

People like us *versus* Statistical representations of readers

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This paper examines an under-researched issue, that of regional journalists' ideas of readership. It looks at the journalists' constructions of readership in light of statistical data which profile newspaper readers in a regional area. The paper investigates the journalists' constructions of readership and then compares these to pictures of readership which emerged from a survey undertaken through an independent surveying body. It does this in an attempt to provide hard data rather than supposition about one facet of the reader-journalist relationship. The similarities and contradictions between the sets of data are explored. In doing so this paper concludes that while there is some relationship between the two pictures of readership which emerge from the data, some groups remain overlooked by both approaches. Therefore, journalists need to ensure their conception of readership includes more than the narrow ideas they currently have or those presented by the survey information.

Journalists are thought typically to know very little about their audiences (Green 1999; Ewart 1997; Schudson 1996). In Australia the picture of readers painted by newspaper journalists appears to be a limited one (Ewart 2000; 1997; Green 1999). Significantly, there is no available Australian research that examines the correlation between newspaper journalists' ideas about their readers and statistical profiles of the latter group. Although this is partially explained (Green 1999) by the difficulty journalists have in accessing and taking up market research, anecdotal evidence (Ewart & Tickle 2002) suggests regional journalists have limited if any access to such information. It is little wonder then that journalists are forced to devise their own images and ideas about the readership. At issue is the question of the degree to which the pictures of readers created by journalists reflect

the average newspaper reader. Schudson (1996) suggests the challenge is to find out how journalists construct images of readers. However, few Australian researchers have examined the way journalists in an Australian regional newsroom develop their ideas about readers. In particular, there is no existing Australian research that explores the extent to which journalists' constructions of readership reflect market research or other available statistical data. This may be explained by the high cost of this kind of research. Such studies are necessary to ensure that assumptions about the relationship between journalists' ideas about readers and demographic profiles of the latter group are based on hard data, not supposition as currently appears to be the case. As well, media organisations are reluctant to provide outsiders with access to their market research. Because the existing literature suggests that journalists know little about their audiences (Green 1999; Ewart 1997), it would be easy to assume that some journalists paint an unrepresentative picture of readers. Furthermore, assumptions about journalists' knowledge of readers may be based on geography – for example regional journalists could be thought to have a better idea of their readership than their metropolitan counterparts. However, the point is that such statements are based on supposition, not hard data. While research into audiences is starting to emerge in Australia (Balnaves, O'Regan & Sternberg 2002; Green 2002), the aforementioned issues have yet to be explored.

In an attempt to address the paucity of research in this area, this paper explores the correlations between journalists' constructions of readership and statistical profiles of the same, generated from data gathered as part of a survey of newspaper readers in Central Queensland. The first data are drawn from interviews with 29 Central Queensland journalists working at three newspapers, the *Morning Bulletin* (Rockhampton), the *Gladstone Observer* (Gladstone) and the *Bundaberg News-Mail* (Bundaberg). These newspapers are owned by Australian Provincial Newspapers. The interviews were undertaken during 1996, 1998 and 1999 respectively. As well, the data are taken from informal discussions held during training workshops in 1999, 2000 and 2001, for journalists from these newspapers. The statistical data about newspaper reading were provided by a project undertaken in 2001 which produced profiles of newspaper readers in the Central Queensland area. The first approach provides insights into the way

journalists at the three newspapers picture their readers. The second approach supplies data about newspaper readers across a number of categories including: gender, age, employment, socio-economic status, frequency of newspaper reading, educational levels, political allegiances and religious affiliations. The two sets of data provide comparisons between the journalists' ideas and statistical profiles of readership. This paper attempts to answer the question: To what extent do Central Queensland journalists' ideas of newspaper readers reflect statistical profiles of the same readers? We ask these questions because there is no existing research in this area. We suggest possible reasons for the surprising number of similarities between the two sets of data. Despite the parallels between the statistical profiles and journalists' pictures of readers, evidence emerges from this paper that a number of groups are not accounted for in either version of readership. Future research into readership, especially data which are to be fed back to newsrooms, needs to take account of this.

