## Producing Representations: an ethnographic approach to the study of Australian news texts

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**Abstract**

The depiction of both the 'Australian' identity and the 'other' contained in television news and current affairs, requires a consideration of the factors which impact the production of news texts, particularly regarding commercial media. As a nation-state, Australia has an increasingly diversified socio-demographic composition and a unique broadcast television media environment. While textual analysis may elucidate the identity representations that feature in news, an ethnographic study of the news-making process will demonstrate the process of hegemonic negotiation which impacts the dynamics of production and results in distinctive group formations of the 'Australian' and the 'other'. An overview of Australian research concerned with the portrayal of national identity and the 'other' in both print and television news demonstrates a lack of ethnographic application. In drawing upon wider research, this article argues that ethnographic research methods need to be employed in order to assess the representation of Australian identity and evaluate overall hegemonic group relationships.

### Introduction

As a nation-state with an extended history of migration, the composition of Australian society is in constant flux, resulting in a multiethnic demographic. Whether this dynamic identity is communicated and represented in broadcast television requires a consideration of the factors impacting the production of texts, particularly regarding commercial media. In drawing upon a framework which views the mass media as implicated in the generation and reflection of identity and group relationships, this article will demonstrate the need for analysis on the commercial television production processes. Of particular concern are the production processes and the identity depictions within news texts, which aim to objectively convey a portrayal of 'reality'. Research that examines the sites of news production will be able to highlight factors that impact on the representation of identity and the way hegemonic group relationships are managed as a part of both production processes and the overall text.

Australian television studies have thus far, with a few exceptions, been primarily concerned with the use of interviews, focus groups, content, or discourse analysis to generate insights on the ranges of racial, ethnic or cultural representation. These methodologies however, do not allow direct study of the television newsroom environment and the social processes of production, necessitating the incorporation of a study of newsroom content in addition to news texts that are produced. By focusing on the ranges of ethnic, racial, or cultural depictions in news texts, the processes of negotiation in which the 'other' is manifested in relation to the dominant national identity is marginalised. This article will contend that ethnographic methods need to be applied when researching Australian news media, which will result in unique insights on the expression of identity and the production and reproduction of hegemonic group relationships. While media research within Australia is yet to incorporate an extended ethnographic study of the commercial television newsroom production environment, when considering multiethnic representation, wider research demonstrates the applicability of ethnography in addressing these issues. By articulating the methodological need for the incorporation of ethnography in Australian research, as part of a holistic view of the production processes and the overall news text, a greater understanding may be reached on the negotiative relationship between the mass media and society within the national environment.

### Group Identity and the News

Broadcast television news texts provide visual representations of Australian identity and an expression of reality in terms of varied group relationships for the audience. When linked to national identity, relationships follow 'in-group' and 'out-group' patterns as news functions to 'set the agenda for *what* one is, or should be explaining – that is, it sets a problematic' in story coverage (Hogg & Abrams, 1988: 82-83). Furthermore, the mass media functions as the locus where consolidation of group identities are negotiated and reaffirmed for the audience, particularly for broadcast television, which visualises this 'reality'. In particular, the dominant group characteristics only acquire meaning 'in relation to perceived differences from other groups and the value connotation of these differences' resulting in positive self-identification (Tajfel, 1981: 256-258). As a multi-ethnic

migrant nation, there is particular importance placed on the relationship between the historically contextualised dominant group and the 'others'. The fluctuating evolution of national identity is then impacted upon by intra-national and extra-national differentiation to those groups in a manner which deviates from the positive norm portrayal of the socio-historically dominant group. Depth of analysis is needed when examining the depictions of Australian identity in news products, and ethnographic approaches to research will elucidate the relationship between production processes and the formative representation of the 'other'.

Ethnographic approaches to understanding the depiction of intra-national and extra-national out-groups in relation to the dominant national identity would further facilitate an understanding of the process of 'enhabiting' a categorical identity. Billig highlights issues with a fixation upon 'individual categorisation' in social identity theory and neglect towards the ways in which 'national identity becomes enhabited' (1995: 66-67). When analysing news and current affairs texts, it is necessary then to consider aspects of how identity becomes 'enhabited' through audience viewership, and the production structures that impact the processes of 'enhabiting' that identity in these texts. Negative differentiation through moral panics drawing upon out-groups may further consolidate group identity in the mediation of normative behaviour (Cohen, 1987). Commercial television news texts can evidence the in-group and out-group representations in relation to moral panics more visibly as 'institutional imperatives and commercial strategies … can be the driving force behind the generation of many moral panics' (Miekle, 2009: 111).

