

## On the outer Barcoo: Sources of independence?

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This paper explores the idea that community newspapers are the voice of the people. The authors suggest that one measure of a community newspaper's value is its ability to ensure the voices of non-elites are not only represented but given equal access to the news as news sources. The authors believe one test of this idea is the extent to which such newspapers reflect the voices of ordinary people. The authors examine the range and types of sources used by a recently established community newspaper, *The Barcoo Independent*, in Blackall, Queensland, Australia. Our aim is to determine the extent of access provided to non-elites by this newspaper. In particular, the authors want to identify whether this newspaper exhibits sourcing patterns which are typical of most newspapers in relation to the use of elites and non-elites, or if differences are evident in the range and type of voices heard within it.

Our paper explores this issue through an analysis of sources and source usage in the first five editions of *The Barcoo Independent*. This newspaper was established collaboratively in the latter part of 2003 by one of the authors of this paper, John Cokley, lecturer at James Cook University, Townsville, in Queensland, and a community group of three Blackall residents. The authors believe there are similarities between community media such as *The Barcoo Independent* and emerging community media in countries other than Australia and the authors hope that this paper will bring into focus the very important issue of source usage and access to community media for those considering starting a newspaper or reinvigorating existing community media outlets.

The closure of local newspapers in many small rural towns in Australia has had a significant impact on those communities. In the 1980s and 1990s the ownership of many small local weekly, bi-weekly and monthly newspapers shifted from independent operators to major newspaper corporations. Some of these titles ceased production because of poor economic returns or competition with other titles owned by the same companies. One community affected by the closure of its local newspaper was Blackall, in the central-western region of Queensland. The town's only locally produced newspaper, the *Blackall Leader*, had been published weekly by Australian Provincial Newspapers, a large media corporation which owns a range of newspaper titles in Queensland and New South Wales. However in 2001, the *Blackall Leader* was closed. That left a situation in which the nearest newspapers were controlled and produced from the towns of Longreach, 200km to the north-west, and Charleville, another 300km to the south-east.

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<sup>1</sup> The listing of authors is intended to reflect their contributions to this study.

In the latter part of 2003 (Coats 2003:1), a community group located in Blackall, in conjunction with students and staff at James Cook University, launched "a new community newspaper" entitled *The Barcoo Independent*, as a means of providing local news to residents of Blackall and the surrounding region. In fact, the "new" paper was a revived version of an historic mast-head first published in 1889 as *The Barcoo Independent and Blackall, Tambo and Isisford Observer* (Cripps 2003) which had replaced the town's first newspaper, *The Western Champion*, (launched in 1879, see Coats 2003). However, after publishing for just short of a century, *The Barcoo Independent* ceased publication in 1983 when its office was destroyed by fire (Coats 2003).

Cokley and Capel (2004) described the objective of resurrecting a local newspaper in Blackall as "meaningful operational control of content (in pilot) by representative citizens of Blackall". Journalism students from James Cook University worked with the community, initially via the Association for Blackall Community Development (ABCD), and later with a derivative group known as the Blackall Newspaper Project committee, to identify, gather, write and produce stories for the newspaper. The committee and Cokley established the newspaper's editorial policy/direction which focuses on stories that reflect the interests and activities of residents of Blackall town and the surrounding rural shire area (a sheep and cattle grazing district).

This study examines the range and types of sources used in *The Barcoo Independent* between 2003 and May 2004 (the first five editions). The authors do so because the literature on community and rural newspapers suggests that they are more aware of their readers (Pretty 1993, 1995; Bowd 2003). As well, research indicates that community newspapers focus on local issues of importance to local people and that they should reflect the activities of local people (Kirkpatrick 2000a, 1995). Bowd (2003:118) also said that such newspapers are distinguishable by "their relationship with their audience, their role in advocating for and promoting their community and their approach to news". She also identified that country newspapers and journalists are much more accessible to the public because of their physical location in the centre of town and because the journalists are well known and recognisable within the community. Alysen, Sedorkin and Oakham (2003:9) suggest that a sense of "ownership" of the local newspaper by local people is created by the coverage of news stories which involve readers and provide recognition for their achievements.