Methodologies

The interviews were guided by semi-structured questions, which enabled exploration of journalists' ideas about their readers (Fontana & Frey 1994). As well, this approach provided journalists with the opportunity to identify issues and elaborate on points raised in the interviews. Time spent with journalists varied from 30 minutes to an hour. Most interviews were held in the journalists' workplaces, although in a number of cases journalists specifically requested that they be interviewed away from the office and arrangements were made to do so. Because I worked as a journalist for more than 10 years, I possess an understanding of journalistic culture, the jargon they use and their culture. Fontana and Frey (1994) call this insider status and suggest it provides valuable insights into the different ways interviewees have of saying things and the cultural manifestations of the interviewee. However, this also meant that when talking to the journalists I had to ensure I did not become a participant in the research by commenting on their responses to questions. Interviews with journalists were undertaken at the *Morning Bulletin* in 1996, the *Bundaberg News-Mail* in 1998, and the *Gladstone Observer* in 1999. Follow up discussions

with some of these journalists were held at training workshops in 1999, 2000 and 2001. Readership was among the issues addressed by these workshops. While many of those interviewed participated in the workshops, other journalists from these three newspapers also attended. This added to the general impressions of readership gained from journalists at each newspaper.

Data used to develop the statistical profiles of Central Queensland newspaper readers were gathered through the Central Queensland Social Survey (November 2000). This annual omnibus-style survey takes in a region from Mackay in the north, to Bundaberg in the south, and west to the Queensland border. Data were categorised according to the centre from which the survey responses emanated. The sample of 1237 people was taken from a telephone database. One resident aged over 18 years from each household was interviewed in a phone survey of up to 30 minutes. The survey, by the Central Queensland University Population Research Laboratory (CQUPRL), included (Mummery & Schofield 2001: 5): “1. A standardized introduction; 2. questions which reflected the specific research interests of University researchers participating in the study; and 3. demographic questions.” The data presented in this paper were gathered via a series of questions about newspaper reading habits. These questions were cross-tabulated with demographic data provided by the survey. The CQUPRL used a computer-assisted telephone interviewing system to collect the data between 10 November 2000 and 26 November 2000 (Mummery & Schofield 2000: 6). The data were cleaned and analysed using the computer program SPSS.

The Data: Interviews and Statistical Profiles

Interviews: *The Morning Bulletin*

Journalists at the *Morning Bulletin* indicated they had limited access to readership profiles or statistical data about the readership. Their ideas about their readers were drawn from their colleagues, friends and the newspaper editor. All journalists described their readers as being representative of the wider Rockhampton/Central Queensland community. They thought most people in this group were Anglo-Celtic

and male. They described the majority of readers as having a limited education, for example high-school level or below. Most readers were believed to be middle-aged, or older, with youth not considered as an audience of the newspaper. The journalists thought most of the readers belonged to the Anglican or Catholic faith. They felt the majority of employment in the area was industry-related and, because of the prominence of blue-collar type jobs, believed most readers earned a low annual income. They described readers as being 'regulars' or as reading the newspaper every day. The journalists said there was probably limited readership by the community of state and national newspapers such as *The Courier-Mail* and *The Australian*. They indicated the majority of readers voted Labor because of the significant blue-collar workforce living in the region. Their picture of readers was summed up by one journalist who said:

Readers are middle-aged or at least over 25 years-of-age. [They are] Rockhampton people reading a provincial newspaper that appeals to local people. [They are] very mono-cultural, white Anglo-Saxon Australians. [There is a] mix of blue and white collar workers who buy it for specific sections, for example the race guide or hatches, matches and dispatches. [Readers] with a basic high-school education. A mix of clerical and trades qualified people, [who are] middle class.

A common description of the newspaper's readers was that they were hard-working, down-to-earth, rural types who exhibited care and concern for others. Only one journalist interviewed indicated it was difficult to categorise readers or define a 'typical reader'. He believed that was why regional newspapers had experienced difficulties with circulation in the past decade or so. He explained:

Newspapers globally, they are having trouble keeping in contact with people in the community that they are serving. Don't really have an image in mind of who the readers are. Basically there is a broad and diverse community which we are trying to serve.

The majority of journalists interviewed had a clear idea of who the readers were, although they had limited access to any data from which to formulate these ideas.