In addition to demonstrating a connection between production processes and the depictions of intra-national and extra-national out-groups, ethnographic research methods can also elucidate how national tensions are reproduced within news texts. News and current affairs texts are particularly important concerning representations of identity considering the professional norm towards objectivity in reporting. However, as Smith (1973) notes, news 'creates some of the doubts and fosters the certainties of that society' when concentrating on the "issues which confront society", highlighting the importance of the 'social and economic situations' within which media organisations are 'obliged to operate' rather than focus on the 'medium' itself (1973: 75-76). Regarding the expression of group relationships, the news is only able to demonstrate the concerning matters that cultivate differences between in-groups and out-groups as a result of operating within an existing socio-economic system. The application of ethnographic research is able to address the divergences between dominant group representation and out-group representation within news text as an outcome of the production process and the overall hegemonic environment.

**Hegemonic Relations**

A lack of focus into research on the Australian production environment has resulted in a simplified understanding of the nationally located hegemonic relationship that bares impact on the depiction of identity in news texts. Although news is a global profession with certain core practices, differences in mass media development and the context of operation across national bounds necessitates an Australian study on production. Smith posits that 'without its central *national* professional discipline, news becomes a different genre altogether' and it functions best 'based upon the idea of a homogenous mass audience' (1973: 108-109). As a structure in regulating group identity, the national news media remains integral in maintaining in-group dominance when articulating in-group norms and negotiating out-group interests. 'The world of production", in particular the commercial mass media, allows the dominant group to draw upon their historical position to exercise "hegemony" in the production and reproduction of norms and social life' (Gramsci, 1971: 12). This relationship remains in constant negotiation, whereby 'some account be taken of the interests and tendencies of the groups over which hegemony is to be exercised', albeit not considering 'essential' interests' (1971: 161). In both commercial and public television media the news becomes the locus of the everyday influence of the dominant norms and perpetuation over out-group interests. However, the representation of group identity in public and commercial television remains varied, s supporting the need for an in-depth ethnographic study of production processes.

Though there are provisions for both commercial and public television broadcasting in Australia, public television is subject to governmental funding and less susceptible to market forces which results in a greater presence of non-dominant out-groups. While dominant group norms may still perpetuate throughout content on public television, the democratic consideration of minority 'interests and tendencies' is indeed enabled. Commercial television news media remains subject to a wider range of economic and social forces and is less mediated to ensure the participation of non-dominant 'out-groups'. And yet within Australia these are the most watched television news programmes potentially impacting the reproduction of identity for the majority dominant group (Australian Communications and Media Authority, 2011). Professional necessities of the news genre, such as the 'efficiency and power of sources', impact the overall creation of television news texts to inhibit 'multiperspectivism' (Gans, 2004: 334), resulting in a hegemonic reproduction of identity and norms. Such conditions result in the commercial mass media perpetuating dominant group interests to both form and reproduce depictions of 'out-group' identity in content, evidencing norms that need to be moulded to co-exist with the dominant group. Within a pluralist democratic society then, Laclau and Mouffe stress that "any form of consensus is a result of hegemonic articulation, and that it always has an 'outside' that impedes full realisation" (1985: xviii). Additionally, within the process of hegemonic articulation 'neither is it possible for the identity of the articulating force to remain separate and unchanged" and it is the "articulated and the articulator' which 'both are subjected to a constant process of subversion and redefinition' (1985: 138-139). This relationship between the dominant group and the 'out-group' remains in constant flux impacting on the development of identities across time. The consensus of identity and norms featured on Australian commercial television news are subject to the same challenging representations of identity and norms as public television. Research is required to establish how these are negotiated as part of the production processes.