## Our aim

The authors aimed to determine the extent of access provided by *The Barcoo Independent* to the news for non-elites. In particular, the authors wanted to identify whether this newspaper exhibited sourcing patterns considered typical of most newspapers in relation to the use of elites and non-elites, or if differences were evident in the range and type of voices heard within it. The authors consider *The Barcoo Independent* to be out of the ordinary in the Australian media market because of its ownership by the community, rather than by a media corporation or even an independent operator. There are notably few of the latter remaining.

Our paper explores the aforementioned issues through an analysis of sources and their treatment in the first five editions of the new *The Barcoo Independent*. Of particular interest is the involvement that one of the authors of this paper, John Cokley, has had in facilitating similar projects which have involved creation of independent news media outlets. Of note was his involvement in the design and delivery of a course at the Queensland University of Technology, in Brisbane, Australia, which culminated in the development of a website run by journalists at the *Timor Post* newspaper in Dili, East Timor, 3000 km to the north-west of that university (Cokley *et al*, 2000).

Following its initial development by Cokley and his students during 2000-2001, QUT academic Sharon Tickle and a group of students visited East Timor to train staff at the *Timor Post* and then hand over ownership and operation of the website ([www.easttimorpress.com](http://www.easttimorpress.com)) in 2002 (Tickle 2002). Dili staff have continued to operate the site since then. The site includes a Portuguese language component, because of East Timor's history as a Portuguese colony until 1975. The island's national language is now also Portuguese, even though the indigenous language, Tetum (Hull 1999:ix), is gaining a following again. Cokley is also the founder and inaugural convenor of the Australian Convergent Journalism Special Interest Group, a collaboration between James Cook University and the University of Tasmania, Hobart. This group was the first of its kind in Australia to be admitted as an affiliate to the NewsPlex project at the University of Southern Carolina in the United States, an international collaboration of US, European and Asian journalism researchers and colleges (<http://www.newsplex.org/>).

## Literature

Newspapers in Australia continue to face circulation and readership difficulties (Kirkpatrick 2000b:75). While major metropolitan titles survive, despite circulation problems (MacLean 2004:17), many newspapers have closed in the face of increasing production costs and declining circulations (Cokley and Capel, 2004; Chadwick 1996). Whereas small country Australian newspapers were typically family-owned, there are now fewer independently-owned titles, with major newspaper corporations buying up family and independently-owned mastheads. Evidence indicates that Queensland regional newspapers<sup>2</sup> have been struggling with declining circulations during the past decade or so (Kirkpatrick 2000b:82-83).

Kirkpatrick suggests metropolitan newspapers have also faced similar problems. He notes the factors which have contributed to declines in circulation include, but are not limited to, population declines in some areas, closure of major industries in regional areas, cover-price rises and reductions in editorial space. While regional newspapers throughout Australia boasted of circulation improvements of more than 17 per cent in the mid-1970s (Kirkpatrick 2000b:75), in the 1990s most experienced circulation declines. Regional newspapers have tried various methods to improve circulation, focussing on marketing devices such as give-aways, competitions and price reductions for regular subscribers.

However, country or small-town newspapers have not had the luxury of being able to focus on such marketing devices. Indeed, many independent newspaper operators have had to sell their titles to major corporations in the face of increasing competition for advertising dollars, rising production costs and declining circulations. In some instances, major corporations have also purchased and later closed small community titles (Cokley and Capel 2004).