Statistical Profiles: *The Morning Bulletin*

The data¹ gathered indicated that 50.6 percent of those people surveyed who read the *Morning Bulletin* were males, the other 49.4 percent were females. About half (51.1 percent) of male readers, read this newspaper every day, while slightly fewer females read it that frequently (50.6 percent). Of the remaining males who read the newspaper, 25 percent read it 3-5 days a week, and 23.9 percent read it 1-2 days per week. Of the female readers who identified that they read the newspaper, 23.3 percent read it 3-5 days a week, and 26.2 percent on 1-2 days a week. Of those people who nominated the Morning Bulletin as the paper they had read in the past seven days 23.5 percent were in the 18-34 age group, 48.9 percent in the 35-54 year age group, and 27.6 percent were aged 55 and over. Of those surveyed who read this newspaper 24.4 percent nominated Roman Catholic as their religion, 15.5 percent were Church of England, 10.3 percent identified as Anglican, 10.3 percent as Uniting Church and 10.3 percent had no religion. Almost half (48.4 percent) of this newspaper's readers completed secondary school, while 9.9 percent possessed a primary school education, 16.7 percent had a TAFE level education and 23.6 percent a university education. More than 60 percent (60.6 percent) of those who read the *Morning Bulletin* had a paid job in the past week, while 38.8 percent did not have paid employment during that time. Annual income levels included: 31.6 percent of readers who earned less than \$20,799 a year, 19.6 percent earned between \$20,800 and \$36,399 annually, 11.5 percent earned between \$36,400 and \$51,999; 9.4 percent earned between \$52,000 and \$129,999, with 0.6 percent earning more than 130,000 annually. Just under 7 percent (6.9 percent) of these readers identified that they had no income, while 10.9 percent did not know how much they earned. Of the *Morning Bulletin* readers, 34.5 percent said they intended to vote Labor in the 2001 State (Queensland) election, while 10.9 percent intended voting Liberal; 7.8 percent National; 1.1 percent Democrat; 2.3 percent One Nation; and 6 percent Independent. Of this group of readers 27.6 percent did not know how they would vote and 6 percent did not respond to the question.

Interviews: *The Bundaberg News-Mail*

Journalists interviewed at the *Bundaberg News-Mail* described readers as middle-income earners, and as being average members of the public. Most journalists thought the readers were Anglo-Celtic, with incomes in the higher range. One journalist indicated there was a significant population of Aborigines and Torres Strait Islanders in the area. However, this did not influence the way she wrote as she felt she had to cater for everyone rather than a specific group. Another journalist described the typical reader as being someone who was interested in their community and region. She did not want to generalise, but said: “They [the readers] are people across the board, the general public. I presume [readers are] young people right through to old people.” Another journalist explained the area had a high unemployment rate, but also a significant number of families with blue-collar-type jobs. Although she thought there were some young readers, she believed most were in the middle to elderly age group. Her comments were reflective of the picture other journalists had of the readers:

Bundaberg has a high unemployment rate and a large number of elderly people. So, the reader is most likely to be unemployed or elderly. We have many people who earn middle of the range incomes, families, and some young readers. Primarily they are the middle to elderly age groups. Most are from Anglo-Celtic backgrounds.

The journalists thought those who read the newspaper probably did so on a daily basis. They described the majority of readers as having a high-school education level. Most journalists thought the religious background of their readers was Anglican or Catholic. They saw their readers as conservative both politically and morally. They believed the audience was a mix of agricultural workers and retired people. One journalist explained: “[Readers] are ordinary people working people, working persons. The paper is attractive to these kinds of people, as opposed to being a thinking person’s paper.” Another journalist said housewives and farmers made up the bulk of readers. One of his colleagues explained how he pictured the readers:

The readership pretty closely mirrors Bundaberg [demographically]. We have a higher number of older readers, rather than younger ones. [Readers are] Those on higher incomes rather than lower. Those with a higher level

of education are in greater proportion than in the general population but not in a overly dramatic way. Bundaberg has an Aboriginal population and migrant population, but they are just part of the community.

Most of the journalists interviewed at this newspaper said they had never been shown any market research. The then editor said market research done by newspapers including the *Bundaberg News-Mail* focussed on advertising rather than editorial issues. He was it had been eight or nine years since the newspaper did an editorial-based market research project.

Statistical Profiles: *The Bundaberg News-Mail*

Of those surveyed who identified the *Bundaberg News-Mail* as the newspaper they had read in the past week, 55 percent were male and 45 percent were female. Of the males 49.1 percent read it every day, 20 percent read it 3-5 days a week, and 30.9 percent read it 1-2 days a week. Of the females who read this newspaper 51.1 percent read it every day; 26.7 percent read it 3-5 days a week; and 22.2 percent read it 1-2 days per week. Of the readers, 23.8 percent were aged 18-34 years, 44.6 percent were in the 35-54 year age group, and 31.6 percent were aged 55 or above. Religious affiliations amongst readers included 14.9 percent who were Roman Catholic, 17.8 percent who were Anglican; 6.9 percent who identified as Church of England; 5.9 percent were Presbyterian; 9.9 percent were Uniting Church, and 21.8 percent indicated they did not have a religion. The majority (53.4 percent) of readers had a secondary school level education, while 11.9 percent were educated to primary school level, 21.8 percent to TAFE level and 11.9 percent had a university education. Of these readers 56.4 percent had a paid job in the past week, while 43.6 percent did not have paid employment. Almost two-thirds of the readers earned below \$36,400. This included 38.4 percent who earned \$20,799 or less and 26.3 percent whose annual income was between \$20,800 and 36,399. Only 4 percent of the *Bundaberg News-Mail* readers surveyed earned between \$36,400 and 51,999, with 3 percent earning between \$52,000 and \$129,999. Only 1 percent earned more than \$130,000 a year, while 8.1 percent identified their income as nil. Of this group 10.1 percent did not know how much they earned and 9.1 percent did not answer the question. When surveyed about their voting intentions in the 2001