**Imagining National Identity on Television**

The plurality of representations in commercial television news includes depictions as hegemonically produced and reproduced, but these have great impact on the television format of immediacy and visual differentiation when conveying identity. Media

research has tended to concentrate on textual analysis of news products to elucidate the bounds of identity; however, the effects on the production structures that allow hegemonic negotiation have largely been neglected. Application of ethnographic methods to the study of commercial news production would expand analysis to account for the processes in which the consensus is reached and whether it is challenged. The importance of this negotiation process and the impacts upon production in commercial television is further compounded when consideration is given to national identity rather than group and hegemonic identity. Indeed, the understanding of the way in which the intranational and extranational out-group is manifested needs to be conducted as a reflection of the impacts upon production, and as a way of accounting for the nationally located hegemonic negotiation processes. The nation as a community is 'an imagined political community', and it is conceived in ways that denote the nation as being "imagined as limited…as sovereign…as a community" (Anderson, 2006: 6-7). Further restrictions upon national identity reinforce the requirement for a 'pre-defined territorial demarcation' but also stipulate 'the presence of a dominant *ethnie*' (Smith, 1991: 114). Intrinsic in this formation of the nation are conditions which provide the boundaries regarding intranational and extranational out-groups and the self-identification of a dominant in-group based on a perceived commonality. As affiliation within national groups is based on alleged commonalities, the process of differentiation must also occur in regards to identity. Nationalism is then 'not the awakening of nations to self-consciousness: it invents nations where they do not exist', however identification 'does need some pre-existing differentiating marks … even if … these are purely negative' (Gellner, 1964: 169). This process of nationalism and identification within the national community follows similar patterns to the formation of in-groups and out-groups in the requirement for at least a base level of positive self-identification from the negative 'other'. As such, the aspects of differentiation can be historically contextualised and must further be considered in terms of the surrounding socio-cultural environment from which the distinctions are made.

While individuals may 'feel' that they are part of the national community, the associations used to delineate the group are not necessarily experienced solely by the dominant group within the sovereign territorial bounds. As the 'elements of which that feeling is resultant' can extend 'far beyond national borders', the associations used to generate communal affiliation are not incomparable (Emerson, 1960: 100). However, this does not discount that the 'imagined' nature of national identity is historically embedded, with a consequential social impact upon dominant group interactions and the events in the future of that national community. The 'social psychological aspects' of achieving a consensus on identity interacts with the entire reality including the 'social, political, and economic events' and 'relations with other groups' (Tajfel, 1981: 229-230). The social reality and the historical relationship are divergent across each nation-state, reflecting the distinctive socio-historical interactions and experiences of the dominant group with others. In addition to being unique to each community, these notions surrounding the formation of the dominant community and nationality are not static, and do bear meaning on the continual evolution of identity and interactions with non-dominant groups. Within the nation the development of identity is not an abstraction, and in reality features through the interaction of events and concerns with overall group relations, particularly in media. It is through texts that the constitution of national identity is established through individual recognition of a 'set of concerns' in a communal manner rather than through an abstract 'imagining … of others who are reading the same text at the same time' (Bowman, 1994: 141). The production processes in organisations and institutions which reinforce the historically embedded 'feeling' of identity need, then, to be studied in simultaneity with texts in order to understand the constant negotiation of this consensus.

Based on the composition of Australian society as a migrant multi-ethnic nation-state, the situation of out-groups in news texts encompasses a divergent range of local and international cultural, ethnic, and racial configurations simultaneously as part of the negotiation of an imagined group identity. Conventional notions surrounding the understanding of both the nation and the imagining of nationality are challenged in regards to the post-modern period where the classical boundaries of the nation-state are, to some extent, reduced. Traditional bounds of 'time, space and embodiment' have been lessened, resulting in the post-modern assertive and conscious self-management of identity and nationality (James, 1996: 35). The mass media, in particular television, has a significant role in reproducing nationality and hegemonic relations, particularly in relation to the diminished bounds. Television

> has underscored a *new nationalism* … evident particularly in the late-capitalist countries, from the United
> States to New Zealand, from Japan to France' (1996: 35-36).

Television media in particular is able to create 'immediacy' between the distant or localised 'others' which allows divergences to be accentuated, in addition to the 'immediacy' of nationally unifying events that audiences were previously unable to experience. This strengthens the need for an ethnographic understanding of the hegemonic processes that effect the production of news, as television news texts evidence both strong and immediate representations of the experiences of the dominant group within the nation in relation to the non-dominant 'others'.

