ONCE A JOURNALIST, ALWAYS A JOURNALIST?
Industry restructure, job loss and professional identity.

The traditional model of journalism in western societies, dominated by legacy media outlets such as newspapers and television, has undergone fundamental change in the 21st century. One consequence has been significant job loss within these newsrooms. As journalists negotiate new employment post job loss in Australia, this paper asks, how has this impacted on their professional identity? Drawing on varying conceptualisations of professional identity as a set of values and as a set of work practices, this paper presents data from a survey of 225 journalists who had been laid off between 2012 and 2014 in Australia, to explore whether and how journalists' professional identity changed after redundancy. The results indicated that professional identity was likely to fade post job loss, which indicates that identity may be more closely linked to a journalism work context. In addition, the paper found that the loss of institutional legitimacy may also be affecting the respondents current journalism practice. Conversely, not all participants who noted their identity was intact still worked as journalists or in journalism. This research has implications for the changing media workforce, as it indicates that notions of journalistic professional identity are still contested and complicated.

Introduction

Continual media industry restructuring and consequent job loss from legacy newsrooms have increased scholarly interest in the professional identity of journalists. This is a notable development given persistent debate about journalism's professional standing (Waisbord 2013; Aldridge and Evetts 2003). As Lewis (2012) notes, journalism's claims to professional status do not rest on conventional definitions of a profession. He states, 'it has no monopoly on the training and certification of its workforce, nor the means to prevent others from engaging in its work, and, while it has self-policing mechanisms of ethical codes, its power to enforce compliance is minimal' (Lewis 2012, 843). Instead, the specialised and distinctive nature of work in this occupation has been conceptualised in terms of more open-ended categories, such as journalistic identity, ideology or practice, which figure prominently in current assessments of journalism's capacity to adapt to its changed circumstances (Allan 2005; Hampton 2010; Waisbord 2013). Our interest here is to consider how journalists' experiences of job loss and re-employment influence their perceptions of journalistic work and professional identity. Our examination of the impact of industry restructure and job loss in journalism on professional identity draws on the results of a national survey of 225 journalists laid-off from Australian newsrooms between 2012 and 2014.

The changing professional identity of journalism

In *Media Work*, a landmark study of media professions in a digital age, author Mark Deuze (2007, 100) argues journalism careers and professional identity are in decline as news work is taken over by a multi-skilled array of 'media workers' employed on flexible employment contracts. The current paradox of media work is that career professionals are struggling to survive job cuts, industry restructure, and new business models when, at the same time, there is an exponential growth in online media platforms, devices, services, contents and consequent work opportunities (Deuze, Elefante and Steward 2010).

There is little scholarly consensus, however, on how to interpret changes to journalists' professional identity. On the one hand, the fact that newswork looks nothing like it used to in downsized converging digital newsrooms drives concerns about 'de-professionalisation' (Bromley 1997). Increasingly, journalistic news values and public interest agendas are sidelined as editorial decisions are based on web analytics, monetisation pressures and eyeball-catching clickbait (see Tandoc 2014; Blom and Hansen 2015). Trends such as this give rise to related concerns about the decline of journalistic careers and fading professional identity (Deuze 2007; Meyers and Davidson 2016; Witschge and Nygren 2009). On the other hand, empirical studies provide evidence of journalists individually and collectively pushing back against top-down re-organisation of newsrooms, management-imposed work intensification pressures, job cuts, and news commercialisation. In this context, professional identity is variously seen as a source of resistance to change, an incentive to adapt to new industry conditions, or a resource for coping with uncertainty (Örnebring 2010; O'Donnell, McKnight, and Este 2012; Grubenmann and Meckel 2015).

Witschge and Nygren's (2009) research on journalism as a 'profession under pressure' provides a way forward from this impasse because it integrates the disparate perspectives. In

their analysis, de-professionalisation and pushback are conceptualised as co-existing trends in journalism at a time of great uncertainty and flux: 'the defense of the profession from within seems to indicate that journalists are at least not ready to let go of the professional standards' (Witschge and Nygren 2009, 57). We are interested in this paper in whether journalists continue to hold onto their professional values, standards and practices even when they lose their newsroom jobs and are forced to re-make their professional careers.