State (Queensland) election, 32 percent of the readers of this newspaper said they would vote Labor. Nine percent indicated they intended to vote Liberal; 16 percent National; 1 percent Democrat; 7 percent One Nation; and 3 percent Independent. A significant percentage, 27 percent, of readers of this newspaper who were surveyed did not know for whom they would vote, while 3 percent did not respond to the question.

Interviews: The *Gladstone Observer*

Journalists at the *Gladstone Observer* described readers as being younger than those located in Rockhampton, with the average reader being aged 30-35 years. They believed their readers either worked in one of Gladstone's industries or were housewives. Because of the city's industrial base, readers were thought to be relatively affluent, with at least a mid-range income level. As well, the journalists thought there was a high level of readership amongst unemployed people, but they believed there was a high employment rate in the city. The journalists believed the typical reader did not have a university education and was from a European (Anglo-Celtic) background culturally. They did not nominate a particular religion as being common to readers. One journalist explained how he pictured the reader:

The average reader is someone who would not be overly wealthy or overly poor, just average in income. I don't think they are in a particular job, but [in relation to] age I would say a lot of elderly people would read it and a range of other ages. Probably [readers are] mostly people who have not done university, those without a university education. They are mostly from European backgrounds.

Another journalist gave his version of readership:

For instance in Gladstone, I think it is a working town and it has a certain socio-economic blueprint which is very healthy. It has good employment, it is an industrial town but at the same time it has one of the highest sporting participation rates in Australia.

Most journalists said they got their ideas about readers from market research or others in the newsroom. Although most had not had access to market research, they were told about the findings of this kind of research by others in the organisation.

Statistical profiles: The *Gladstone Observer*

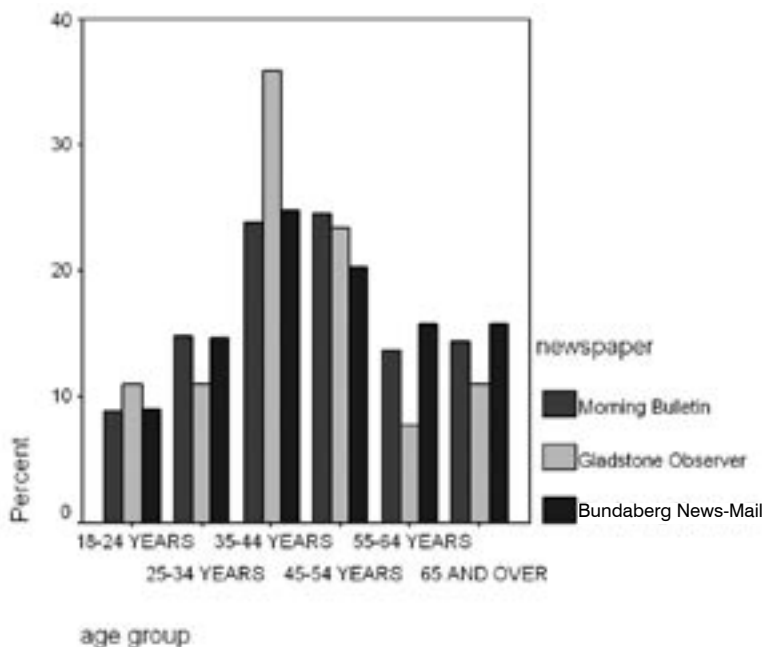
The survey data gathered indicated 43.1 percent of those who nominated the *Gladstone Observer* as the newspaper they had read in the past seven days were male and 56.9 percent were female. Of the male readers, 48.4 percent read this newspaper every day, 22.6 percent read it 3-5 days a week, and the remaining 29 percent read it 1-2 days a week. Amongst female readers of the *Gladstone Observer*, 31.7 percent read it daily, 36.6 percent read it on 3 to 5 days a week and 29 percent read it 1-2 days a week. The majority of readers (58.9 percent) were in the 35-54 year age group, with 22 percent in the 18-34 year age group, and 19.2 percent were aged 55 or over. Readers religious affiliations included 16.7 percent who identified as Roman Catholic, 12.5 percent Presbyterian; 9.7 percent belonged to the Church of England; 8.3 percent were Anglican; 16.7 percent had no religion; and those belonging to the Uniting Church accounted for 8.3 percent of this group. Most (57.8 percent) readers of the *Gladstone Observer* had a secondary school education, with 2.8 percent possessing a primary school level education, 15.5 percent a TAFE qualification and 23.9 percent a university education. More than two thirds (69 percent) of those surveyed who read this newspaper had a paid job in the week before the survey, while 31 percent did not have paid employment. A quarter of this group earned less than \$20,799, 13.9 percent earned from \$20,800 to \$36,399, 9.7 percent earned between \$36,400 and \$51,999, 13.9 percent earned from \$52,000 to \$129,999, 1.4 percent earned \$130,000 or more, 11.1 percent had no income; 13.9 percent did not know how much they earned; and 11.1 percent did not respond to the question. When questioned about voting intentions at the State (Queensland) election 32.4 percent said they intended to vote Labor, 4.2 percent indicated they would vote Liberal, and 7 percent identified they would vote for the National Party. Of this group 1.4 percent intended to vote for the Democrats, 1.4 percent for One Nation, and 8.5 percent for Independent candidates. A significant percentage of those surveyed who read this newspaper (29.6 percent) indicated they did not know who they would vote for in the State election, and 14.1 percent did not respond to the question.