**The Application of Ethnographic Methods**

The constraints upon using content or discourse analysis to demonstrate the hegemonic negotiation process as part of the production of news texts necessitates the implementation of ethnographic methods, especially when considering the representation of identity. Ethnography varies significantly to other research methods, combining elements of interviews and participant-observation. It entails 'studying people within their own cultural environment through intensive investigative fieldwork' to highlight the interactions maintained with an emphasis on the 'subjects' frames of reference (Singer, 2009: 191). Employing ethnographic research methods to understand the media production processes in relation to the text remains relatively unapplied in the Australian context. The relevance of ethnographic study can be further considered in light of ethnomethodological theory which provides that:

> … social order is maintained by the use of techniques that allow those involved in interactions the sense that
> they share a common reality… techniques are almost always subconscious in nature and are taken for
> granted by members of a society … Ethnographic research is designed to uncover how people convince each
> other that there really is such a thing as 'society' or 'culture' in the sense of coherent norms guiding their

interaction … (Angrosino, 2007: 10-11).

In relation to the study of identity and the hegemonic production and reproduction of nationality in news products, ethnographic methods have great value in disclosing the subconscious interactions that occur in the production process which impact the overall text. As research in Australia has not used ethnography to study the depiction of nationality and the production of television news, the hegemonic processes of identity representation and negotiation have not been examined coherently. The successful utilisation of ethnographic methods in a study of the print newsroom by Fulton (2011), demonstrated the subconscious techniques impacting upon the creativity of journalistic output both in terms of the structural field of practice along with the individual journalist's background and traits. The applicability of ethnographic methods across media is strengthened by Lindgren's (2011) use of auto-ethnography which has also led to an understanding of the process of creating a radio documentary. Such research is a useful progression in the application of ethnographic methods to the study of the Australian news media industry, and can provide a framework of reference in addition to non-Australian ethnographic news studies. Yet the broadcast television format and the negotiation of Australian national group identity within the news production process linked to the text have not been accounted for.

The requirements of broadcast television, particularly its visual and immediate nature, are of considerable importance when influencing communal notions of nationality. Ethnographic methods will articulate the social meanings and the fluid hegemonic negotiation process that individuals within commercial television organisations are effected by when representing identity, and demarcating between intranational and extranational 'out-groups'. Where discourse and content analysis of identity in news texts have focused on the articulated representations of race, nationality, ethnicity, and culture in news products, ethnographic methodologies allow for a significant contribution to the unarticulated hegemonic negotiations in the structural production processes that effect the communication of identity. A significant number of non-Australian media studies, particularly those from the United Kingdom and the United States, have been able to apply sociologically-based ethnographic practice. These have elucidated the unarticulated processes, which lead to a reliance on commercial professional objectives and a reaffirmation of the dominant group norms in both journalistic practice and news texts. To demonstrate the value of ethnographic application to Australian studies, a select review of research will be undertaken highlighting significant outcomes. A brief evaluation of Australian media research concerned both with identity representation and production studies that have utilised ethnographic elements will present the gaps in research, which will subsequently be followed by an elaboration of the unique insights on American and European newsrooms garnered through media ethnographies. By examining the substantial findings from a vast body of American and European research, this article will argue on the exigent need for incorporating ethnographic methods into Australian news studies.

