted as the overwhelmingly dominant factors leading to child sexual abuse in the Northern Territory. Coupled with voices calling for immediate, consequential action and endorsing Howard's response to the issue, it is clear *The Australian* was pushing its own political agenda (Reid & McCallum, 2012). Had this perspective been confined to editorial or opinion pieces, the reporting of *Little children are sacred* in *The Australian* would raise fewer ethical concerns. It is the failure of the newspaper to separate its corporate standpoint from the presentation of hard news that has more worrying implications.

Of the articles analysed for the reporting period, 66 per cent mentioned factors of 'Individual Responsibility' as a cause of child sexual abuse, compared with 24 and 10 per cent for 'Failed Social Policy' and 'Mutual Obligations' respectively. Given that hard news articles accounted for 70 per cent of the data sample, it is evident this framing extended beyond editorial and opinion pieces to become a prominent feature of reporting overall (Reid, 2010). Framing analysis also suggests that the omission of alternative understandings of the *Little children are sacred* report in *The Australian* worked strategically to frame the story (Reese, 2001). A correspondent for the online publication *Crikey*, Bob Gosford, in an interview for this project, surmised the situation as such:

> *The Australian* had a bunch of journalists going around here who were basically out writing black … they wanted pictures of kids, snotty nosed kids with dirty nappies of naked, playing in the dirt with beer cans around, or old crones standing around drunk. (Waller, 2010)

Seeking out routine and predictable images and stories about Indigenous dysfunction, *The Australian* actively perpetuated the tradition of news media representation of Indigenous Australians as personally responsible for their current circumstances (Blood et al., 2008; McCallum, 2007).

In addition to the use of a singular news frame to report *Little children are sacred*, *The Australian* employed a range of journalistic devices to drive home its strong editorial endorsement of the NTER as the appropriate response to the *Little children are sacred* report findings. A disproportionate emphasis on Pearson's viewpoint, and Indigenous sources who ratified it, created a false impression of acquiescence within the Indigenous community for interventionist policies. Neither was this technique confined to Indigenous reaction. For example, wider research on the newspaper's representation of the Intervention found, whilst there was widespread public discussion on the government's announcement to mandate sexual health checks in Indigenous children, *The Australian* did not frame the proposal or its amendments as a major news story (Walker, 2007).

It is clear from the evidence presented in this paper that while social policy is of deep and genuine concern to the editors of *The Australian,* the newspaper used the *Little children are sacred* report to influence, as well as report on, the Indigenous policy process. Placing disproportionate emphasis on the role of 'Individual Responsibility' factors in child sexual abuse, *The Australian* appropriated the inquiry's subject but largely disregarded its findings, painting a particular picture of the issue and how it should be addressed. Through its coverage, *The Australian* spoke directly to Indigenous affairs policymakers in its campaign for government intervention, justifying the use of 'paternalistic' or coercive measures to force behavioural change on Indigenous communities (Reid & McCallum, 2012).

Five years after the release of *Little children are sacred*, its effects are yet to fade in Indigenous communities in the Northern Territory. Most recently, the Gillard Government consolidated a fifteen-year policy program aimed at

reducing the life expectancy gap between Indigenous and non-Indigenous Australians. The *Stronger Futures in the Northern Territory Act 2012* extends one of the most radical interventions in Australian Indigenous policy history despite contested evidence of the NTER's impact on the lives of children (Allen and Clarke Regulatory Specialists, 2011; Shaw & d'Abbs, 2011; Altman, 2011). Negating the voices of those most closely involved in the issues, *The Australian* played a role in hampering the "development of systems, structures and methods that have a genuine chance of reducing violence and child sexual abuse" (Anderson & Wild, 2007), just as the inquirer's had feared, and tried so hard to prevent.

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Indigenous Policy Actor Perspectives

Intractable or indomitable? How Indigenous policy actors keep issues alive and contested

Kerry McCallum, Lisa Waller and Michael Meadows

Indigenous policy advocates have played a pivotal yet largely unrecognised role in keeping alive public debate about issues such as the importance of bilingual education programs and community involvement in the delivery of primary health care. This is a key finding from the *Media and Indigenous Policy* project. It has prompted us to argue here and elsewhere[1] that the intractability of some Indigenous policy issues can be usefully rethought as the effectiveness of Indigenous peoples in maintaining and promoting their firmly held cultural and political perspectives on issues such as health and education in public and media discussion.

For the purposes of this essay we begin by providing a brief overview of the bilingual education and Indigenous primary health care policy fields. Bilingual education in the Northern Territory has been the subject of controversial policy shifts since its inception in the 1970s. In the late 1990s the Northern Territory government tried to abolish the programs in remote Indigenous communities (Hoogenraad, 2001, p. 131), a move that was fiercely contested by Indigenous and education communities. As a result, the bilingual programs survived until 2008, when the territory government effectively abolished them with the decision that the first four hours of teaching each day would be in English. The Country Liberal Party government elected in mid-2012 has promised to reinstate the programs after four years of sustained campaigning by affected communities. Likewise, the delivery of primary health care via community controlled Aboriginal Medical Services (AMS) has had a chequered policy history since the release and adoption of the 1989 National Aboriginal Health Strategy that advocated a strongly self-determinist model of primary health care (Murray et al., 2003). Despite policies of mainstreaming during the 2000s that attacked its underlying principles, the AMS network of more than 140 services has survived to play an important role in the federal government's 'Closing the Gap' policy to improve the life expectancy of Indigenous Australians.

Policies of self-determination from the 1970s empowered Indigenous peoples to affect their own representation through the funding of Indigenous-controlled organisations and the emergence of Indigenous-owned and operated media. These developments prompted Mickler (1998) to argue that, in spite of stereotypical mainstream media coverage, negative public opinion and an unsupportive political environment, Indigenous peoples have become key media players. We build on this research through our interviews, which provide empirical evidence to show how Indigenous policy advocates use a range of mechanisms that enable them to penetrate public policy debates, define problems for policymaking and public discussion through the news media, and thereby exert particular forms of influence in the policy process. We are interested particularly in the intersection of 'Indigenous public spheres' and mainstream journalism, and the pressure that such relationships can exert on policymakers and policy outcomes at key policy moments.

Indigenous public spheres are central

A number of study participants offered precise insights into how Indigenous public spheres function, and provided evidence of the ways in which these processes impact on the mainstream public sphere. Participants emphasised the central role of Indigenous media outlets as forums for

[1] This essay is a digest version of research published previously as McCallum, K., Waller, L. & Meadows, M. (2012). 'Raising the volume: Indigenous voices in news media and policy', *Media International Australia*, 142: 101-111.

people to deliberate together and advance their own policy discourses. Former ABC journalist and Indigenous media consultant Ursula Raymond was engaged by the Yolgnu people in North-East Arnhem Land to assist in their campaign to retain bilingual education programs. She said: 'They're doing that stuff through their own local media networks, Indigenous radio, the national Indigenous radio service and their own Koori radio, radio Larrakia, CAAMA, those sorts of places.'

News is constructed through cooperation between journalists and their sources, who maintain close contact and shared values. Participants in our study described the relationship between Indigenous media organisations and their sources from the Aboriginal community in terms of confidence and familiarity. One said: 'The people out there, they utilise Indigenous media a lot of the time off their own bat anyway. They knew them and they just work them.'

Communities and independent Indigenous organisations embody media logic by drawing on media expertise from within their own spheres to teach people to use digital technologies to create and operate their own media. As well as investing in the services of Indigenous media consultants to coordinate specific campaigns and strategies, large Indigenous organisations provide spokespeople with formal media training and operate in-house media services. Former Apunipinna Cape York Health Council executive director Kerry Arabena discussed the importance and value of media expertise within her organisation and for its stakeholders:

> Up in Cape York I invested in my own communications unit. So we actually had, through the Cape York Health Council, our own communications unit, including digital media, print media. We made a lot of media statements. We went out to communities to help them generate media about their own successes.