Discussion

The pictures of readers which emerge from both the interview data and, to a lesser extent, the survey data, are that of the majority of readers. In relation to the statistical profiles of readers it is important to recognise that such depictions are only “thumb-nail sketches” (Goot 2001: 120). The pictures provided by journalists are also only outlines. Goot (2001: 120-121) explains that statistical profiles are problematic because: “It is not only market researchers or journalists who imagine that a complex set of survey data can be made instantly meaningful by being summarised in this way; academics sometimes fall for the idea as well.” His point is an important one, especially given that survey data such as those discussed here can be and are used by newspaper management to exclude, as well as include, different groups in the concept of readership. Newspapers have done this in the past (Clark – quoted in Goot 2001: 125-126) and will continue to do so, especially in cases where they lack the ability to translate data adequately or pass such information onto journalists (Green 1999). By doing so they risk alienating those who are not included in such pictures of readership. The authors of this paper recognise the danger in creating archetypal pictures of readers from statistical data such as those discussed in this paper.

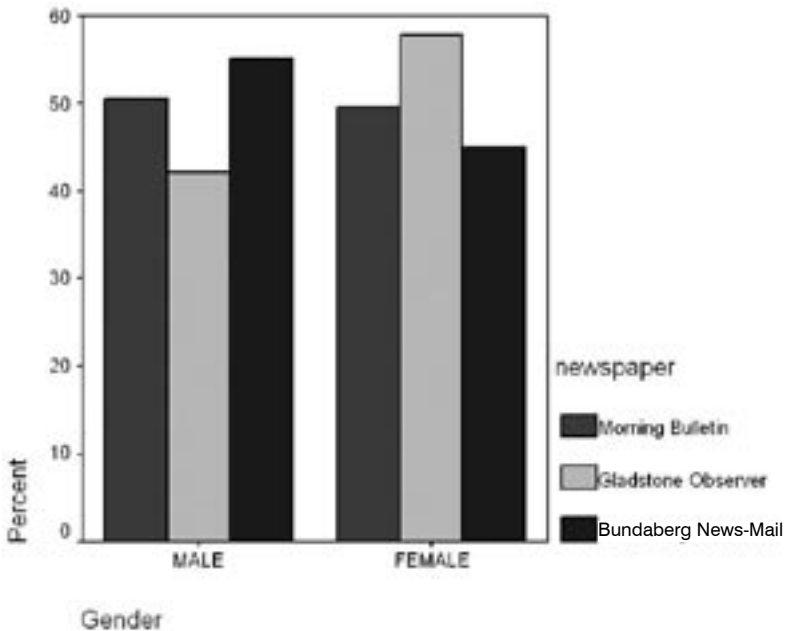
The data gathered through the interviews with journalists highlight that those working in newsrooms create standard pictures of readers. This paper identifies significant similarities between the journalists’ pictures of readers and the profiles drawn from the survey data. Similarities emerged across a number of areas. At the *Morning Bulletin* journalists had a similar picture of readers as that provided by the survey data in relation to readers’ education levels, religion and ages. The journalists believed most readers would have an education level of high school or below, and the data reflected this to an extent, showing that this applied to more than half of the readers – although a significant percentage of readers (40 percent) had a TAFE or university education. The journalists thought the readers would generally belong to the Anglican or Catholic faiths, and the statistics showed that around 60 percent of readers identified as belonging to one of these religions.