**Australian News Media Research**

As previously noted, general research that has focused on either news production processes or the representation and negotiation of identity in Australian news texts have either been conducted from a solely academic base or in conjunction with governmental affiliation. These studies have centred around the (mis)representation of the multiethnic communities in Australian media products, receiving particular attention throughout time periods of national policies on multiculturalism. Initial research in the 1990s into the divergence of cultural representation in media texts was produced for the then Office of Multicultural Affairs (OMA) (Bell, 1992; Coupe et al., 1992; Jakubowicz et al., 1994). Focus on a macro understanding of stereotyping was provided across these studies, accounting for the degree of dichotomised inclusionary and exclusionary depictions of cultural groups across a wide variety of media products, including advertising. While Bell (1992) focused on content and discourse analysis to find stereotyped representation of cultural groups across Australian media products, Coupe et al. (1992) and Jakubowicz et al. (1994) used a varied methodology looking at aspects of production and reception. Jakubowicz et al. (1994) incorporated interviews with media producers and Coupe et al. (1992) held a number of 'cultural' focus groups, each composed of diverse ethnic representation, with content and discourse analysis of the entirety of media products. Media texts were found to remain unaltered by the varied waves of immigration, and cultural focus groups were consistently concerned about the stereotypical presentations. By focusing on the exclusionary and inclusionary portrayals in text, an understanding of the complex hegemonic process as a negotiation of identity and norms between the dominant consensus and the 'out-groups' has not been elucidated as part of news production and audience reception. Additionally, the non-static nature of the hegemonic negotiation process combined with the fluctuation of Australian multiethnic migration has meant that both the socio-demographic composition and impact upon national group representation have altered. Most recently in research that has been focused upon production and reception, Bond University's (2011) report into the *Sources of News* provided a canvas of the contemporary media industry in a generalised news study. Though research moved away from a reliance on textual analysis through a hundred interviews with newsworkers across all media platforms along with a national survey and focus on audience news habits, it was constrained in delineating unarticulated impacts upon production. While these studies have included media producers in analysis of the national media environment, research has remained constrained by its macroscopic focus across all media forms.

Specific studies focusing on print and online media in Australian have demonstrated differences in multi-ethnic representation in news texts along the identity formations of race, ethnicity, and culture in relation to the nation. A move away from generalised research to studies which centre around specific media forms provide greater understanding of formatting requirements which may impact the overall portrayal of identity. Print media studies have focused on discourse and content analysis, and at times have factored in alternative participatory projects for positive self-representation. Teo (2000) recognised the presence of a racially based 'othering' through content analysis of Vietnamese 'gangs' in print news, which was echoed in the monolithic depiction of Arab and Muslim Australians (Foster et al., 2011). Windle (2008) examined the source selection in patterns of reporting on African youth in print media, resulting in morally linked characterisations of a socially 'problematic' group. These studies are complemented by those that have sought to find alternative media for out-group communication and representation. Nunn (2010) contrasted the negative accounts of Sudanese Australians in the print media with alternative

community based film projects in Melbourne for positive self-actualised identity projections. The use of alternative media as a potential to meet Sudanese audience needs that are not fulfilled through the community-based media or mass media was further reinforced in South East Queensland (Van Vuuren & Hebbani, 2010). Investigation of intercultural identity communication across traditional and news media drew upon focus groups which comprised Australians of Turkish identity in an evaluation of their categorical linkage with an Islamic identity (Hopkins, 2011). Dreher's (2003) analysis into the Arab and Muslim community based interventions concerning news media found valuable alternative models which facilitated media skills training, forums, events, and cultural production to improve representation in news texts. The argument for participatory film media and community based radio (Salazar, 2010; Couldry & Dreher, 2007) has also been put forward as an alternative environment for positive inclusion of 'out-group' community participation in Sydney media. While the analysis of Australian identity across online and print media has suggested that alternative community based media may provide avenues for positive assertion, these studies have neglected the complexity of the hegemonic relationship. Alternative participatory media does allow for the communication of positive 'out-group' representations; however, it does not provide an understanding of the overall negotiation processes between 'out-group' and 'in-group' characteristics as a part of mass media news production.

Australian news media research has also given consideration to the broadcast television format in terms of both production processes and the depiction of multiethnic groups in relation to Australian identity. In content and discourse analysis of identity in current affairs programmes, the feature of stereotyped expression prevailed and when challenged to fit into a 'neat, simple explanation' it was resolved with the use of audience phone-in polls (McIver, 2009: 53). Data analysis across four television channels in Melbourne evaluated structure and ideology in Australian society through differences in 'serious' and 'trivial' or 'other news', news which did not fit into discussions of political culture (Langer, 1980). While it was shown that the dominant ideology was reproduced in the 'trivial' news in a similar manner to the 'serious' news through the intrinsic reliance upon the existing sources of 'power and privilege' (1980: 42), exactly how this was negotiated in the generation of the news text was not provided. Government affiliated research on multicultural representations across the media has been generated by Phillips (2009, 2011) and Phillips and Tapsall (2007) with the predecessor Department of Immigration and Multicultural Affairs (DIMA) and the Department of Immigration and Citizenship (DIAC). Discourse and content analysis of television news and current affairs texts considered multiethnic identity within Australia. A continuation of the typified representation of ethnic 'out-groups' in broadcast television was established, and initial recommendations made for improving broadcast journalism practice when representing multicultural individuals (Phillips & Tapsall, 2007). While Phillips (2009) acknowledges the professional impact upon broadcast journalism, the fixation upon ethnic portrayals in news texts does not consider the hegemonic negotiation process inherent in identity representation. Empirical research, through application of ethnographic methods to the production of news texts, would demonstrate an evaluation for the ways in which the expressions of identity are impacted. Suggestions provided for improved broadcast journalistic reporting when representing ethnic communities need to be linked to a production based study and establishing the contextualisation of behaviours across multiple levels of agency including individual, organisation, professional, and the wider social context. Within the Australian broadcast television environment research on the representation of identity has not facilitated the application of ethnographic methods to elucidating the production process, and studies which have enabled some use have not dealt with the importance of identity negotiation as a factor of production.