Working with mainstream media

Engaging with the mainstream media is a key strategy for penetrating public policy debates. Participants identified a range of mechanisms for engagement, from sophisticated 'media machines' within Indigenous organisations to people on the ground using media logic to promote their messages. Raymond attributed the effectiveness of the bilingual education campaign in 1998–99 to her Yolgnu clients being 'media savvy':

> They understood the media, they understood the messages that they wanted to get out so they knew how to work that ... They were very open to talking to the media. They had their key spokespeople identified and prepped and ready to go and they were unified on the issue and very clear.

She reflects the earlier comments of the *Koori Mail's* Todd Condie:

> Increasingly, Indigenous people are becoming 'media savvy', which means mainstream media will always be looked at to further a particular message or viewpoint ... To be fully effective, media-savvy Aborigines know to use both the mainstream and Indigenous networks to state their case. (Cited in Hartley, 2003, p. 53)

Trying to ensure their perspectives are heard loud and clear in the mainstream media is crucial for Indigenous people who want to counter their political opponents. One participant expressed the importance of using the same media tactics as other policy actors. She said her organisation always aimed to advance its policy positions 'in the same kinds of formats and in the same kind of arenas where they chose to take us on'. Arabena said: 'I think what they expected was that we wouldn't have a voice to give back, but in fact a lot of us were influential in *The Age,* in *The Weekend Australian* and in our own media, and I think, we were very successful.'

Chris Graham, from the *National Indigenous Times,* explained that in order to influence policy, Indigenous organisations ultimately needed to engage with mainstream media,

and Indigenous publications were an important connection between the two:

> One of the things we did well and the reason we survived and thrived is, we would use the media to break a story, knowing full well if we broke a great story it would make a heap of difference. Because if the mainstream media didn't pick it up, the government wouldn't ... because politicians are so easily influenced by what the media say.

Participants made direct links between effective media strategies and success in influencing the policy process. Arabena said that through the work of the Cape York Health Council's communications unit: 'We were able to influence policy-makers, community leaders. We were able to send out newsletters that had the eye of the ministers and as a result of our media campaigns we were able to change policy.'

However, participants were not universally positive about their chances of being listened to by mainstream media. Some commented that in certain climates the media were more disposed to picking up Indigenous perspectives or responding than at other times. For instance, during the Howard years when there was a push to mainstream Indigenous health services, the community-controlled sector found it very difficult to gain a voice. Former CEO of the National Aboriginal Community Controlled Health Organisation (NACCHO), Steve Larkin, said: 'I came to understand how fickle the media could be ... I found there wasn't much interest ... in any sort of positive stories, and I know I'm not the first person to say that.'

Indigenous leaders and media power

Established Indigenous leaders exert considerable influence in public and policy discussions through their use of the mainstream news media as a platform to advance their agendas and take on their opponents. Participants identified effective leaders as those with well-developed media skills. Raymond said: 'There are some like Galarrwuy Yunupingu who's incredibly sharp and knows how to work the media.' These leaders have two roles in the mainstream media. They are busy actors on the political stage, and therefore frequently quoted news sources and providers of 'news subsidies' (Gandy, 1989; Bakir, 2006). Some have also developed strong profiles and influential voices through the opinion pages of the national press. Some are regular contributors — such as Noel Pearson, who writes for *The Australian* — while others, such as Marcia Langton, Warren Mundine and Galarrwuy Yunupingu, appear as guest columnists and opinion writers. Arabena observed:

> Noel [Pearson] used media with a stunning success and really did engage the eye of mainstream Australia, really. He was able to communicate very effectively through media networks that we had within all of the Cape York institutions.

However, many participants were critical of the lack of diversity of Indigenous leaders'

KEY POINTS

- Our study reconsiders the 'intractability' of some Indigenous policy issues as the effectiveness of Indigenous peoples in maintaining and promoting their firmly held cultural and political perspectives on issues such as health and education in public discussion.
- Participants made direct links between effective media strategies and success in influencing the policy process.
- Our study has generated some precise insights into how Indigenous public spheres function, and provides evidence of the ways in which these processes impact on the mainstream public sphere.
- Established Indigenous leaders exert considerable influence in public and policy discussions through their use of the mainstream news media as a platform to advance their agendas and take on their opponents.

voices heard in the mainstream media, and said some conservative leaders' views had become too dominant in both public and policy discussions. A *lack* of strong Indigenous leadership can make it difficult to attract media attention. Former Yirrkala principal Leon White said in 1998 that the Yolgnu had leaders with national media profiles, including Yothu Yindi lead singer Mandawuy Yunupingu. In 2008, when the Yolgnu experienced difficulty attracting media attention for their campaign to save bilingual education, these leaders were no longer in the community due to death or ill-health. Reflecting on the success of the 1998 campaign, White lamented: 'We also had people like [internationally renowned Yolgnu educator] Dr Marika who's now passed away and Mandawuy's wife and others who took leadership of this. They're no longer with us.'

How some mainstream journalists make a difference

Journalists play a crucial role in mediating Indigenous voices in the mainstream public sphere. They can amplify Indigenous policy perspectives or downplay them. Different journalism practices and journalists' personal orientations produce different levels of engagement, which results in an uneven landscape in the reporting of Indigenous issues. Most participants commented that lack of empathy for Indigenous issues and people contributed to poor journalism practice and negative portrayals.

Participants identified particular journalists with the cultural competence to negotiate Indigenous public spheres. These are the reporters who are most likely to actively seek out and represent Indigenous policy agendas and perspectives, forming valuable intersections between the Indigenous public sphere and the mainstream. Journalists' personal histories and experiences influence their approaches. A number declared that they were committed to presenting positive accounts about Indigenous people and highlighting injustice. Some described themselves as having a social justice orientation, while others said early reporting experiences had shaped their attitudes. Veteran Press Gallery journalist Peter Reese recalled his earliest experiences in the 1970s:

> So to … have these events unfolding before my eyes and … witness police brutality — dragging people like Bobby Sykes … off on their backs along the ground and throwing them in the paddy wagon — it really opened my eyes and made me very aware of the disparity in society that Aboriginals have.

Former *National Indigenous Times* writer Graham Ring said the social justice orientation in his journalism came from his Catholic school education and studying politics at university:

> I was always pondering how … you give people a feeling for the kind of discrimination, mistreatment, dispossession all that kind of stuff, it clearly wasn't cutting through the [journalism] that was around.

Murray McLaughlin of the ABC said some may criticise him for ignoring 'the hard and more negative stuff':

> [B]ut it's been my preference to look for stories and actively pursue stories that have positive contexts … It's not all … doom and gloom … I don't know how that developed, but it's just the way it's worked out.

Participants identified cultural competence as the key attribute of accomplished Indigenous affairs reporters. They said it enabled them to find their own stories, cultivate and maintain strong contacts in the Indigenous public sphere and negotiate the obstacles in the field to get the story (see *Journalists, 'remote' Indigenous sources and cultural competence*).

A number of journalists said they gained their cultural competence while working in different roles for Indigenous bodies. Others learned in the field from other professionals with deep experience living and working with Indigenous peoples. Senior writer with *The Australian,* Tony Koch, has developed a strategy for enabling Indigenous people from remote communities to gain access to him and generate news stories:

> What I do in Queensland — and it's a bit of a sneaky one, but it works — with News Ltd, we've got a 1300 number so you can ring free from any phone anywhere in Australia. And I just put that number all around, all the communities, anywhere, on cards, anyone that wants to talk to me can just pick up the yellow phone.