Most of those interviewed believed readers would be middle aged or older, and this belief was reflected by the statistical data which showed that 76.5 percent of readers were aged over 35 years. Some differences emerged between the journalists' ideas of readers and the statistical data, most notably in the area of voting intentions in the State election. While the journalists thought the readers voted Labor, the data showed this was the case in only one-third of those surveyed. Those interviewed described readers as being 'overwhelmingly male', but the statistics showed an almost even split between males and females in relation to the gender of readers.

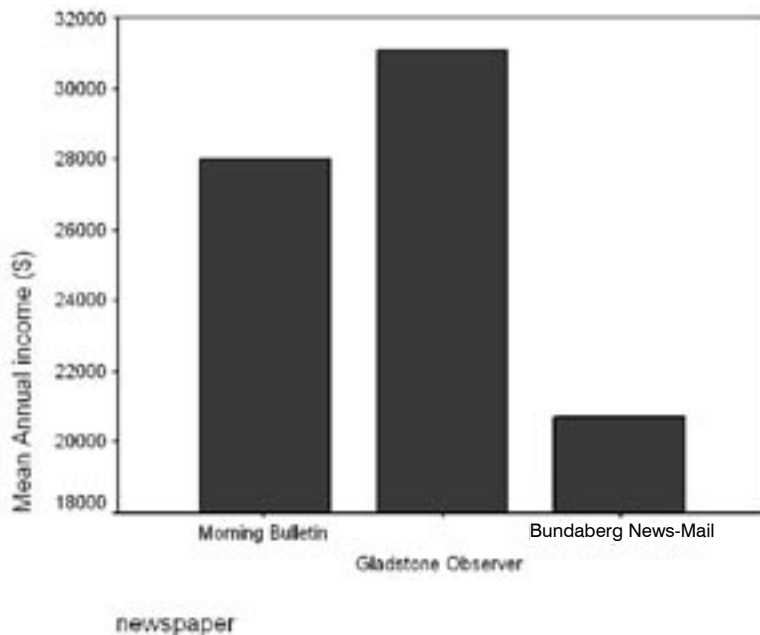


At the *Bundaberg News-Mail* the journalists interviewed indicated most readers were middle aged or older and the statistical data revealed that more than 75 percent of readers fell into this category. The journalists thought there was a high level of unemployment amongst their readers, which was also reflected by the statistical data. As well, they believed that many readers would belong to either the Anglican or Catholic faith. This was also reflected by the statistical profiles of

readers, although there was also a significant proportion of readers who did not have a religion. Journalists at the *Bundaberg News-Mail* thought most readers would read the newspaper every day, however statistics indicated that this was the case with only half of the readers. As well, those interviewed described the readers as politically conservative, but the data indicated 25 percent voted for either the Nationals or Liberals, while almost a third (32 percent) intended to vote Labor. While journalists believed the readers earned mid-range to higher incomes, the figures indicated that two-thirds earned less than \$36,400.

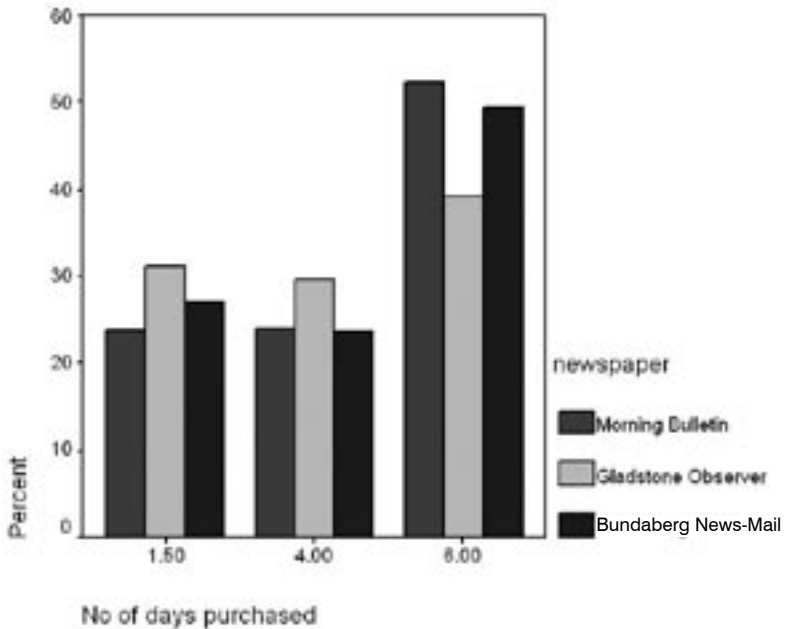


Journalists at the *Gladstone Observer* assumed that there was a high employment rate amongst their readers, and this was, to an extent, reflected by the statistical data which showed two-thirds of readers had a paid job in the week prior to the survey. Journalists believed most readers did not possess a university education and the statistical data reflected this idea. While those interviewed thought most people who read the newspaper would do so every day, the statistics showed this was not correct. The journalists described most readers as being between 30 and 35 years of age, but the profile developed from statistical data