This study extends research on the future of journalism as a profession under pressure by empirically examining the relationship between changes in journalism work and professional identity from the perspective of laid–off Australian career journalists seeking re-employment. It argues the twin experiences of job loss and job seeking offer a productive vantage point on this dynamic relationship because they prompt journalists to consider not only their own job prospects but also the labour market for journalism skills, the chances of work outside journalism, and the implications of these new opportunities for professional identity.

Against this volatile and uncertain backdrop, we examine two competing but related conceptualisations of journalistic professional identity that enable us to empirically assess the claims of decline: first, that professionalism largely rests on a common set of ideals and values and, second, that professional identity is more clearly linked to journalists' work routines and practices. We also want to explore the areas where these two approaches overlap.

In the first approach, journalism's professional identity is defined as an ideology, or common set of ideals and values, found among journalists across the world (Deuze 2005; Hanitzsch 2007; Carpentier 2005). Deuze's (2005) important attempt to characterise this ideology focuses on five core values: autonomy, immediacy, ethics, objectivity and public service. Objectivity is seen as the least globally relevant and therefore most controversial of these values, especially given its deep association with US journalism (Hampton, 2008). Nonetheless, as Carpentier (2005, 199) notes, even when circumstances permit alternative points of professional identification, objectivity remains central to media professionals' identity, a trend that illustrates both 'the rigidity of the hegemonic articulation' and the way it acts as 'a self-evident…frame of reference' (Carpentier 2005, 207). Hanitzsch (2007) further explores the question of how journalists frame and understand their work by developing his notion of journalistic culture, which is defined as 'a particular set of ideas and practices by which journalists legitimate their role in society and render their work meaningful' (Hanitzsch 2007, 369). In this view, journalistic culture's three constituent features are its institutional roles, epistemologies, and ethical ideologies. Empirical study of the principal dimensions of these three features, namely institutional roles (interventionism, power distance, market orientation), epistemologies (objectivism, and empiricism) and ethical ideologies (relativism and idealism), has revealed variation in journalistic culture across different national media systems (Hanitzsch 2007, 371). The premise inherent in these three models is that individual journalists acquire shared values and identity while working in the industry.

We argue, conversely, for greater consideration of the temporal and spatial characteristics of professional identity, that is, for example, whether and how the intensity of professional identification varies over time or in relation to workplace setting. In particular, in the context of claims that journalistic careers and professional identity are in decline, we ask if job loss in journalism is linked to loss of confidence in or adherence to the profession's core

values — for example, autonomy, immediacy, ethics, objectivity, public service (Deuze, 2005) — and, if so, whether this loss is remedied by re-employment in the industry.

In the second approach, found in more recent work on professionalism in journalism (Lewis 2012; Waisbord 2013; Carlson 2015), the unique nature of journalistic professional identity rests on the structure and logic of journalistic practices or work. Waisbord (2013, 141) rejects the normative model of journalistic ideology and instead argues that professional identity rests on 'jurisdictional control' of news work practices, including the occupation-wide consensus about news values in which 'newsiness trumps all other considerations'. This argument notes that professionalism in journalism is found not in a set of ideals and values but, rather, in 'the frantic fast-paced rhythm of producing information expressly with a very short shelf life [that] is journalism's distinctive form of knowledge, its unique way of rendering a wealth of complex information into an easily manageable series of events' (Waisbord 2013, 136). This conceptualisation is useful because it helps to explain the sometimes conflicted nature of news, whereby large parts of the press are devoted to following the latest celebrity or sports news rather than pursuing political news or the watchdog role that is seen as central to normative models of professional identity (Waisbord, 2013, 137). It also debunks the tacit premise found in values-based models that professional identity is narrowly tied into journalism's public good function. We argue, conversely, for greater consideration of the diversity of professional identities in journalism associated with the full gamut of journalistic reporting practices and news formats. We are particularly interested in the current labour market value of journalistic knowledge and work practices, as expressed in the re-employment of laid-off journalists in non-journalism industry sectors, and its implications for the professional identities of the re-employed journalists.