Australian research into television news production has engaged in aspects of ethnographic application to demonstrate an understanding of the production techniques and impacts upon the news text. However, these need to be integrated further to connect the socio-historic impacts upon production processes with overall portrayal and content in the news texts. Initial production studies that sought to incorporate ethnographic methods into an understanding of the newsroom did not engage in an extended study of the environments, often observing processes for short time period. In the study of newsroom production processes and information gathering, research methods moved away from textual analysis to incorporating interviewing and analysis of news copy (Baker, 1980). While research found that there was reliance upon the social knowns and an exclusion of the unknowns when representing events, Baker drew upon his prior industry knowledge to inform the study. Ethnographic engagement with the specific sites of production in relation to the news texts that were being emitted would have been more useful in connecting the differences in individual media organisational settings, with specific aspects of professional practice, and the wider socio-economic context of negotiation. Furthermore, the use of interviewing and employing prior professional knowledge to the study does not achieve the understanding of unarticulated behaviours, which may not be apparent to the socialised newsworker. In order to identify and comprehend unarticulated behaviours that impact the production of news and representation of events, ethnographic research needs to extend over significant periods of time to establish these patterns, which cannot be elucidated in shorter time periods. Indeed, the relay of a day spent in broadcast newsroom sheds light into the events and routines of the commercial Channel 9 media environment as part of a widespread overview of television journalism linking the journalistic environment, the news text, and the audience (Henningham, 1988). Yet the minimal period of ethnographic observation impedes the extensive understanding of the news production environment as a social process impacted upon by the wider socio-economic context. In a similar manner, Putnis (1992) demonstrated the events of a day within the commercial Channel 10 newsroom. A longer period of observation of five days in commercial Channel 7 Sydney and Brisbane demonstrated an understanding of the selection and production of international news (Putnis 1996). While limited in the time of observation, Putnis was able to demonstrate, due to economic and professional imperatives, a strong reliance on 'overseas' feeds for non-Australian news, which were then 'repackaged' for the Australian audience. Research on the production processes within the newsroom and the relationship to the overall television news text would benefit from longer periods of ethnographic observation to disclose how practices and content are impacted upon by the wider system and to establish patterns of behaviour. In addition to the incorporation of ethnographic research for news production studies, such methods would be best suited to elucidating factors of production which impact upon the representation of dominant national and out-group identity in the (re) production and (re)articulation of hegemonic relationships.

**Ethnographic Studies of the Newsroom**

An examination of wider news research demonstrates a more comprehensive understanding of the relationship between