The importance of country and community newspapers in Australia has been recognised by a number of researchers. However, what has been less thoroughly explored is the impact of the closure of a small country newspaper on its community. Cokley and Capel (2004) identified the considerable impact of the removal of local media from a rural community. In particular,

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<sup>2</sup> Regional newspapers refer to those newspapers published daily which are located in regional areas, usually based in a small city or large town, serving a wide surrounding geographical area

they found that local newspapers have a peculiar sensitivity to local issues and people and their role in the provision of a networking space is essential and noticeable when absent.

Kirkpatrick (1995:224) found that country newspapers were important because of the role they played in providing information and, more importantly, because of the "special relationship between it [a country newspaper] and its readers." He said that such newspapers held a special place in the communities that they served. Country newspapers, he indicated, were pre-occupied exclusively with local affairs (Kirkpatrick, 1995: 224). Significantly, Kirkpatrick found country newspaper staff closely identified with the values of their communities.

Pretty (1993) emphasised the important role country newspapers played in making residents feel that they had a sense of ownership of their newspapers. While her study examined the type of journalists who typically worked at country newspapers, she identified that they thought they had a close connection with readers and local citizens. An earlier investigation of this by Burke, Bednall, Fricher & Jones (1978) supported the idea that country journalists held significant levels of knowledge about their local area and the opinions of readers of their newspapers.

The different roles performed by daily, bi-weekly, weekly and monthly country, regional and metropolitan press (McDougall 1995, Kirkpatrick 2000a, Killiby 1994a, 1994b) have been clearly identified. The distinctions are evident in relation to how audiences perceive and use these different kinds of newspapers. Kirkpatrick explains (2000a: 223-224): "Australian audiences differentiate country or provincial/regional newspapers from metropolitan daily newspapers." In exploring the differences between the regional daily, also known as the country daily, and the regional weekly, Kirkpatrick (2000a: 219) highlighted an important, but often overlooked, distinction between these publications:

Walk into a country-town newsagency and you'll find the country daily and the country weeklies sitting side by side with the capital-city daily. Yet, though part of the one family, these publications are different creatures, as different, sometimes, as a domestic cat is from his cousins the tiger and the leopard. Provincial or "regional" daily newspapers, as they are now promoted, play a different role from metropolitan dailies, and even from country weeklies. They have different audiences with different needs and values. These factors help shape a different product.

Pretty (1993:78) found that while the country press was read by many people in a local community, it played a different role from the metropolitan press. She identified the important role country newspapers have played "in the political, social and economic developments of many countries including Australia". Kirkpatrick (2000a:224-225) elaborated on the relationship between the country press and its audience:

Participants in and observers of the country press have long claimed a special relationship between it and its readers, indeed a special place for it in the affairs of the communities the newspapers serve

O'Toole (1992:85) emphasised the importance of the local newspaper, pointing out that communities invested a significant amount of trust in their local newspapers, expecting them to focus on news about geographically close areas. Griffin (1999: 25) took up this theme, suggesting that local newspapers and by extension local journalism was "intimately and of necessity involved in many local, regional and urban affairs that draw on, amplify or connote the notions of place, space and landscape...". In other words country journalism, with its focus on the local and its representation of local people, amplifies notions of place through the sources used and the voices heard. Local newspapers in non-metropolitan areas, as O'Toole discovered (1992:87), are "a fairly important cog in the wheel" because of the interest which communities and their members have in local news. More importantly, such media are often the only source of local news and the only provider of local information within a community.

O'Toole believes that readers of local newspapers want news about geographically close areas (1992:85) and that communities have a great deal of trust in their local newspapers. Bowd (2003:117) points out the similarities between country journalism and non-western forms of journalism, such as developmental journalism. She believes that country newspapers focus on "local news and the promotion of local concerns, individuals and achievements".

## **Our study**

We chose a quantitative methodology because existing research into community newspapers in Australia has, to date, not explored the types of issues the authors are investigating using such an approach. Importantly, the authors also interviewed several of the key people involved in the project because the authors wanted to include their reflections on the development

of the newspaper and the authors thought this best done with the use of a qualitative methodology.