Policymakers' media practices

Interviews conducted with federal and state public servants and former ministerial advisers provide evidence of how news media coverage and debate influence their policy practices. These participants are reflexive about their role in a media-saturated policy environment. They acknowledge that they use the media strategically to promote their policies to the public, that their practices feed the journalists' routines and react to minister's political agendas. The political sensitivity of Indigenous health policy means that any sharp focus by news outlets, particularly *The Australian* and talkback radio, is likely to have some policy impact. One senior health bureaucrat said:

> You have to be aware of the political implications of what's going to happen if something you do goes public. Is it a good news story or a bad ... if it's not saleable to the general public ... then if you've got a strong enough case they'll do it covertly ... or it won't happen, or it will be defused rather than put in place something that ... the talkbacks or the tabloids might get a hold of ...

Participant Tess Lea was one of the authors of *Learning lessons* (Collins, 1999), the report of the Collins review of Indigenous education in 1999 that led to the Northern Territory's bilingual education policy being reinstated as 'two-way learning'. She offers precise insights into how Indigenous public sphere activity defused the government's policy resolve. She said the Northern Territory government's terms of reference for the inquiry did not include bilingual education. However, the 'Don't Cut Off Our Tongues' campaign was so successful in focusing public and news media attention that 'no one wanted to talk about anything else':

> So we took that on as it was a responsibility to try to find some kind of middle path ... so we came up with ... two-way stuff ... it was really just trying to navigate through government's ordained decision and what was clearly needed on the ground ... So that's what happened, it [the inquiry] was gazumped, the issue gazumped us.

Conclusions

Our study has mapped some of the ways in which Indigenous people and communities make incursions into public policy debates and ultimately affect policy outcomes. This story is told through the words of those who have fought on behalf of particular policy outcomes in Indigenous health and education, those involved in reporting on Indigenous policy in Australia, and those who develop and implement that policy. Indigenous community activists take a strong position in policy debates that affect them, based in their culture and in their land. We contend that in a mediatized policymaking environment, these communities have used Indigenous public spheres effectively to engage with mainstream media to keep their policy agendas alive.

The Yolgnu people's campaign to retain bilingual education in the late 1990s culminated in the biggest ever petition to the Northern Territory parliament, and resulted in the retention of these programs for another decade. Their most recent battle to preserve their education system also appears to have been successful, with the new Northern Territory Government's promise to reinstate the programs. We argue that, if the Yolgnu had not employed news media strategies and tactics to engage with the policy debate, bilingual education in the Northern Territory would have been scrapped in the late 1990s. Similarly, we have demonstrated that, despite marginalisation over many years in national health policy debates, the media activities and commitment of policy advocates to the self-determinist principles of Aboriginal community-controlled health contributed to

the survival of the AMS network in the delivery of primary health care to Indigenous Australians.

Media-savvy Indigenous leaders understand journalism's role in defining policy problems and providing a platform for a range of voices to be heard in policy debates (Mickler, 1988). Advocates interviewed for this study believe the media play an important role in policymaking, and have employed a range of mechanisms to engage with and influence national policy debates. This finding supports Koch-Baumgarten and Voltmer's (2010) argument that marginalised groups rely on mass media to amplify their demands in public discussion. They understand the importance of engaging empathetic journalists in the mainstream media in order to get their policy positions heard. Whether it is through communications units developed in Indigenous-controlled health organisations or the promotion of news stories broken in Indigenous media, there is an awareness that Indigenous public spheres must interact with mainstream public spheres in order to influence policy outcomes. In this way, Indigenous organisations employ media logic in their campaigns to effect policy change.

We acknowledge the marginalisation of Indigenous viewpoints in mainstream media reporting; however, we have identified a small group of journalists who have the skills and commitment to amplify Indigenous perspectives in public discussion. These are journalists who have the cultural competence and professional practices to negotiate Indigenous public spheres effectively, enabling them to broaden public and policy debates. They typically have a social justice orientation and a genuine desire to engage with Indigenous public spheres. They do not, however, see themselves as mouthpieces for Indigenous causes or their role as influencing policy; rather, they articulate a desire to make a difference to the lived experience of Indigenous people. These agenda-setting journalists often break the big stories that initiate major policy change. Their reporting does not always promote 'good' policy as the Indigenous advocates we have interviewed would understand it, but they maintain a commitment to reporting Indigenous perspectives.

In a mediatized policymaking environment, it is imperative that Indigenous voices are heard (Dreher, 2010). There is a diversity of peoples and opinions in Indigenous Australia; however, not all voices are heard at the same volume. Some are diminished in parliaments and newsrooms where often there are few listening. But there is a determination to convey Indigenous agendas to those in power and engage in the policy-making process. As Maddison (2009, p. xxvi) says: 'Aboriginal people are tasked with negotiating a complex political culture that is poorly understood by non-Aboriginal people, but in doing so they are 'resourceful, creative and persistent'.

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Academic Perspectives

Academics, think tanks and journalists: The trouble with expert opinion, empirical evidence and bilingual education

Lisa Waller

Public servants and journalists have some things in common: for both fields a strong 'evidence base' is a mantra for good professional practice. Both groups look to independent 'experts' including academics to provide or verify the evidence they rely on; however, this evidence-based approach can present challenges. Our project focuses on news media and the policy process, and this has involved investigating the relationships between journalists and their sources, including academics. That relationship is the focus of this essay, but I want to begin by underlining that is not the only uneasy relationship we have encountered along the way. The same kinds of uneasiness that are evident at times between journalists and academics can be seen in the relationship between policymakers and academics, and between policymakers and journalists, as well.

In his discussion of the problems of evidence-based policy, former Productivity Commission head Gary Banks (2009) described cultural differences between public servants and academics. He said there was a perception among senior public servants that academics can be very hard 'to do business with' or that they are too slow, or lack an appreciation of the 'real world'. He said, while there may be some validity in these perceptions, they may also reflect an unrealistic view by public servants of how much time is needed to do good research; and perhaps a lack of planning. Perhaps also a desire for greater 'predictability' in upholding a certain viewpoint than many academics would be willing to countenance.

The literature on journalists and their sources has long emphasised the importance of 'experts' and empirical evidence in the construction of credible news (Lippmann, 1921). Some journalists in our study underlined this. *The Australian*'s Tony Koch, commenting on coverage of bilingual education in the Northern Territory, said:

> … [you've] got to include them, the evidenced-based and outcomes based. I mean — you can't waste money and people's time and people's lives on bullshit stuff that's not evidence-based.

Language activists said there is a wealth of international and Australian research that provides evidence of the benefits of bilingual education for Indigenous children who start school only speaking their mother tongues, and this is reflected in the literature (Grimes, 2009). However, academic commentators (Devlin, 2010; Hoogenraad, 2001; Nicholls, 1994; Simpson, Caffery & McConvell, 2009) and some study participants say this substantial body of evidence was largely overlooked by politicians and the news media in 1998–99 and again in 2008–09, when they announced the Northern Territory's bilingual education programs would be set aside, without research or consultation with affected communities. Furthermore, participants said that in 2008 the news media did not probe the evidence for the policy change cited by the government, or seek comment from relevant academic experts. Journalists explained that the government withheld the relevant data. Some participants said editors were not interested in publishing academic experts' submissions to the opinion pages of leading newspapers. One academic said:

> … a number of people tried writing opinion pieces and tried getting them published and they were just knocked back one after the other. OK, some of them may have been badly written, there are all sorts of reasons for rejecting. One of them, I remember I

> got one rejected by The Age, saying something like, 'well, we've had our fill of Aboriginal stories for a while, we just can't take another opinion piece on it'.