production and news text across both print and broadcast television media. Studies have facilitated the application of ethnographic methods as part of the research process, which have led to unique insights on the processes which impact production in both American and European research. Classical studies have largely focused on researching media organisations for knowledge on the production processes and the structural impacts upon news-making when concentrating on the generalised processes. American and European research by Glasgow University Media Group (1976), Schlesinger (1978), Tuchman (1978), and Gans (1979) provide critical knowledge regarding newsroom production linked to content in news texts. These studies established that the production of news across newsrooms was subject to commercial pressures, leading to a routinisation and professionally-embedded practices which supported the dominant status quo. Further concern with the production environment behind news tests was demonstrated with a longitudinal multi-phase ethnographic study at the British Broadcasting Corporation in 1963 and 1973, focusing on the impact of managerial structuring and organisational relationships in the context of trade-unionism and re-organisation within the BBC (Burns, 1977). In conjunction with the representation of out-groups, ethnographic methods have been used in the production stages to highlight a reliance on cultural elites for information (Elliott, 1972). The planning stages of production for a television series on prejudice against different social groups reveal that there was an overall lack of engagement with individuals from the out-groups. Hegemonic relationships persisted when considering the established prejudice against the out-groups, as the organisational and industry culture allowed 'standard perspectives … to be reinforced … in the process of gathering material for a new programme' (1972: 147). A study on the political programming, with a focus on news and current affairs, across BBC and ITV, utilised a combination of structured, open-ended interviews followed by participant observation (Tracey, 1977). The superstructures of politics and economics within which the media was located impeded its ability to represent political issues with production being fixed into a "cycle of dependency" and the dominant groups relied upon for hegemonic reproduction. The international comparison through ethnographic research and content analysis across Nigeria, Sweden, and Ireland found that objective notions of news coverage varied across the study (Golding & Elliott, 1979). Ethnographic methods revealed that variations in the idea of objective news coverage in the international study of broadcast news took place within regional or national bounds, and that the format of television broadcasting itself inhibited the presentation of competing views in news texts (1979: 218). It is through the application of ethnographic methods that these studies have provided a delineation of the contextual factors impacting both the production processes and the news texts, which content and discourse analysis of news texts alone would not have allowed.

The ethnographic study of media organisations and news production allows research to elaborate on the socio-organisationally embedded processes that can impact professional practice and may be taken for granted by newsworkers. Representations in news texts and ethnographic study in the US has given some consideration to organisational structuring and the impact upon news production, facilitating an evaluation of out-groups along racial and ethnic identities. Fieldwork observation across broadcast television networks, in combination with interviews and discourse analysis of television news texts throughout 1968 and 1969, demonstrated network and organisational factors impacting upon production to skew the presentation of reality (Epstein, 1973). The impact of organisational structures upon news workers' adherence to institutional policy was evidenced through ethnographic participant observation (Breed, 1955). Breed combined this with a 'reverse content analysis' (1958: 111) that comprised eleven community studies to investigate issues that were kept out of the news in the view that they may 'jeopardise the socio-cultural structure and man's faith in it' (ibid).

The use of ethnographic methods established that there was a tendency to rely on socially prominent opinion leaders, which overall reinforced the established hegemonic socio-cultural relationships that were in place. This is further substantiated with Fishman's ethnographic analysis of print newspaper production, which found that the professional values inherent in news production resulted in a reliance upon bureaucratic and governmental sources (1980). Routinisation and mutual interest regarding the use of governmental sources reinforced the sociological status quo. Bias in print news coverage was further demonstrated as a result of the reporter-organisational relationship through an ethnographic examination of the structural production processes in two US daily newspapers (Sigelman, 1973). In revealing the mechanisms of control through socialisation in the analysis of one print and one television media organisation in the US, Warner (1971) drew upon ethnographic participant observation to establish that news texts were impacted to a degree by newsworker conformity within the overall media organisational policy. The importance of ethnographic methods in illuminating the unarticulated behaviours in production which impact on the news text can demonstrate how social reality can differ to the represented event on television. Altheide employed ethnographic methods in an observation of television network news to reveal that 'organisational, practical and other mundane features of newswork promote a way of looking at events which fundamentally distorts them' (1976: 24). The skewed representations of events on television news were demonstrated through the ethnographic analysis of the commercial and political constraints upon the production processes and news texts, resulting in a routinisation of behaviours. Consequently, the importance of ethnographic research methods is evident when considering that content and discourse analysis of news texts is not able to shift focus sufficiently from the produced reality of an event to its alternative interpretations, which are negotiated in the production process.