As part of our quantitative approach the authors examined the range and treatment of sources in the first five editions of *The Barcoo Independent* (October 2003-May 2004). The authors believe it is especially important that in community-operated media, the stories and voices contained in the newspaper's pages reflect not only the issues which concern the community, but also the voices of citizens. Most importantly, a newspaper which is local and reflective of its community's issues and concerns should involve the voices of members of the public, in particular those of non-elite sources.

The authors believe this is important because research shows (Tuchman 1978, Gans 1979, Ericson, Baranek and Chan 1989, McNair 1998) that typically newspapers rely on elite sources. The authors were unable to locate any similar research into source usage in Australian community newspapers and the authors hope our study will make a useful contribution to the field. Because the literature shows that newspapers construct social order (Zoch and Turk 1998, Ericson, Baranek and Chan 1989) through their use and treatment of sources, the authors believe this study will reveal important data in relation to the treatment of non-elites and elites, as well as male and female sources. The authors wanted to see whether Altheide's finding that the only events and issues which made news were from "a handful of institutional news sources" (1979: 81-82) stood up for community newspapers.

Early investigations into journalistic sourcing practices (Tuchman 1978 and Gans 1979) indicated that journalists relied heavily on and extensively quoted institutional sources or those in positions of power. These findings were later supported by additional research (Ericson, Baranek and Chan 1989, McNair 1998).

Of specific note in this research was that journalists assumed that sources had to have a certain status to be considered legitimate and useable (Tuchman 1979). Source usage has been quantified by various researchers. Solsoki discovered (1989) that the majority, 56.3 per cent, of the sources of news appearing in a newspaper over a year were government or elected officials, while community groups and business leaders accounted for 14.6 per cent of sources used.

Studies also indicate that women are typically under-represented in traditional news media. Zoch and Turk (1998:769) found that 68 per cent of

total sources used by three newspapers they examined were male, with only 20.6 per cent of sources female. In a study of front-page news stories, Brown et al (1987: 50) discovered that only 10 per cent of sources used were women. Shoemaker and Reese (1991:56) showed that journalists, regardless of their gender, had a preference for male, authority sources. An Australian study in 1995 (Macklin), which examined the treatment of women by a country newspaper, indicated that women were used less frequently as news sources than men. Macklin's study suggested that women were subordinated and marginalised in many spheres of community life in country areas, and their treatment by the local newspaper reinforced this. Recent studies into public journalism indicate that sourcing practices remain relatively unchanged by different approaches to journalism (Massey 1999: np).

## Methodology

We analysed the first five editions of the revived *Barcoo Independent*. Each edition of the newspaper contained eight A4 pages. The first edition of the newspaper, published in October 2003, sold 387 of the 400 copies printed (Capel & Cokley, 2004). Circulation of the other four editions was as follows: 219 copies (12 March 2004), 262 (26 March), 179 (23 April), and 160 (14 May). The editorial committee identified promotion and distribution as a key element in this falling sales figure and were to implement new arrangements for the 28 May and following editions. Because of the small number of editions available until the time the authors conducted their study, the authors examined all articles in each of those editions, rather than using a method such as the constructed-week method (Riffe, Lacy and Fico, 1998); there was not enough data to use this approach (note: in the final edition, two pages of agricultural show results were not included in the analysis).

Almost all stories were written by journalism students from James Cook University, with the exception of five stories, two of which were clearly labelled as being media releases, two others were written by Sally Cripps, the freelance journalist/resident of Blackall who worked on the paper as a volunteer, and one was authored by newspaper committee leader and resident Kirstie Davison. Those stories were included in the analysis because they quoted sources and were written in journalistic style. The authors defined sources as those individuals who were named and referred to by personal pronouns, such as "he" or "she".



Sources were categorised as being elite or non-elite according to the published "qualifications" for speaking which included job titles and descriptions of their role and reason for speaking. Of particular note was the fact that some sources spoke in different roles in different stories, in or across editions.