Our participants offered their experiences and observations of policymakers and the news media's unwillingness, or inability, to grapple with what they admit is complex data and concepts. They said they felt academics were seen as distant from educational and political 'realities' and that their potential contribution to the debate was easily dismissed. This group of participants' media-related practices can be understood to lend weight to Negrine's (1996) contention that the news media are ultimately unable, unwilling, and often unprepared 'to confront and make sense of the complexity of causes and effects which surround events and happenings in the contemporary world' (1996, p. 16).

This essay argues that in 2008 the kinds of 'politically palatable' views espoused by think-tank experts, who oppose the use of Indigenous languages in schools, were preferred by policymakers and the news media to those of linguists and Indigenous education experts. Fairfax's Northern correspondent Lindsay Murdoch said:

> And politically it's an easy thing to sell in the policy ... this is Australia and they will learn English for six (sic) hours of the day. That's politically ... they get political points for that — being tough on ... 'we're not going to have these people not being able to speak English'.

Some study participants believed Helen Hughes, of the Centre of Independent Studies, and Noel Pearson of the Cape York Institute, exerted a strong influence on public perception of the issue and in the minds of both territory and federal policymakers. Hughes wrote several reports on Indigenous education (Hughes, 2008; Hughes & Hughes, 2009) and Pearson wrote an article in the *Quarterly Essay* (Pearson, 2009) preceded by a comment piece in *The Australian* (Pearson, 2007), in which he argued that while respecting and preserving Indigenous languages is crucial, it should not be the remit of schools to teach them. Instead, Indigenous children should be taught their languages in the home. Both Hughes and Pearson's writings received a considerable amount of public attention and discussion. The literature on the power of think tanks, which is discussed later, says tracing or measuring the impact of think tanks on government policy or news media outputs is difficult but 'traces' of their ideas can often be discerned. Bacchi's (2009) concepts for understanding policymaking can assist in explaining how these ideas became part of the policy conversation. She challenges the idea that governments react to pre-existing problems and instead argues that they are reactive in creating or producing those 'problems'. In making this claim, Bacchi is not arguing that the issues or experiences to which a policy refers are not real, but rather that calling those conditions 'problems' or 'social problems' fixes them in ways that need to be interrogated. Arguably, the views espoused by Hughes and Pearson fixed bilingual education as a 'problem' that needed to be fixed and their proposed policy 'solution' was politically appetising at the time.

Competing views of the 'problems' of remote Indigenous education

Participants commented that these think-tank experts, who oppose bilingual learning with a simple message that Indigenous children must learn in English, were preferred by the news media to other credible sources on Indigenous education in the Northern Territory, including a detailed report by the Australian Education Union (AEU) (Kronemann, 2007). This review followed up on concerns that the *Ampe akelyernemane meke mekarle (Little children are sacred)* report into child sexual abuse in the Northern Territory (Wild & Anderson, 2007) had raised about the importance of bilingual education and the need for improved English teaching in remote Indigenous

schools. It estimated that $1.7 billion would be needed over five years to put the teaching and infrastructure resources in place to provide a proper education for all the Indigenous children in the Northern Territory (Kronemann, 2007, p. 36).

Despite its significant findings and recommendations, the AEU report attracted little media attention. Far more influential was the monograph written by Hughes for the Centre for Independent Studies (Hughes, 2008). She highlighted the poor results of Indigenous students, and underlined some real problems with Northern Territory education delivery in remote communities. She also claimed teaching in Indigenous languages is a major cause of educational disadvantage, but produced no evidence to support her statements. Ignoring the fact that only nine out of 119 schools had bilingual education programs, and that those programs start teaching English early, she wrote that, 'In the Northern Territory, children are still initially taught in a vernacular language, despite the research that shows that the ability to learn languages recedes with age' (Hughes, 2008, p. 8). Simpson et al. (2009) point out this was also misleading, because the homeland school which prompted her complaint, Yilpara, like other homeland schools, does not have a bilingual education program.

Hughes also claimed, again without providing evidence, that:

> … parents ... are clamouring for their children to be taught the mainstream curriculum in English from kindergarten onward. They are confident that they can teach their children their language and culture at home and in the community. (2007, p. 9)

Even though Hughes is not a specialist in education or languages, her position attracted media attention and support (Barker, 2008), especially in *The Australian*.

ANU Professor of Linguistics, Jane Simpson, said the news media preferred to 'recycle as news' the opinions of Hughes and Pearson, rather than those of academics who *could* provide empirical evidence to support their claims:

> … they were certainly not coming looking for us, and it was quite understandable that they didn't come looking for someone like me because I didn't have a profile, but they didn't go looking for people like Christine Nicholls, who did have a profile, or Brian Devlin who has been a major bilingual education figure in the Northern Territory.

In declining an invitation to participate in this study, Hughes (pers. Comm., 4 April 2011) said 'I regret that the subject you propose is not an area of my expertise' This is despite having written two extensive reports on the subject (Hughes, 2008; Hughes & Hughes, 2009) and participated in news media interviews in which she was highly critical of bilingual

KEY POINTS

- Tracing or measuring the impact of think tanks on government policy or news media outputs is difficult but 'traces' of their ideas have been discerned in this study.
- Our research suggests the views of think-tank experts, who oppose the use of Indigenous languages in schools, were preferred by policymakers and the news media to academic sources.
- This observation accords with international studies that show the growing importance of think tanks in the policy process.
- Academics said they felt they were seen as distant from educational and political 'realities' and that their potential contribution to the debate was easily dismissed.
- They pointed to a general lack of understanding in their relationship with journalists and the media relations units within universities.

education, accusing the programs of producing students who were 'non-lingual' and advocating strongly for English as the language of instruction in all remote Indigenous schools (see for example Barker, 2008; Ferrari, 2008)

Journalists and problems with access to evidence

Several other issues related to the question of expert opinion and empirical evidence emerged from the interviews. Journalists who covered the 2008 decision to dismantle bilingual education programs in the territory revealed the problems they encountered getting access to the relevant government data on school performance. They explained how this tended to skew the coverage. Katrina Bolton, who covered the issue for the ABC in Darwin, said:

> And it's such a shit fight always to get even the statistics from the Education Department. There's so much lack of clarity in terms of being able to see the data. Like, the length of time between when they were saying that bilingual schools weren't performing and the length of time between when we then got any kind of quantifiable data was ridiculous. Like months. And so it was repressive lines being fed by politicians, and then other opponents sort of, it was that sort of warfare kind of thing.

Intellectual voices not heard

Several academic participants, including Dr Frances Morphy of the Australian National University and Dr Christine Nicholls of Flinders University, commented on the lack of media attention for intellectuals in Australia generally, as opposed to other western nations, such as Great Britain and France, where they said some scholars enjoyed a celebrity status.

In the Northern Territory context, participants observed that in general there was a lack of local intellectuals and who were available for public comment. Former journalist Chips Macinolty said:

> Despite having had a university for 20 years there's no local commentators you can go to for stuff on politics or history or whatever. I mean, at the moment there's one former Labor politician who gets asked about things, he's no intellectual giant and is a failed politician.

A senior Northern Territory health bureaucrat also commented that Northern Territory news outlets tended to seek expert opinion from 'outside' institutions from 'down south':

> … the other contributing factor for the NT is the difficulties it seems to have in constructing a local point of view or perspective.

Inclusion in the news media as a source of information lends prestige and an air of credibility (Soley, 1992), so who and what the news media present as expert sources and knowledge on remote Indigenous education informs public understandings of who are credible education researchers and what is reliable education research (Haas, 2007). Taken together, the news media influence who the public pay attention to as scientific sources of education research, as well as the problems those sources contend are worthy of attention and the solutions they advocate (Koch-Baumgarten & Voltmer, 2010). This often translates into which educational approaches and programs are identified and put forward as deserving of public resources. In this case the Northern Territory's own Charles Darwin University experts on bilingual education such as Brian Devlin and Michael Christie were not heard, but Sydney-based economist Helen Hughes and North Queensland lawyer Noel Pearson were.