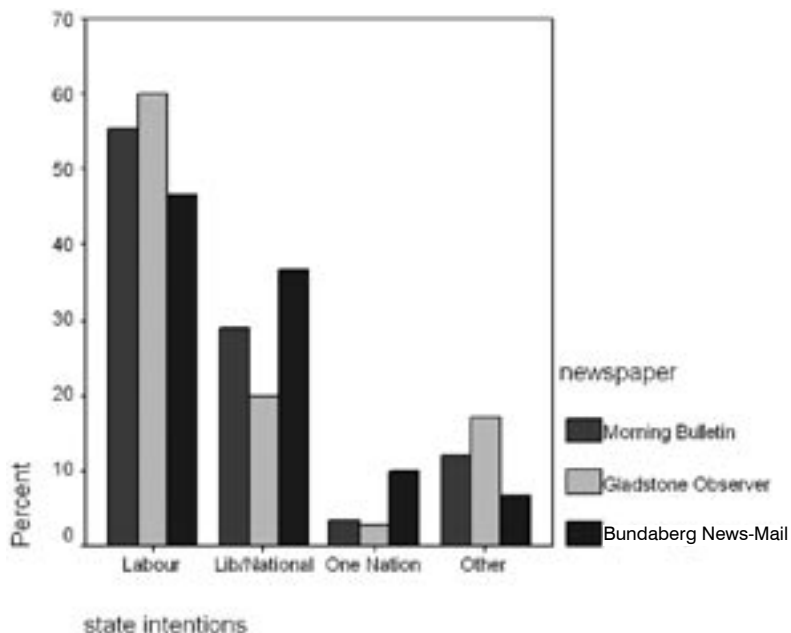


showed that only 22 percent were younger than 35 years of age. They identified income levels as being middle of the range, but the statistical data showed one-quarter of readers earned less than \$20,799 and one-quarter earned more than \$36,400.

The similarities between the two sets of data for each newspaper are somewhat surprising given research which indicates journalists know little about their readers (Green 1999; Ewart 1997; Schudson 1996). This gives rise to the question of why similarities exist between the journalistic and statistically derived pictures. In exploring this question, it is possible to draw on some existing literature in speculating why commonalities exist between the two sets of data. Ericson, Baranek and Chan (1989) suggest that journalists develop their ideas about readers through a kind of osmosis. In examining the construction of the public by regional journalists, Ewart (2000: 4) describes how this occurs: “Repeated daily intensive exposure to the opinions of editors, senior newsroom staff and colleagues, as well as family and friends, formed a picture of readers, which they then reproduced in interviews.” As well as being influenced by those around them journalist draw on



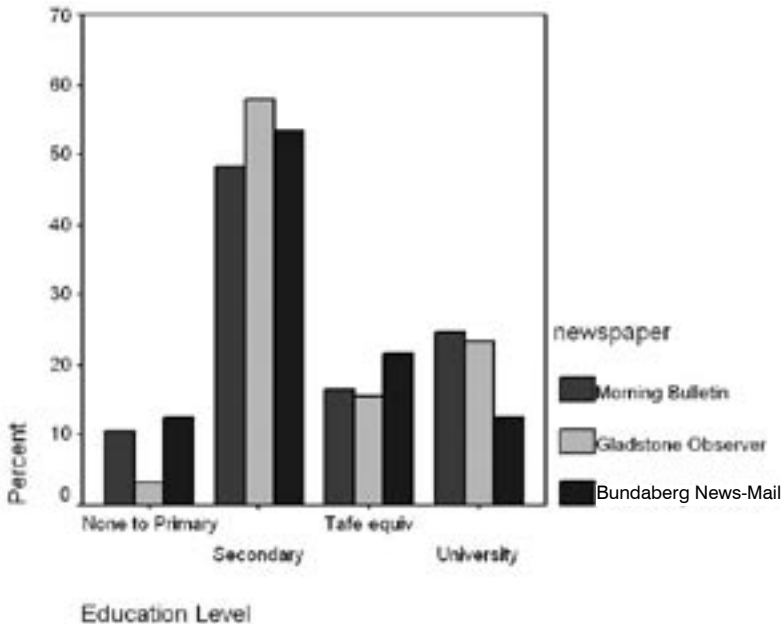
the characteristics of their near associates, colleagues and friends in creating pictures of readers. Additional research in this area would reveal the extent of similarities between those on whom journalists rely in formulating their ideas of readers and the statistical profiles of newspaper readers. As well, journalists draw from their lived world and experiences in developing mental models of readers (McNair 1998; Ewart 1997; Gans 1979; Tuchman 1978). For example, the journalists interviewed described readers as being the people they saw every day, in particular those they witnessed reading or buying the newspaper. In describing readers in this way, journalists create a presumed readership which is not based on anything more than the experiences of the journalists (Ewart 2000). Another factor which may impact on the way journalists describe readers is that they work in environments which are likely to cause them “to lose touch with the needs and wants of their audiences” (Green 1999: 32). Journalists’ ideas about readers may mirror the profiles of readers provided by the statistical data because of their reliance on near associates, family and friends who may share some, if not most, of the characteristics of the