The important overlap between these two approaches to journalistic professional identity – as a set of values versus elements of practice – lies in the shared concern to establish the boundaries that define and differentiate journalism from other communication practices. For example, Deuze (2005, 451) claims that 'one of the most fundamental "truths" in journalism, is that: the professional journalist is the one who determines what publics see, hear and read about the world'. Likewise, for Lewis (2012), 'control over content' is the defining feature of journalism's professional logic. He says journalists 'take for granted the idea that society needs them as journalists – and journalists alone – to fulfil the functions of watch-dog publishing, truth-telling, independence, timeliness, and ethical adherence in the context of news and public affairs' (Lewis 2012, 845). Consequently, if the demarcation and reinforcement of occupational boundaries is the common mainstay of journalistic professionalism (Lewis 2012; Waisbord 2013), then it is easy to see how the networked news culture of the 21st century potentially undermines journalistic professional identity. As Singer (Singer 2010, 277) argued:

> In a network, all communicators and all communication are connected. The media space and control over what it contains are shared. This means a dramatic conceptual and practical shift for journalists, who face a rapid, radical decline in their power.

It is not surprising then that empirical research has indicated that journalists tend to reject new digital elements of news gathering that may ultimately see them lose control. For example, research has found professional journalists do not place a high value on content generated by citizen journalists (Hermida and Thurman 2008; Singer 2010), say the internet weakens rather than strengthens journalism (Reinardy 2010), and tend to 'normalise' new news platforms, such as blogs or Twitter, within traditional journalistic boundaries rather than exploiting the affordances of digital technologies (Lasorsa, Lewis and Holton 2012). Generally, this empirical work has found that journalists strongly believe that journalistic work happens in legacy media outlets, by professional journalists, and indicates an inflexible professional identity. While this research is critical as it explores the impact of new technology on traditional forms of journalism, there is less work that explores the impact of industry restructure on the nature of professional identity.

The research that does explore professional identity, both in terms of values and news work, establishes that it can be both inflexible and flexible (Witschge and Nygren, 2009; Ekdale et al., 2015; Grubenmann and Meckel, 2015). For example, Grubenmann and Meckel's (2015) study, which examined ways that journalists' used identity negotiation mechanisms to cope with newsroom change in a Swiss newspaper, found awareness among online journalists in particular that 'past norms and values cannot be extrapolated unchanged into the digital sphere' (Grubenmann and Meckel 2015, 12). In this case, professional identity demonstrated flexibility by acting as a resource for negotiating workplace change, that is, 'the search for new reference points tailored for a changeable landscape', even when some inflexibility was also detected, in the form of a 'defense of traditional values against contemporary working conditions' (Grubenmann and Meckel 2015, 13). However, most of this research exploring how professional identity helps journalists cope with change is based on the experiences and perceptions of journalists working in legacy media newsrooms. It does not directly address current trends such as the decreasing size of the journalistic workforce, or increasingly precarious employment conditions and higher percentage of contract and freelance work. We argue more research is needed on the professional identities of journalists who find themselves on the margins or outside of newsrooms. Moreover, as the topic of professional identities in transition is an important concern in the field of the sociology of work (see, for example, Gabriel, Gray, and Goregaokar 2013, 2010; Taylor 2013; Letkemann 2002), more research is needed to identify and analyse the similarities and differences in changes to identity experienced by journalists and other workers.

There is some research that suggests that professional identity values can sustain even laid-off journalists as they look for new work. Nel's (2010) study of 144 laid-off British journalists found most were 'deeply committed to their profession' and professional identity remained a 'source of pride, passion and satisfaction', even for those still looking for work up to two years after job loss (Nel 2010, 21). The result is notable given the poor job outlook for journalism in the United Kingdom, where the workforce shrank between 30 and 40 per cent in the first decade of the 21st century. Elsewhere, in the Australian context, a study of 95 laid-off journalists found more ambivalence about professional identity, with around one in four respondents noting negative feeling related to career fragmentation, loss of status, and the challenges of creating new identities (O'Donnell, Zion and Sherwood 2016). Those who had left the profession or changed careers suffered more from loss of identity than those still

working in journalism. However, renewal of professional identity was also detected amongst this cohort, with almost two thirds of respondents saying they looked forward to being involved in new forms of journalism, and around half indicating they had upgraded their content creation and/or monetisation skills in readiness for digital news work (O'Donnell, Zion and Sherwood 2015, 47-48). Grubenmann and Meckel's (2015) claim that flexibility enhances professional resilience is supported by the findings of this Australian study. Also relevant in this area is research that addresses new forms of entrepreneurial journalism. A 2016 study on hyperlocal news websites in the US (Chadha 2015) found that journalists who combined news reporting and website business management, a trend which potentially compromised their impartiality and autonomy, fell back on traditional journalistic values to guide their work.