The specific application of ethnographic research methods to the television media environment has proven beneficial when understanding the divergent nature of print and broadcast production and the overall relationship with the produced text. Interviews combined with ethnographic analysis across all levels of television network institutions in the US commercial entertainment context found that there were economic constraints upon textual production (Gitlin, 1994). A homogenisation of cultural conventions was the result of an economic environment of competition that impacted upon the structural functioning of the network and the television texts. A clear relationship between organisational pressures and news products in New York is clarified by Gans to find that 'multi-perspectivism' in terms of the coverage of events is restrained by professional norms including those of 'efficiency and the power of sources' (2004: 334). Within the US environment ethnographic news research is moving toward identity representation in news production in relation to the production processes. Heider (2000) has incorporated an analysis of the reporting on different racial groups using ethnography and interviews with both newsworkers and community leaders. Ethnographic research established the presence of dominant assumptions when reporting on different

racial groups in texts, and an investigation of news texts alone would not have highlighted these assumptions as a consequence of production. Research using ethnographic methods by Ericson et al. (1987, 1989, 1991) has been conducted in the Canadian environment, examining both print and television news organisations. As Ericson et al has noted, journalistic focus upon social deviance and control remains bound by social constructions and 'the television newsroom is a more enclosed social organisation than the newspaper, and its content more preordained' (1987: 353). This demonstrates the applicability of ethnographic methods to the study of television broadcast news production, and suggests that the nature of production within this medium needs participant observation analysis in order to clearly delineate the outcome of negotiative production processes in relation to the news text. The extensive use of a holistic methodology which links the production environment with the news text in wider research both necessitates a unique Australian study and provides a framework for the incorporation of ethnographic methods into traditional research approaches.

**Resurging considerations for newsroom ethnographies**

While this article has argued for the need to incorporate ethnographic methods into the study of news production and the depiction of identity within Australia, it is not alone in raising this issue. Specifically within the Australian environment, there is the acknowledgement that research on news needs to be extended to include underused methods of study. The initiation of 'new research, perhaps of an ethnographic nature like that conducted by Putnis (1995)' will generate insights into the commercial television news production processes, and how these impact on the overall news text that is broadcast (Bond University, 2001: 143). In a wider context, a sustained consideration for the ways in which production processes are impacted upon to structure content has been advocated. Research cannot 'analyse individual texts in isolation from the study of the wider system of ideologies which informed them and the production processes which structured their representation' (Philo, 2007: 184). Although this does not deviate from prior contentions for the use of ethnographic research, it serves to prompt the continued relevance of this method to news research. Indeed, advancements in the field of communications have resulted in the further diminishment of time and space boundaries and changes in journalistic practice, which necessitate a reconsideration of the study of production practices. The use of ethnographic methods can elucidate the '"technological embedding" … as well as the impact of new technologies on involvement of sources and news output' (Cottle, 2007, 12). Ethnographic study can demonstrate the altered technological environment, particularly in regard to the representation of identity when considering multiethnic societies. It is apparent that there is a continual relevance of the ethnographic study of newsroom environments when considering the relationship between the larger socio-cultural environment at the national level with professional production processes and the news texts that are generated.

**Conclusion**

By providing a framework that places broadcast television as a part of the process in creating and communicating in-group and out-group national identities, this article has connected identity formation to the wider studies focusing on the importance of news production processes. Additionally, a review of Australian, American, and European research has demonstrated both the gaps in news media research and the benefits in the application of ethnographic methods to the study of commercial television broadcast news. The apparent need to connect an Australian study of the commercial television newsroom environment in relation to news texts necessitates the incorporation of an extensive ethnographic period of study. When linked to the wider economic and socio-cultural system in the nation-state, a proper understanding of news production processes can serve to inform how relationships between communities are understood and relayed to the broader audience. American and European studies on the newsroom production environments have demonstrated unique organisational settings resulting in diverse and varied findings which often link to the socio-historical context. That news operates as a 'central *national* professional discipline … based upon the idea of a homogenous mass audience', places significance on the distinctions between national contexts of operation (Smith 1973: 108-109). The focus of newswork as garnering and conveying meaning at a national rather than global level heightens the significance of Australian based ethnographic studies. In particular, the dynamic and fluctuating composition of Australian society to encompass multiethnic identities requires a consideration of how these identities are represented in commercial television media along with the ways in which in-group and out-group relationships manifest. While prior Australian studies have moved away from textual analysis when considering multiethnic representations, the use of interviews and focus groups cannot shed a new light on the social and professional processes that impact on the meaning in the overall news text. There is an exigent need to use ethnographic methods in the study of Australian news production processes, which will be useful for evaluating both the articulated and unarticulated (re)productions of hegemonic relationships in commercial news media texts. Such an incorporation of ethnographic research will only serve to facilitate a holistic understanding of the Australian context, bridging the gaps in news media research.

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