Lack of understanding between fields

Academics who were interviewed pointed to a general lack of understanding in their relationship with journalists and the media relations units within universities. While the field of academia may be close to the journalistic field in terms of the education and social class of their members, there are distinct differences.

This can be understood to relate to differences in professional practices (Bourdieu, 1990). For example, both journalists and academics commented on journalists requiring quick information and easy access to academics. Academics said they wanted time to consider the questions being asked and to carefully craft their responses, as their expert reputations depended upon providing accurate and up-to-date information that was carefully interpreted. They also said their working day meant they were busy teaching, or they may be engaged in research activities in the field, which meant they were not easily contactable. The disconnection between journalists and academics was also revealed to manifest in different ways. This included practices such as journalists using 'find an expert' directories on university websites. Linguists who specialise in Indigenous languages said they were contacted regularly by journalists looking for a comment on a subject such as the prime minister's accent, which they were not qualified to comment on. They said the journalist had simply sought a linguist, without considering their expertise may not be in the area of linguistics in which they wanted an expert opinion.

A number of academics also said they had never been approached by the university's media relations team to discuss the kinds of expert opinion they could provide. Nor had they been offered any kind of media training. They said this meant universities, governments and the public were not benefiting from their expertise.

Journalists who were interviewed described the bilingual education debate as 'good academic argy-bargy' and said this made it a topic that was difficult to present well as a broadcast news story because it was too abstract and difficult to narrate visually. Print journalists said space limitations made it difficult to explain the context and complexity of the academic arguments about which educational approaches work best. In other words, the production requirements of news affected whether it was an issue that would be given coverage or how the issue was represented (Cottle, 2003; Dreher, 2010).

Journalists were criticised by some participants as lacking adequate knowledge about education generally, not having the time or skill to comprehend academic research and of poor numeracy skills that are necessary to interpret quantitative data on school performance. Poor numeracy among journalists has been documented as a widespread problem internationally, and a barrier to good reporting (Maier, 2002).

Academics also expressed disappointment that governments, which fund their research, often ignore their expert advice and their study findings. This emergent theme requires further research, which is beyond the scope of this project. It is important because, as participants commented, their research is federally funded and in their opinion the nation should benefit from academic research that informs public policy.

The rise of think tanks

Think tanks are defined generally as organisations that have significant autonomy from governmental interests and that disseminate, synthesise or create information, research, ideas, or advice to the public, policymakers, other organisations (both private and governmental), and the news media (Haas, 2007). Openly political conservative think tanks, such as the Centre for Independent Studies, outnumber and outspend both liberal advocacy-focused think tanks and nonpartisan research-focused think tanks (Reese, 2002).

As a group, think tanks are a challenge to long-standing practices of scientific knowledge production. They are not bound by either tradition or professional affiliation to adhere to university or other guidelines of professional conduct for education research (Weaver & McGann, 2002). The extent to which they conform to these standards and procedures—such as national ethical research standards and

blind, peer review—is voluntary. Think tanks can present themselves as researchers and research institutions that produce and disseminate research studies regardless of how they actually conduct their activities (Howe, 2002).

Simpson said think tank experts were popular with policymakers and the news media because:

> They write accessibly, they write to the point, they write in a place [policymakers] can get access to easily. [They] don't have to fish around and they understand confidentiality.

She contrasted this relationship with traditional academics:

> … it's a feeling that academics are distant, that we have vested interests. We're too theoretical or whatever. It seems to me absurd given the taxpayer is paying us a lot to think about these issues ... and the media and the policymakers aren't actually interested in hearing what they're paying us to do.

The observation think-tank experts' opinions were of more interest to, and had more influence on, policymakers and the news media in relation to bilingual education accords with international studies that show the growing importance of think tanks in the policy process (Ahmad, 2008; Haas, 2007). In their study of the power of think tanks in British politics, Ball and Exley (2010) say:

> There is a sense that academics remain unhelpfully out of touch with real and practical policy problems; that they are detached, cynical and more concerned with peer review, the Research Assessment Exercise and spending time *thinking* than with getting on and *doing* (author's italics). (Ball & Exley, 2010)

They argue that there has been an overall shift in the types of knowledge that are regarded as valuable in relation to policy, away from academic expertise and towards simple messages that can easily be understood by politicians, policymakers and the public via the news media.

Tess Lea of Charles Darwin University spoke of the challenges of making academic research accessible to a lay audience and not offending funding bodies:

> If you're going into the public domain you are very conscious of translating the stuff so that it sounds relatively interesting … you're trying to actually be definitive when what you've actually done usually, is made the definitions problematic. So there's that translation stuff that kicks in, but that's just a real side thing. The serious disincentive is how these days all academics are having to scrub for money, and if we alienate … you get in trouble very quickly.

However, with regard to influence on government policy, tracing or measuring the impact of think tanks on government policy or news media outputs is difficult, as others have pointed out (Ahmad, 2008). Stone (2000) has argued that 'the agenda-setting capacity of a think tank (if any) is intangible' and 'think tanks do not have extensive paradigmatic influence over official thinking' (Stone, 2000, p. 219). Ball and Exley (2010) argue that what occurs is perhaps a process of 'attrition and infiltration', with 'versions or traces of think tank ideas being written into state documents'(Ball & Exley, 2010, p. 158).

Our research suggests this offers the best way of interpreting the influence of think-tank experts Hughes and Pearson on the policy solution put forward by the territory government in 2008, which echoed their position that all teaching must be in English.

The proximity between think-tank experts and the news media can be traced, with the news media giving their position credibility through its coverage of Hughes's and Pearson's reports and essays, and the think-tank experts referencing sympathetic news media, as Hughes and Hughes do in their 2009 report:

> Nobody disputes the right of Indigenous children to speak their own languages at home. But as *The Australian* editorialised, 'Mr Calma and others need to recognise that lack of basic skills, including English language proficiency, is holding his people back from better lives and job opportunities.'(Hughes & Hughes, 2009, p.10)

Future directions

This essay began with a brief general discussion of the often uneasy relationships between public servants, academics and journalists, then focused on news media, academics and think-tank commentators in the context of bilingual education policy in 2007–08. It has argued that differences in professional cultures and practices in this specific policy constellation helped to shape the public discussion and the policy process as well. This occurred through downplaying some forms of expert knowledge and think tanks representing the policy 'problem' in a particular light and proposing a monolingual 'solution' (Bacchi, 2009). I return now to the broader issue the essay began with, because it is worth considering that as the digital age evolves new technologies will perhaps transform relationships between public servants, experts and journalists. There are also recent challenges to the study of policy that have the potential to reshape our understanding of policy processes. For example, Bacchi (2009) is critical of the current orthodoxies of evidence-based policy. She sees this paradigm as reliant on positivist, rationalist assumptions, and argues that because it purports to treat policy as a neutral, technical process it is depoliticising and potentially regressive. She seeks to shift the focus from problem-solving to problem questioning — to ask, 'what is the problem represented to be?', which has the potential to transform the role of academics and journalists in the process.

Some of our research participants raised questions about future academic engagement in the online policy environment. For example, some policymakers commented that they go directly to academic sources for discussion of policy problems and potential solutions now that they are online, rather than relying on mediated policy information. This could give academics more of a policy agenda-setting role, rather than being consulted once the problem has been defined in other forums. For example, one senior public servant with FaHCSIA said:

> The availability of information over the internet has been the big change. Now we can get a more diverse range of information, rather than just relying on the mainstream newspapers to learn about public discussion of Indigenous issues. For example, I read the publications put out by CAEPR [Centre for Aboriginal Economic Policy Research] that are available online.