One explanation for this is that, given the small population of the town and region, some residents volunteer for and represent community groups as well as working in professional, business and governmental roles. The authors categorised each source as elite or non-elite according to the role in which they spoke in each story and the identifying information included in the attribution.

Non-elites included unaffiliated citizens who were not speaking on behalf of any organisation or business, small business owners, representatives of non-governmental bodies including festival organisations and sporting club officials, and rank and file public servants. Elite sources included officials from law enforcement and government agencies, professionals and experts, civic leaders and those who spoke on behalf of major societal groups. These definitions were similar to those used in a project by Ewart and Massey (2003) which were adapted from the literature on news-story sourcing (see Sigal, 1973; Gans, 1979; Brown, Bybee, Wearden, and Straughan, 1987; Hallin, Manoff and Weddle, 1993; Massey, 1998). Gender of sources was determined from their first names, where the name was gender specific, or honorifics attached to their names such as Ms, Mrs, Mr, etc. As well, personal pronouns such as "he" or "she" assisted in determine the source's gender.

Those sources where gender was non-identifiable (such as a business) were categorised as such. The authors analysed the percentages of elite and non-elite sources in all news stories and the average number of each source type used per story.

The authors determined source prominence from the number of paragraphs in each story in which a source's voice was heard through quotations or paraphrases or both. As well, the authors looked at where in a story (i.e. which paragraph block) a source was first named. Paragraph blocks were created by dividing stories into three blocks of five paragraphs each. Any paragraphs appearing after the 15th were counted as belonging to the fourth paragraph block.

The methodology was adapted from similar approaches by Stempel and Culbertson (1984), Massey (1998), Ewart and Massey (2003). One of the

authors of this paper coded all articles and a coding reliability check was performed by the second author who coded ten articles. The check revealed an agreement rate of 82 per cent on all variables used in our study.

It is important that the authors address factors that some researchers might see as weaknesses in our methodology. Firstly, John Cokley, one of the authors of this paper and one of the instigators of *The Barcoo Independent* project, acted as sub-editor of the newspaper but played no role in finding or allocating stories to students.

In fact, the community committee was responsible for providing story ideas to students and then for selecting the stories which were published. A final-year journalism student at James Cook University, Patricia Coats, acted as chief-of-staff responsible to Cokley. At times the committee requested that certain articles not be published because they were concerned that a non-Blackall resident was featured.

Another factor which some might view as problematic is the involvement of both authors of this study, to varying degrees, in the coding work. The authors note that there are some problems with this approach, but feel that the benefits outweigh the disadvantages<sup>3</sup>. The authors also interviewed two Blackall residents involved with the project. Questions were semi-structured providing the interviewees with the opportunity to elaborate on the issues discussed. In the interviews the authors specifically sought to obtain the interviewees' comments on the statistical data about the status and gender of sources used in *The Barcoo Independent*.

## The data

The data revealed that most published stories fell into the categories of entertainment/social (23.1 per cent), education (14.8 per cent), sports (13.9 per cent) or business (13.9 per cent). It was somewhat surprising that stories about farming issues accounted for only 5.6 per cent of the total stories published given the rural nature of the shire. The most dominant category of story, "entertainment/social", contained stories which were about

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<sup>3</sup> Our thanks to Brian Massey, University of Utah, for his assistance with some questions the authors posed about the methodology. This methodology was based on a similar project which Massey and Ewart (2003) undertook which analysed source usage in regional newspapers in Queensland.

community events, which was perhaps due to the demands of the readers. A survey by the Department of Primary Industries in 2002 revealed an overwhelming demand from respondents for local social/entertainment news (Capel and Roberts, 2002).

### Source usage

In the first five editions of the new *Barcoo Independent*, a total of 349 people were named, and 51 of them appeared more than once. Eight stories were not attributed to, and did not name, any sources. Female sources dominated the voices in the news stories, at just over 54 per cent, while males accounted for just under 38 per cent of sources used. Table 1 provides more detailed figures in relation to the gender and status of sources used in the stories.