This final part of the literature review refers to the emerging body of work on journalists who have moved to work within public relations. Discussion of changes in professional identity is particularly interesting in this context because the relationship between journalism and public relations is typically characterised by dramatic narratives of conflict. Public relations is 'demonised' as 'spin' (McNair, 2005), seen to exclusively uphold commercial values, and denigrated as both manipulative and the antithesis of journalism's professional values, particularly the watchdog function and mandate of truth (DeLorme and Fedler 2003; McNair 2005; Fredriksson and Johansson 2014; Macnamara 2014). As DeLorme and Fedler (2003) note in their historical analysis of journalists' reactions to public relations, when the *New York World* was shut down in 1931, the unlucky laid-off journalists 'would wind up in the poorhouse, the morgue, or in some public relations office, which is almost the worst that can happen to a newspaperman' (DeLorme and Fedler 2003, 111). Contemporary journalists may well share this view, but the scholarship indicates more and more journalists are moving into public relations work as employment precarity in newsrooms increases (see for example, Gollmitzer 2014; Koch and Obermaier 2014)). More notable is the fact that many find job satisfaction as well as a decent income within public relations work, a trend which seems at odds with traditional conceptualisations of journalistic identity, both in terms of values and work.

Taken together, the research reviewed here demonstrates the need to further explore journalists' sense of professional distinctiveness at a time of increasingly indistinct media boundaries (Lewis 2012), and increasing employment precarity (Deuze et al. 2010). In particular, this study aims to explore the nuances of concepts of professional identity. While some research ascertains that journalists' professional identity is clearly linked to values, and that these can endure post change, other models link journalistic identity clearly to work, which suggests that journalists who leave traditional media companies may struggle to retain their professional identity. Therefore, this study aimed to explore whether or not journalists who took redundancies from Australian media outlets more clearly identified with the values driven elements of professionalism, or the work elements. It also asked whether concepts of professional identity, which have traditionally been inflexible and resistant to change, continue to be so for journalists who have taken redundancy? This study therefore aims to increase our knowledge and insight into the relationship between changes in journalism work and professional identity by exploring how job loss, a critical life event, affects journalists as they seek re-employment in an industry that is continually restructuring as it transitions to

digital-first/digital-only news production. Drawing on the previous research on professional identity and change, we will develop this insight by addressing the following three research questions:

> *RQ1* What elements of professional identity do re-employed journalists highlight, and are these more closely related to values or newswork?

> *RQ2* What changes to professional identity do laid-off Australian journalists perceive post-job loss?

> *RQ3* Are there different perceptions of professional identity in relation to re-employment in journalism or non-journalism roles?

Methods

This study is part of broader longitudinal research project, New Beats, that is tracking the experiences of career journalists laid-off from Australian legacy media newsrooms between 2012 and 2014. The research sample was recruited via the non-probability method of snowball sampling. This method is effective for contacting journalists who have moved from the limited number of major newsrooms, where contact details are public and easy to obtain, to an unknown number of dispersed workplaces or to unemployment. In this case, potential research participants were identified using a call-out to interested parties via the project website, industry contacts provided with permission by the Media Entertainment and Arts Alliance (MEAA), the main union for journalists in Australia, published lists of laid-off journalists, and personal contacts. These journalists were invited via email to participate in a survey about their individual job loss and post-job loss experiences. Those who agreed were asked to share details of the survey with colleagues who had also lost their jobs in the 2012-2014 period. In addition, Twitter and other social media platforms were used to recruit potential participants. In this way, snowball sampling enabled us to identify and invite participation from approximately 500 journalists. However, one potential limitation that this study acknowledges is that using snowball or participant driven sampling (Lee 2009) runs the risk of over-representing those most invested in the topic (e.g. disgruntled ex-journalists).