However, the general public is less likely to seek out these sources and will therefore continue to rely on mainstream media to provide the perspective. Many participants said the issues are complex and emphasised the need for them to be presented in ways that will raise public awareness, or bring people to an understanding to share the solutions. One senior Northern Territory policymaker said discussion of Indigenous issues tended to be polarised between relatively inaccessible academic channels and sensationalist media coverage. She identified the importance of academic contributions to well-moderated public discussion that contributes to policies that improve the lived experience of Indigenous Australians, thereby enriching the entire nation. However, she was cynical that such an outcome was achievable:

> We need to get everybody on board to participate in the debates, and not just have it thrashed out in university institutes, or … in an international journal. And then, on the other hand, some trite front page or page 5 story in the *NT News* … We've been

laughing about it for some years, but it will be hard for an alternative to emerge.

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Reciprocity and Indigenous knowledge in research

Lisa Waller

> Ganma is a metaphor. We are talking about natural processes but meaning at another level. Ganma is social theory. It is our traditional profound and detailed model of how what Europeans call 'society' works. (Yunipingu, 1994)

> I try to follow the threads of local arguments wherever they lead. That is to say, I take them seriously as theory — as texts to learn from, not just about. (Connell, 2007, on the project of theorising in the global periphery)

Indigenous peoples think and interpret the world and its everyday realities in particular ways that are different from non-indigenous peoples because of their relationships to land, their cultures, histories and values (Rigney, 1999). However, indigenist researchers have demonstrated that one of the legacies of scientific racialisation and its ideology has been the construction of knowledge about Indigenous peoples through the 'common sense' colonial view. In doing so, they have revealed the ways in which Northern epistemologies reproduce and reaffirm the cultural assumptions of 'the world' and the 'real' by the dominant group (Denzin & Lincoln, 2008; Jones, Lee & Poynton, 1998; Smith, 2004).

The perspectives of Yolngu people are an important part of this study and throughout the project I have remained aware of and taken steps to avoid the dangers of a Northern-centric approach to my research. The study design, fieldwork, analysis of Yolngu practices and the research outputs are informed by Indigenous methodologies, especially Yolngu epistemologies and the work of Kaupapa Māori[1] researcher Linda Tuhiwai Smith, which emphasises that the quality of the interaction between the researcher and participants is more important than ticking boxes or answering closed questions (Smith, 2004, p. 136).

Smith (2004) observes that some methodologies regard the specific research setting, characterised by the practices of Indigenous communities as 'barriers' to research, or as exotic customs that researchers need to be familiar with in order to carry out their work without causing offence. Indigenous methodologies, on the other hand, approach these practices in a respectful and ethical way as an integral part of the methodology:

> They are factors to be built into research explicitly, to be thought about reflexively, to be declared openly as part of the research design, to be discussed as part of the final results of a study and to be disseminated back to the people in culturally appropriate ways and in a language that can be understood. (Smith, 2004, p. 15)

Yolngu knowledge systems involve thinking from, and with, the sea and the land. As Connell (2007) observes more generally of Indigenous cultures, 'land and sea are not just geographical co-ordinates, but a concrete presence in social reality' (Connell, 2012, p. 212). Being welcomed on to Yolngu country — learning about it in conversation and by walking upon it with senior women; the many background discussions, interactions and social experiences I had with Yolngu — was a crucial part of the research process because it established a rapport between us. Spending time getting to know people, driving into town together, having some lunch, going for a walk, meeting family —

[1] Maori researchers in New Zealand call 'methodology' 'Kaupapa Māori research' or Māori - centred research. Smith explains that 'this form of naming is about bringing to the centre and privileging indigenous values, attitudes and practices rather than disguising them within Western labels such as 'collaborative research' (Smith, 2006, p. 125).

was how I discovered what is important from a Yolngu perspective — and why.

Ganma

Yolngu use the Ganma metaphor to explain how knowledge is produced and it is therefore one of the foundation philosophies for their bilingual/bicultural schools, which are central to my research questions. It has also emerged through the research process as the theoretical base of my doctoral project, which brings together Northern and Southern theory in a particular ecology. This places Ganma at the philosophical front and centre of this research journey. It is also part of the land on which the research is based. Some would describe this as a 'grounded theory' approach but I prefer Connell's suggestion. She gives a new meaning for the term 'grounded theory', which involves 'linking theory to the ground on which the theorist's boots are planted' (Connell, 2007, p. 206). This study is an attempt to do just this. Connell calls this approach 'dirty theory', and defines it as theorising which is 'mixed up with specific situations': 'The goal of dirty theory is not to subsume, but to clarify; not to classify from outside, but to illuminate a situation in its concreteness' (Connell, 2007, p. 207):

> To think in this way is to reject the deeply entrenched habit of mind … by which theory in the social sciences is admired exactly in the degree to which it escapes specific settings and speaks in abstract universals. Connell, 2007, p. 206

The thinking and action the Ganma metaphor has inspired can be understood as a response to Yolngu participants' self-determinist aims for the research, which included writing works of journalism about bilingual education for mainstream news media audiences that present their perspective. This critical studies approach (Denzin & Lincoln, 2008) has resulted in a model of academic journalism based in Indigenous research methodologies (Waller, 2010a). Its aim is to contribute to improving news media representation of Indigenous people and issues. It draws from Indigenous epistemologies that emphasise the centrality of trust, listening, reciprocity and maintaining consent (Waller, 2010a).

Decolonising research

This work of journalism is a form of 'decolonising research', which is enmeshed in activism. From the outset Yolngu participants were more interested in what I could offer their community as a journalist in return for their input and guidance, than what I could offer as a PhD student writing a thesis and conference papers. We agreed from the beginning that I would produce a work of journalism for the mainstream media that advocated for their policy position on bilingual education. Denzin and Lincoln (2008) describe this approach as 'decentring and redefining the field of research so the Western academy is not the locus of authorising power that defines the research agenda' (2008, p. 38). My project had ethics clearance from the University of Canberra, which included writing works of journalism. The article was constructed upon the Indigenous ethical framework I describe here and elsewhere (Waller, 2010; 2012).

Denzin and Lincoln (2008) stress that decolonising research emphasises performativity:

> It is not only concerned with building a theoretical foundation but researchers are engaged performatively in decolonising acts framed as activism, advocacy or critical reclamation. ((Denzin & Lincoln, 2008, p. 38)

This essay traces the development of the journalism methodology and its operationalisation in the article 'Learning in both worlds' (Waller, 2011), which presents the Yolngu perspective on bilingual education.

Journalism

It is important to note that, from an Indigenous perspective, no difference exists between journalism and other

forms of non-Indigenous research. For Indigenous people, research is one of the key means that colonisers and imperialists have used to 'take' their knowledge, objectify them as 'Other' and rob them of their sovereignty (Rigney, 1999). Kaupapa Māori researcher Linda Tuwai Smith says: 'the word itself, "research", is probably one of the dirtiest words in the Indigenous world's vocabulary' (Smith, 2004, p. 1). Mainstream Western journalism still operates mainly with the positivist–objectivist epistemology that reproduces and reaffirms the cultural assumptions of 'the world' and the 'real' by the dominant group (Rigney, 1999; Meadows, 2001). Therefore, new epistemologies are needed if journalism is to reflect Indigenous understandings of 'the world' and 'the real'.