**Table 1: Source Gender \* and Source Identifier**

One explanation for the significant number of women sources is that

		Source Identifier		Total
		Elites	Non-elites	
Source Gender	Male	19	112	131
	Female	49	144	193
	Can't Tell	2	23	25
<b>Total</b>		<b>70</b>	<b>279</b>	<b>349</b>

women in rural communities tend to be involved in running community events, volunteering and are a visible presence within the activities that make up community life. This explanation was offered by one of the Blackall residents, and newspaper committee members, interviewed for this article. Of the total source appearances, 7 per cent were not identifiable by gender<sup>4</sup>. Non-elites dominated the voices appearing in the news, at just under 80 per cent (279), while elites accounted for a little more than 20 per cent (70) of the sources appearances. Table 2 shows that among the non-elite sources (279)

<sup>4</sup> The remaining 2.2 per cent were unidentified, or no, sources and so they could not be categorised

female voices (144) were heard more often than males (112), while among elite sources, women's voices significantly outweighed those of men.

**Table 2: Source Identifier and Source Gender**

This is noteworthy given Zoch and Van Slyke Turk's (1998) findings

			Source Gender			Total
			Male	Female	Can't Tell	
Source Identifier	Elites	Count	19	49	2	70
		% within Source Identifier	27.1%	70.0%	2.9%	100.0%
		% within Source Gender	14.5%	25.4%	8.0%	20.1%
		% of Total	5.4%	14.0%	6%	20.1%
	Non-elites	Count	112	144	23	279
		% within Source Identifier	40.1%	51.6%	8.2%	100.0%
		% within Source Gender	85.5%	74.6%	92.0%	79.9%
		% of Total	32.1%	41.3%	6.6%	79.9%
Total		Count	131	193	25	349
		% within Source Identifier	37.5%	55.3%	7.2%	100.0%
		% within Source Gender	100.0%	100.0%	100.0%	100.0%
		% of Total	37.5%	55.3%	7.2%	100.0%

which indicate that journalists traditionally rely heavily on elite male sources. It is also important because there are fewer women in societal positions of power than men. Importantly it shows that Macklin's finding (1995) that women are subordinated in country life does not apply in all rural areas in Australia. Our data revealed that non-elite sources were given more prominence within the newspaper than elites: slightly more than 78 per cent of the sources appearing in the first paragraph block of stories were non-elites, and the remaining 21.7 per cent were elites.

In combination with the previous data, this is significant because it shows that non-elites were both more prominent and dominant within the news stories in *The Barcoo Independent*. It is also worth noting that there was little difference in the way elites and non-elites were treated in relation to the number of speaking role mentions they were given. Mainstream media

generally gives elites more speaking role mentions or, in other words, they get to speak more frequently through direct and partial quotes and paraphrases. Speaking role mentions were consistent across both male and female categories: males and females were given approximately the same number of speaking-role mentions. Also of note was that there was no significant difference in the treatment of elite and non-elites as sources, actors or both. Of the 279 non-elite voices heard, 56 (20.1 per cent) were used in source roles, 204 (73.1 per cent) were categorised as actors and 19 (6.8 per cent) were both sources and actors. Of the 70 elite voices heard, 19 (27.1 per cent) were treated as sources, 45 (64.3 per cent) were treated as actors and 6 (8.6 per cent) were used as both sources and actors.

## Discussion

The aim of *The Barcoo Independent*, as explained by those involved with its establishment and operation, was to build community cohesion and pride through the newspaper and to bridge what was identified as a widening gap between individuals who felt they knew little about what was happening in their community. Newspaper committee member Sally Cripps said:

We wanted to get the local people to know what others were doing in the community again. I felt that it was reaching the point of community breakdown. People don't feel like anyone cares about them and what they are doing

The statistical data was not intended to reveal whether *The Barcoo Independent* has achieved this reconnection of individuals. At the time of writing (early June 2004), there had only been six editions of the newspaper and that would not make it possible to determine accurately the extent of its impact on community connectedness. However, the statistical analysis indicates that the range of voices heard in *The Barcoo Independent* was significantly different from sourcing patterns typically found in newspapers.