The data collection instrument was a self-administered online survey of 52 questions, created and accessed using the cloud-based SurveyMonkey tool. The survey was administered between October 2014 and January 2015. A total of 266 of the 500 journalists in the database answered the questionnaire, for a response rate of 53.2 per cent. However, 41 entries were subsequently excluded from the data set because of inadvertent duplication, failure to meet the 2012-2014 job loss criterion, or invalid responses. The sample profile, described in more detail below, highlights the trend towards increasing employment precarity in Australia journalism, particularly for mid to late-career newspaper journalists (see Hanusch 2013; O'Donnell, Zion, and Sherwood 2016). To protect participant confidentiality, which was the main ethics issue for this research, participants are referred to only by a number.

To answer RQ1, we first asked survey respondents a filter question about their current work status, which had six options (working in journalism, work includes a mix of journalism

and other, working in a role that is not journalism, looking for work, taking a break, retired). Those who had been re-employed and had current work either in journalism, non-journalism or a mix of roles were asked to describe changes in their professional identity post-job loss. This was an open-ended question. Analysis of the answers was conducted through qualitative coding techniques as recommended by Miles, Huberman and Saldaña (2013). The data was stored, sorted and coded using coding software. RQ1 was examined via coding, using constant comparison techniques to guide the analysis (Miles, Huberman, and Saldaña. 2013), with a focus on the professional roles, tasks or values — that is, the elements of professional identity — highlighted as important by the re-employed journalists. These elements included ethics, autonomy, timeliness, objectivity or the watchdog function, or whether they noted elements of work, such as the importance of the institution. RQ2 coded the descriptions of professional identity according to change or no change, and, second, according to three categories designed to capture the rate of change (intact, fading and weak). Comparing and contrasting the responses of re-employed journalists working in journalism and non-journalism roles provided the answers to RQ3.

Results

Descriptive statistics of participants

As shown in Table 1, there were more male participants than female (57.8% male to 42.2% female) in this survey. More than three quarters of participants took a voluntary redundancy (76.9%). This cohort was overwhelmingly aged 41 and over (85.3%) and more than half of the participants had more than 25 years' experience at the time of their redundancies. This was therefore a highly experienced and also educated cohort, with 70.7% possessing a University degree. Most had also completed some form of journalism specific education (48.9% had completed a journalism cadetship and 31.1% had completed a related undergraduate degree).

-Insert Table 1 near here-

As shown in Table 2, most of these participants took redundancies from companies whose main business is newspapers – Fairfax and News Corporation (47.4% and 34.2% respectively), again indicating that those hardest hit by changes to the news industry were legacy media.

-Insert Table 2 near here-

Elements of professional identity

One of the initial tasks in answering the research questions was to explore whether or not the participants identified traditional values, such as ethical conduct, the watchdog function or autonomy, in their answers to the professional identity question. The results indicated some participants very clearly identified these traditional ideals or values that have been used to

define journalism as professional group in their answers. For example, Participant 189 indicated a commitment to journalisms' fourth estate function:

> I can't say my professional identity has changed greatly. I am still - and will always be - a journalist to my core. I'm still an avid news watcher, consumer and critic. I am thrilled by engaging with student journalists. I still want journalism to retain and defend its role as this country's fourth estate. (Participant 189).

However, others who noted the presence of ideal-typical value roles, such as objectivity, identified that they could no longer achieve these because of changes in their work. Participant 195 noted that a new communications job with a trade union required loyalty to the union movement first, a requirement that was both awkward and unprecedented: "I have found this very hard to accept, as my lifelong career has been to telling a story in a fair and balanced way with flair" (Participant 195). This initial analysis of participant responses indicated that the useful way to process the data would be to analyse the answers in terms of whether or not participants said their identity had changed, and then explore the changes in relation to their current work.

Professional identity: intact, fading or weak

There were three broad themes that these participants indicated in terms of change and professional identity, those who stated their identity was weak, those who reported fading identity, and those that said their identity was intact. This section explores these themes, and also highlights other common elements of identity that participants discussed. Overall, 169 participants answered the question about professional identity. A total of 53 responses were coded as intact, 83 as fading and 26 as weak, with a small number (seven) coded as non-applicable.