archetypal reader. Therefore, in some ways, it is not surprising that the journalists' pictures of readers are similar to the profiles provided by the statistical analysis.

In most cases the journalists interviewed had never had access to market research undertaken by or for their newspapers. Of the two editors interviewed (both of whom had been reporters shortly before taking up their positions as editors), one indicated that his most recent exposure to any extensive readership data had been eight or nine years prior to the interview. He was critical about what he described as a tendency amongst newspapers to instigate advertising-related surveys. He said surveys which were based on readership issues, and which did not encompass advertising or circulation, were sorely needed by many regional newspapers. This editor also highlighted the issue of the lack of communication of the results of such surveys. Henningham (1998) and Green (1999) also identified that journalists in newsrooms around Australia experience low levels of exposure to market research.

Not only are regional newspapers slow to instigate market research which focuses solely on readership-related issues, but evidence would



also suggest they are reticent to support, financially at least, research in this area. In 2001 one of the authors of this paper approached a regional newspaper to investigate the possibility of a jointly funded research project examining issues of readership. The editorial management of the newspaper declined the opportunity. Several weeks after that approach, the same newspaper contracted Central Queensland University’s Population Research Laboratory to undertake paid market research. That research focussed mainly on advertising and circulation issues³.

Another important point to emerge from these two sets of data is that a variety of groups can be, and often are, overlooked by journalists and by statistical profiles of average readers. In the Central Queensland region those overlooked include the unemployed, Indigenous Australians, ethnic communities, and those on low income such as pensioners, to name a few.

Conclusion

This paper set out to make a contribution to the body of literature

and research surrounding newspaper readership issues in Australia. Its aim was to undertake a basic exploration of regional newspaper journalists' ideas of readers and statistical profiles of the same. It did so because readership research in Australia has, to date, neglected this topic and thus any connection or disconnection between journalists' ideas of readers and demographic profiles of readers, has been purely speculative. The ideas the journalists involved in this study had about readers were, in some cases, similar to the statistical profiles of readers provided by the survey data. While existing research provides some indication of why this may be the case, additional investigation with both journalists and their near associates as well as readers may shed further light on this area. While current literature indicates journalists are increasingly disconnected from their readers and communities (Green 1999; Rosen 1999a, 1999b; Nye 1997) it is possible that the regional journalists interviewed for this paper are more closely connected to their communities than was previously thought to be the case (Ewart 1997). Further investigations in this area might explore the educational and cultural backgrounds of regional journalists to determine whether they are similar to that of the readers. Another factor which might explain the correlation between the journalists' descriptions of readers and the statistical profiles is that the members of regional communities might have more success in making themselves known to journalists working on local newspapers. For example readers may be more likely to have direct contact with, or know someone who is friends with, a journalist.

Finally, what emerges from this paper is that there are gaps in both the composites of readers as provided by journalists at the three newspapers, and the statistical profiles. This is important for newspaper management in ensuring they take account of more than just the average reader when considering the content and direction of their publications. Journalists would do well to remember that readers come in all shapes, sizes and colours, and relying on stereotypical images of readers will not help the journalists' attempts to connect with and reflect the community. Importantly, the key to retaining and building up readership may lie beyond the majority. Significantly, this paper has provided data which can be used in future explorations of readership.

Notes

1. All data in the survey were derived from a question about which newspaper those surveyed had read in the past seven days.
2. The data referred to here have, to date, not been given to, or discussed with, journalists or editorial management at any newspaper.
3. Parts of this research were funded by Central Queensland University's Social Science Research Centre.

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