In the five issues of the newspaper examined, the authors found that there was a focus on non-elite voices, and that women were well represented among both elite and non-elite sources. Newspaper project coordinator Kirstie Davison (and now its editor, since the newspaper was handed over to Blackall control in time for the June 11, 2004, edition) explained that she thought the prominence of women sources in the newspaper was directly related to the involvement of women in the newspaper and also in the wider community. She elaborated: "Women are involved with all the community things in town so they're the people we've talked to." Another newspaper

project committee member, Sally Cripps, said that the newspaper was aimed at a wide range of readers, but that like any community newspaper it focussed on those who were active in the community. She said: "I think that people who are interested in Blackall are nurturing personalities. They are people who are caring and sharing. And they are the ones who have got things to say about Blackall."

The statistical analysis revealed the majority of stories in the newspaper were about social events, education, sport or business. Those involved in the newspaper's production said community members had indicated in a survey in 2002 that they wanted more social news, rather than negative stories such as those about the drought which was covered extensively by mainstream media. As well, those involved in the production of the newspaper found there was a demand for civic stories especially about the shire council and how council funds were being spent. Significantly, the community appeared to want the newspaper to cover the type of news not covered by mainstream media.

Members of the newspaper project committee indicated that a key factor in the establishment of the newspaper was the involvement of James Cook University staff and students. They said this had added a degree of professionalism to the production which they thought might not be present in other community newspapers. Sally Cripps thought there was a significant benefit associated with the networks which the community was able to access because of the involvement of the university. Another associated benefit was that students focussed on stories about local personalities which might not have otherwise been included in the newspaper. Sally Cripps explained: "They have highlighted things the authors think are normal old things." The committee was impressed with the fact that students were continuing to offer to write stories after their assessment and semester had finished (at the end of June 2004), which indicated an ongoing interest in the community among students - students who had, prior to the establishment of the newspaper, not been connected with Blackall in any way (or even known of its existence).

With the handover of the newspaper's production from Townsville to the Blackall committee in June, there had been an increase in interest in the newspaper, with more locals writing stories for publication. However, there had also been some negativity about the newspaper: some people had commented that the newspaper did not have a future and that it was "women's business". This latter comment is significant, given the prominence of wom-

en's voices in the newspaper and the extensive involvement of women in the community.

## Conclusion

Our study has revealed that *The Barcoo Independent*, a non-commercial, community-operated newspaper, has managed to move beyond traditional approaches to the use of news sources. Significantly, it has not only avoided replicating the typical sourcing patterns of mainstream newspapers, but also those of similar, community-based newspapers in Australia. Indeed, it has challenged the findings of one study in Australia (Macklin 1995) that revealed women were marginalised in community life in country areas and that this was partially due to their treatment by the local newspaper. Importantly, our study has revealed that news in this community-driven newspaper has been from more than just a handful of institutional news sources. The value of *The Barcoo Independent* is in the degree to which it provided a public space where the voices of ordinary citizens could be heard. In particular, those people not typically given access to the news media appear to have been given significant access to the news pages of this newspaper.

Our study provides hope for those wanting to start community newspapers as a means of giving voice to under-represented groups and individuals. In particular, it shows that journalism students can, when producing a newspaper which is community-oriented, avoid the typical pitfalls associated with traditional journalistic sourcing routines and practices. The issue of source usage is an important one, particularly for community newspapers which are expected to be reflective not only of the concerns of community members, but also of the voices of the public.

Future research in this area might examine whether this trend holds up on a medium to long-term basis and the impact on the range of voices heard if the newspaper is commercialised.

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