Intact: 'It's what I am, and always will be'.

The first category was responses where participants described their identity as intact, often defiantly, for example, 'I still consider myself a journalist.' It's what I am, and always will be' (Participant 142), These answers were likely to be shorter and straight to the point compared with the other categories. Some participants indicated that the act of leaving journalism would have severely damaged their identity:

> I am still in the press gallery, so in a way not much has changed. But this new role has been a step up for me and has challenged me in a good way. Being a journalist has long been part of my identity and leaving the profession would have been quite wrenching. (Participant 92)

However, others, such as participant 180, indicated that this was not always the case stating, 'I still call myself a journalist, even though I'm not', which offers an interesting counterpoint, that some still labelled themselves as journalists – even if their current work was different.

Fading: 'Partly a journo, but partly something else too'.

This largest category consisted of participants whose professional identity appeared to be fading or in flux, which was explained by participant 103, 'People still regard me essentially as a journo, but I don't quite regard myself as one any more. Partly a journo, but partly something else too.' This fading of professional identity seemed to be linked to a change in employment. Participant 75 stated, 'I am working more in community development than journalism at the moment. I had an identity crisis when I first left, but now consider myself both a journalist and community development worker.' Participant 44 openly wondered in their answers about when they would start telling others that they had adopted a new career, which can be seen in the following quote:

> I suppose most people still know me as a journalist and, given I do regular freelance work, I still am. When people ask me what I do, I still tell them I am a journalist... and then I have to explain that I now teach journalism and do some freelancing. It's strange in that sense, but I do wonder when I will start telling people I am a university lecturer (Participant 44).

Therefore, the most notable change that appeared to lead to a change in identity was a new job. However, the responses above also indicate that a loss of status was also keenly felt, these participants were perhaps hesitant to lose their association with journalism completely due to the societal status associated with it. Participant 154 stated, 'having worked for a well-known newspaper, it was a bit difficult being a "nobody" with no automatic outlet for stories.' Participant 48 also spoke about the loss of public profile and an adjustment period.

> As a journalist, you are visible. People court you and want to use your influence. That can be very good for the ego. PR is much more behind the scenes. It was a little hard to adjust to not having people call you every day (Participant 48).

Participant 166 said, 'It attacked something I felt very proud of - a great job I did well with some recognition. I am now trying to repeat that in a new role.' In addition to this, several participants noted that the loss of institutional legitimacy, afforded through employment at a major media outlet, had affected both their identity and practice. Participant 96 indicated that the watchdog function of journalism was inherently linked to having a legacy media platform.

> Sometimes I'm reluctant to call myself a journalist, maybe more a writer or content producer, because I still maintain an ideal of a journalist as someone who publishes important things that not everybody wants published. There are a lot of vested interests in the way in the freelance world. But I still call myself a journalist; the skills are there for anyone who wants to stand behind me as I use them (Participant 96).

> I've taken great pleasure in building up a community of readers for my blog, and prompting intelligent discussion. I'm a small fish in a small pond but I have a sense of achievement. What I do is worthwhile. However, I have less impact - old media has most authority and reach. Also I feel as if I've become 'soft' as no longer write hard news and rarely break stories. (Participant 126).

In this example, concepts of professional identity were clearly linked to practice and a platform that legitimised the journalism activity. Overall, those that were coded as 'fading' seemed to be moving to different roles, but also still completed some journalism work – and this conflicted practice had led to a conflicted identity.