Indigenous researchers have drawn upon the critical studies paradigm that advocates for those most oppressed in society and incorporated feminist theory in their development of qualitative methodologies for decolonising[2] research about Indigenous peoples (Rigney, 1999). These methodologies demand greater self-reflection in research and emphasise 'the socially constructed nature of reality, the intimate relationship between the researcher and what is studied, and the situational constraints that shape inquiry' (Denzin & Lincoln, 2000, p. 8). They call for research projects that are designed to reflect Indigenous peoples' values, respect cultures, histories, communities and individuals; serve their purposes and needs first and foremost, and are designed to advance their self-defined struggles for self- determination (McCallum, Waller & Meadows, 2012). The broad principles that have been developed through these methodologies form the basis for Australia's ethical standards for academic research involving Indigenous participants (NHMRC, 2003; 2007).

Indigenous people and the news media

The model for Indigenous reporting developed through my research draws on the National Health and Medical Research Council's (NHMRC) *Guidelines for Ethical Conduct in Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Health* (2003; 2007), Indigenous research methodologies, recent scholarship on listening and Tony Koch's newsgathering practices. I contend that journalism academics, their students and working journalists can be more effective agents of change if they look beyond professional ethics codes or reporting protocols, to Indigenous research methodologies. The ethical framework advocated here requires self-reflexivity, meaningful engagement with communities and individuals and structuring projects so they privilege Indigenous voices and perspectives, thereby expanding, diversifying and challenging stereotypical media representations.

This kind of approach has been advanced by Michael Meadows (2005), who suggests journalists need to learn how to navigate Indigenous public spheres in the same way they learn to move within and between other information networks as part of their daily practice. He says enabling Indigenous speaking positions requires journalists not only understand the impact of negative or stereotypical representation, but also the effects of

[2] Indigenous researchers are involved in the project of 'decolonising' research (see for example, Smith 2004). Decolonising research involves activism and is based on postcolonial theory and postcolonial studies. Denzin & Lincoln (2008) explain: '… decolonising research recognises and works within the belief that non-Western knowledge forms are excluded from or marginalised in normative research paradigms, and therefore non-Western/Indigenous voices are silenced and subjects lack agency within such representations. Furthermore, decolonising research recognises the role of colonisation in the scripting and encrypting of a silent, inarticulate and inconsequential indigenous subject and how such encryptions legitimise oppression. Finally, individually and collectively, decolonising research as a performative act functions to highlight and advocate for the ending of both discursive and material oppression that is produced at the site of the encryption of the non-Western subject as a "governable body" (Foucault, 1977)'. (Denzin & Lincoln, 2008, pp.35-36).

silencing Indigenous people and making them invisible:

> Sensitivity to such issues might invoke reporting strategies such as using an indirect approach in news interviews, consultation and negotiation over meaning, acknowledgment of the existence of indigenous English and local languages, and making use of translators or subtitles where appropriate — in other words, negotiating Indigenous identity through dialogue with Indigenous public spheres. (Meadows, 2005, p. 36)

Listening

Some senior Yolngu who participated in the project said the big problem with the news media is that journalists don't present their perspective often or well enough, so the public and politicians do not listen to them or take an interest in issues they regard as important. In an interview for this project, the highly regarded Indigenous affairs reporter Tony Koch, of *The Australian* newspaper[3], said the best advice he could offer about reporting on remote Indigenous communities was '… you don't go there to speak to them, you go there to listen, and that's just a wonderful experience if you've got the patience for it'. Yolngu people's frustration with not being heard and Koch's advice for other journalists provide evidence from the field on the fundamental importance of listening in responsible reporting of Indigenous affairs.

Yolgnu people's experience of the news media is also reflected in the growing body of research concerned with the politics and value of listening, which this essay draws upon. Scholars observe that the difficulty of producing positive changes in marginalised groups' access to media and their representation is not an inability to speak up on their part. Rather, it is an inability or a refusal to listen on the part of both news media producers and their assumed audiences (Dreher, 2010, p. 98). This essay suggests the university ethics process for working with Indigenous people provides journalism academics with a framework for developing a new approach to reporting based on an obligation to listen.

The literature on race and media representation discussed in this report shows that Indigenous people often have little power over the ways in which they are depicted and that the routines and values of mainstream journalism present barriers to them telling *their* stories. Indigenous research ethics can offer a framework for ensuring Indigenous people have greater control over the ways they are represented and are empowered to tell their stories. Adopting this ethical paradigm involves a commitment to respecting difference, listening to Indigenous people and ensuring that their needs and priorities are emphasised in the news reports that are created.

Dreher (2010) suggests that entrenched news values and existing story agendas often work to shape listening and speaking by focusing on addressing the stereotypes and concerns of 'mainstream' audiences, rather than providing ways through which marginalised voices can be heard. She says our thinking needs to change to include hearing and listening as well as speaking.

Dreher is one of a group of media scholars who are concerned with the politics and importance of listening. Charles Husband advocates for a universal right to be understood (1996), and John Downing (2007) builds on Husband's work with his concept of 'active listening'. He argues that positive cultural change depends on developing 'a sense of obligation to listen' to people who have been historically excluded from public conversation. Susan Bickford (1996) says change can occur when we understand that how we listen determines the ways in which others can speak and be heard. In her recent work on listening, Dreher (2010) suggests that the

[3] Interview conducted by Lisa Waller at Deakin University Management Centre, 23 May 2010.

nature of media power can be usefully rethought:

> Media power might entail the privilege of choosing to listen or not, the power to enter into dialogue or not, to seek to comprehend the other or not, the privilege of demanding answers and explanations and justifications. The challenge for media change then might be how to undo the privilege of not listening at multiple levels — including the news conventions which structure journalists' hearing stories, and the presumed interest of the assumed audience in listening to others. (Dreher, 2010, p. 101)

Fair representation and access to news media for Indigenous people are more likely to be achieved by working outside or re-imagining news conventions, challenging routine source strategies and using different modes of information gathering and storytelling (Dreher 2010). Journalism academics are well placed to take up the challenges of media change suggested here by working through the university ethics process, which facilitates dialogue with Indigenous public spheres. New subjects as well as ways of storytelling can be developed from Indigenous peoples' definitions of issues and priorities for research. Different modes of information gathering would include working together to negotiate what will be investigated and how that inquiry will be carried out. Establishing meaningful relationships that extend beyond information collection can displace routine source strategies. Respecting Indigenous cultures and knowledge, including people's right to be understood in their own languages, facilitates speaking and listening.

The university ethics process is designed to ensure research outcomes that satisfy the needs and aspirations of Indigenous people, which could be works of journalism that tell the stories Indigenous people want the world to hear.

Writing: 'Learning in both worlds'

Learning in both worlds (Waller, 2011) can be described as a piece of 'experimental' journalism as it contributes to operationalising the ethical framework developed through my research. It could also be used to 'test' some of the research findings, especially the local understanding of participants that Australia's southern mainstream news media has little interest in the topic of bilingual education. It could also be used to 'test' whether a substantial piece of journalism that advocates an Indigenous perspective could influence the bilingual education policy debate (Koch-Baumgarten & Voltmer, 2010).

The article was published by the online news and opinion outlet *Inside Story* almost one year after I had completed my fieldwork in north-east Arnhem Land. There were two reasons I did not write it sooner. The first was that I had further interviews to complete with members of the policy field who I believed might not be prepared to participate if they did not like what I wrote. The second goes to my journalistic *habitus,* especially my news sense (Benson & Neveu, 2005). The aims of the feature article were to present the Yolngu policy perspective, reach as wide an audience as possible and ideally to

KEY POINTS

- The main outcomes of the project stem from Yolngu participants' self-determinist aims for the research.
- A major aim was writing a work of journalism that advocated the Yolngu policy position on bilingual education.
- The article that resulted can be viewed at www.inside.org.au/learning_in_both_worlds/
- Working with Indigenous research ethics resulted in the development of a model of academic journalism based in Indigenous research methodologies.

have an impact on the policy process. The wind did not blow the right way, according to my journalism 'nose', until I could spot a suitable opening in the national news agenda. The House of Representatives inquiry into Indigenous languages (Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Affairs Committee, 2011), announced in July 2011, provided an opportunity to link the bilingual education debate to a broader discussion about Indigenous languages at a national level.