Weak:: "I stopped identifying as a journalist"

 While the smallest group, there were 26 participants who appeared to have stopped defining themselves as journalists. Some of these participants stated this hadn't had a negative effect, such as Participant 24, who said, 'It's taken a while to stop thinking of myself as a journalist as it has defined my life for so long, but no particular issues.' While Participant 40 stated 'I don't have the kudos I once had but I'm not really bothered by that. I do love that I'm building an international business.' But some participants also noted it had been a difficult process, such as Participant 209, 'I stopped identifying as a journalist, and my identity became more nebulous and difficult to describe. That was a challenge and sometimes still is.'
    These answers also illustrated that for these participants, their identity was intertwined with their work. They were likely to note that they had changed jobs, and express sadness around the loss of journalistic status: 'I see myself more as a storyteller and communicator now, rather than a crusading journalist. It was a bit sad to lose the cachet that came with being a journalist,' (Participant 39). Answers in this theme again indicated that there was a sense of pride and purpose that came with their journalistic professional identity, and that this had been damaged. For example, Participant 25 said,

> In my role as a journalist, I was respected by the broader community and among my colleagues. I no longer feel respected or valued in the work I do, and I believe I am treated very differently by those I meet in my current capacity.

Likewise, Participant 10 stated 'When people ask what I do for a living perhaps it doesn't carry as much credence being a disability educator as opposed to a press photographer.' Participant 71 also said "Having public profile has proven advantageous in some respects. But I find that it is so entwined with my self-concept that it reinforces the disappointment with what has happened." These answers again highlight an important aspect of the impact of job loss on identity – that the public nature of journalism work significantly impacts on the experiences of redundant journalists. The quotes above, from Participant 39 and Participant 25, indicate that the public standing their roles were associated with had made a transition to life after journalism disorientating. Their descriptions of professional identity were most likely 'weak', because they had been forced to work in roles that they could not justify as

journalism work. These answers indicate that professional identity did change post job loss for these participants, to varying degrees. The most common reason that professional identity appeared to be fading or weak was a change in employment. In order to test these results further, participants' answers to the professional identity question were compared to their current employment.

Current work

Current work was measured through a filter question, where participants self-selected whether or not they were working within journalism, a combination of journalism and other work (for example, freelance journalism combined with public relations work), or outside of journalism (a role completely unrelated to journalism). While previous studies has defined a journalist as someone that has editorial control over news content (Hanusch, 2013), this study made a conscious decision to give the participants agency in defining their own work. As Table 3 indicates, 60.9% (137) of participants selected that they worked within journalism, which included a mix of those entirely employed within journalism at the time of the survey (70 or 31.1%) or a combination of journalism and other roles (67 or 29.8%). 22.2% (50) identified that they were working in a job outside of journalism. Other options included looking for work (17 or 7.6%), taking a break (9 or 4.0%), or retired (12 or 5.3%).

-Insert Table 3 near here-

When compared with descriptions of professional identity, these self-definitions of work offered interesting results, which can be seen in Table 4. As could potentially be expected, those who worked within journalism were unlikely to report their professional identity was weak. Those who selected they had left journalism were more likely to report that their professional identity was weak. However, unexpectedly, the percentage of participants who made statements that indicated their identity was intact was almost equal for those who had stayed in journalism and those who had left. Why did participants who did not work in journalism indicate that their identity was intact?

-Insert Table 4 near here-

There were two key themes in answers in this category. The first could be summed up as follows: while the participants appeared to be working in non-journalism roles, being a 'journalist' was a key part of their identity. Participant 107 captured the difference, saying:

> As an example: I just returned from an overseas holiday and was required to complete the occupation question on the passenger arrival forms. I wrote "journalist" as I believe that is still at the heart of who I am – even if it isn't really what I'm doing now.

However the second theme saw participants explain that their identity was also linked to practice. For example, Participant 11 noted even though they were no longer working as a

journalist, they still employ journalistic skills in their work – which they understand to be closely intertwined with identity:

> Some journalists appeared to no longer count me as a journalist - though I had worked for more than three decades as one. There seems to be a feeling among many journalists that once you become a political media adviser, you have traded your journalistic spurs in - sold your soul, if you like. You have crossed to the dark side of "spin doctoring". At heart, I still consider myself a journalist, applying the same rigid ethics and the same skills - especially in writing exercises (speeches, media releases etc.) (Participant 11).

This participant was not the only one who noted they had moved to public relations work, and that their perception of public relations had in fact changed since they were employed in the industry.

> My career change has rounded out my professional identity and added another string to my bow. There may be a perception among journalists that I've " sold out" and given away my credibility. That was my perception of PR before I joined the profession! On balance, I feel that I've gained new skills in a professional sense and added to an extensive range of contacts. These will stand me in good stead as I prepare for the next stage of my career. (Participant 215).