There are strong similarities between ethnographic and journalistic methods (Waller, 2010b). My brief immersion in Yolngu society while conducting fieldwork provided much of the observation used in the work of journalism. I quote some material from my research interviews, from interviews that were conducted specifically for the news article, and draw upon the scholarly literature and news coverage of bilingual education. The journalism I produced is therefore a hybrid of my academic research and journalism research, undertaken to meet a stated goal of the research.

Journalism as a research instrument

Writing and placing the article provided a research instrument I could utilise in my scholarly work in several ways. Firstly, the process of researching and writing the article contributed to operationalising the ethical framework developed through the university ethics process (Waller, 2010a). Reader feedback to *Inside Story* and discussion of the article in the Friends of Bilingual Learning Google group provide a measure for evaluating whether the ethical framework supported the desired outcome. The comments suggest these readers are not disinterested members of the public, but rather active members of the bilingual education lobby with an understanding of the Yolngu perspective. Comments include:

> It is a tremendously well written and correct version of things at Yirrkala. Lisa has got so many things right, and has sympathetically reported the events and people's feelings and reactions. A real change, easy to read and the truth.
>
> Lisa Waller has got it right, crafting a respectful and accurate account of the continual battles (war) Yolngu have fought for many years to have their land, ceremonies, culture and languages acknowledged, and their rights to continue utilising their land, ceremonies, culture and languages in contemporary Australia. Lisa has also shown us the long and significant history of Yolngu public contributions to wider Australian society … Importantly, Multhara's voice can be heard, sharing with Lisa on her country at Garrthalala, the depth of Yolngu feelings, about land, culture, family and two-way education.
>
> Lucky Lisa — reciprocity — well done.
>
> This article should be read by everyone and serves an excellent model for us language activists. It's a clear and grounded summary of the issues that never devolves into righteousness and slogans. Of course, I think we have every right to be mad as hell but emotive language gives readers a license to switch off. Worse, it offers 'proof' to the Abbott's/Brough's/Scrymgour's of this world that we are somehow motivated by ideology over evidence (just as they are).

The main aims of the ethical framework are to ensure reciprocity with indigenous participants and privilege their perspectives (National Health and Medical Research Council, 2003), which the comments suggest the article has succeeded in achieving.

Secondly, the process allowed me to index my experience against research participants' accounts of having difficulty getting stories about bilingual education through gatekeepers in southern newsrooms. Academics recounted having opinion pieces rejected and journalists reported having difficulty interesting editors in Indigenous stories that did not fit the routine frames of violence,

dysfunction and failure (McCallum, 2010). My experience of having the article rejected by several major metropolitan dailies aligns with participants' experiences, providing further evidence to support the argument that most editors find little interest in the subject and do not think it will appeal to their assumed audiences.

Thirdly, publication of the article has allowed me to 'test' whether news media coverage can amplify marginalised people's perspectives in the policy process, as the literature says (Koch-Baumgarten & Voltmer, 2010). The 'experiment' suggests it does. The article was a 'top read' in the influential Australian Policy Online, ensuring it was brought to the attention of opinion and policy makers. In the week of publication I received an email from a highly placed public servant who participated in the study. He wrote: 'I talked with [NT Opposition Leader] Terry Mills, and he'd like to see it if you have the link.' It is possible to pinpoint the impact of the article through reader comments, any reference to it in Hansard, press releases, follow-up media interest and participants' comments.

Can the 'experiment' be replicated?

This form of 'experimental' journalism can be replicated by academics and participants working together within a critical studies paradigm, guided by liberation epistemologies. As Dreher (2010) argues, fair representation and access to news media are more likely to be achieved by using different modes of information gathering and storytelling, as this 'experiment' does. This approach requires journalism academics to be committed to their research and its design supporting the self-determination struggle of their participants, as defined and controlled by their communities (Rigney, 1999, p. 109) The 'experiment' strengthens the wider project's finding that news media can amplify the perspectives of marginalised groups (McCallum, Waller & Meadows, 2012) and that journalism academics are well placed to work with them towards these ends. This approach demands reflexivity on the part of the researcher through acknowledgment they are an active participant in their field of research. It also rests on the assumption that research participants are in the best position to speak on their own behalf. This underpins my research and is materialised through the Yolngu voices and perspectives in the work of journalism. The approach offers a number of benefits, including reciprocity with research participants; providing a research instrument for testing theories and findings; making research topics accessible for mainstream audiences and developing journalism academics as public intellectuals.

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Appendices

The Media and Indigenous Policy database

Content analysis of newspaper reporting of Indigenous health

The research team, overseen by the research manager, Monica Andrew, collected all news reports on Indigenous in four two-year time periods in three newspapers and recorded them in the *Media and Indigenous Policy* database. Quantitative findings mapped the nature of Indigenous health news, including volume of news reports, topics of health news and spokespeople. The database provided a synopsis of each article. This information has been documented graphically and is publicly available on *the Media and Indigenous Policy* website. In addition, annotated bibliographies of articles have been compiled and have been made publicly available. This quantitative information has provided a rich source of data to trace the changing and recurring themes in mainstream journalists' reporting Indigenous health. It graphically demonstrates the intermittent attention given to Indigenous affairs news, the uneven volume of reporting between news outlets, and the narrow range of topics and voices heard in news reporting of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander health.

Data collection – Newspaper reporting of Indigenous health

The research manager, in conjunction with the Chief Investigator, developed an Access database to store coded information from newspaper articles. The database included fields for article title, reporter,[1] date, page number and length (where available)[2], newspaper and type of article (e.g. news, letter to the editor, editorial).

Additional fields included specific topics (e.g. Indigenous health standards, health funding, disease), spokespeople (e.g. Aboriginal leader, Aboriginal lay person, politician) and a synopsis of the article. These later fields were either free text (e.g. article synopsis) or allowed multiple selections (e.g. specific topics).

The research manager and a small team of research assistants retrieved and coded relevant articles from the *Sydney Morning Herald*, *Australian* and *Courier-Mail* for the periods 1988-89, 1995-96, 2002-03 and 2007-08. Where possible, articles were retrieved through the Factiva online database. However, Factiva only includes the *Australian* from 8 July 1996 and *Courier-Mail* from 20 January 1998.

Articles from the *Australian* and *Courier-Mail* for the earlier periods were gathered from newspaper clipping files held at the AIATSIS Library. As a result, there is a need for caution when comparing data from the *Sydney Morning Herald* and the other two papers and between the earlier and later periods for the *Australian* and *Courier-Mail*.

Search terms

The Factiva searches used the term: health and (Aborig* or Indigenous). This retrieved some irrelevant articles, such as articles on indigenous plant species, but these were easily identified and discarded. Articles were included in the database only if they dealt substantially with Aboriginal health issues or mentioned Aboriginal health in a broader health article.

[1] A maximum of three reporters could be listed for each article. This was more than adequate for the majority of articles, which listed either one or no reporter. However, a small number of articles listed more than three authors.
[2] Factiva records generally included this information but it was not readily available for articles retrieved from the AIATSIS Library.

Intercoder reliability

The research manager developed the protocols for collecting and coding articles and trained the three research assistants who worked on the project. The assistants referred any queries to the research manager. In addition, the research manager has randomly checked records to improve intercoder reliability.

Outputs from the Media and Indigenous Policy project

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