This theme is an important finding of this study, as it indicates while the boundaries between media work are blurring, some participants noted they were still invoking journalism skills in their work, even in public relations roles. It also indicates that these participants are using elements of journalistic professional identity, such as ethical codes, and journalism skills to guide their current work. This combination, of a identity caught up in journalism and practice that still used journalistic skills mentioned by Participant 11, therefore appear to be the key elements that contributed to the "intact" nature of these participants' professional identity.

Discussion and conclusion

This paper aimed to explore whether or not notions of professional identity changed for journalists post-job loss. The most important finding was that more journalists described their identity as weak or fading rather than intact (64.6% to 31.4%). The major reason for this loss of identity appeared to be a change in occupation or employment conditions: the majority of participants had moved from stable jobs in large, legacy media organisations to work of a precarious nature (such as freelance rather than full-time) in smaller media companies, or work that they did not consider to be journalism. Previous research indicates that journalists' use professional identity as a valuable resource in times of change, (Grubenmann and Meckel, 2015; Nel, 2010; Witschge and Nygren, 2009). However, while this study also found evidence of professional identity as a resource for coping with uncertainty, it was typically a resource only used by the minority of journalists who found re-employment within existing

journalism networks. Taken together, then, these findings strongly suggest that journalists perceived their professional identity as linked to particular types of work, and, importantly, particular types of workplaces in which this work occurs.

While the findings are perhaps predictable given the decline of journalism careers in Australia, they are particularly interesting given that Nel's (2010) study of 144 laid-off British journalists found most were 'deeply committed to their profession', and that professional identity remained a 'source of pride, passion and satisfaction', even for those still looking for work up to two years after job loss (Nel 2010, 21). Some of participants in the Australian study noted similar sentiments, describing their journalistic identity as "it's what I am, and what I always will be". But mostly the results of this survey indicated these journalists were no longer committed to their profession, even when they wanted to be, simply because they could not find work in journalism. This difference may be explained by further dramatic deterioration of the journalism job market since Nel's (2010) study. In Australia, over 2000 newsroom jobs have been cut since 2012, and there are simply less legacy media roles available. It also reflects the view, shared by many of the Australian survey participants, that the loss of legacy media jobs represents a significant constraint on journalists' ability to practice journalism.

Many participants discussed a loss of status and public profile post-job loss, which indicates the role of the major media outlets in helping to create professional identity. The loss of the institutional legitimacy offered by these media outlets adversely affected these participants. Pride in their journalistic roles was replaced, post job-loss, by negative feelings about loss of respect, public status, and the difficulty of gaining a platform for their expertise and experience. This loss of public recognition for their journalism work, for example Participant 39 noted it was sad to "it was a bit sad to lose the cachet that came with being a journalist", indicates again that journalistic identity is perhaps more clearly linked to practice than individual values. These results also unexpectedly support claims (Deuze, 2008; Lewis, 2012; Waisbord, 2013) that the nexus between professional identity and professional journalists is that they have "jurisdictional control" over what publics see, hear and read about the world. If the guiding factor in journalists' professional logic is that they have 'control over content' (Lewis, 2012), as the only source in society trusted with delivering the news, it is easy to understand how public profile and status had become an integral part of these participants' professional identity.

Perhaps most interestingly the loss of institutional legitimacy also appeared to have an affect on the type of work these participants could produce. Many respondents reported an inability to perform key elements of journalistic work, such as the watchdog function. For example, Participant 96 indicated that freelance work meant losing the ability to perform the watchdog function of journalism, because this could only be achieved with a media outlet ready to stand behind them. In an age where one of the answers to significant media disruption has been the development of hyperlocal media sites and other small mobile, digital solutions (Carlson and Usher 2016), this finding is potentially significant as it indicates that some journalists with significant experience and expertise in the field feel that they cannot achieve one of the fundamental goals of journalism without institutional backing. It supports previous analysis of this area (Compton and Benedetti 2010, 487) that notes that citizen journalists cannot replace the 'lost labour of reporting'. Therefore, one of the major findings

of this paper is that the watchdog function evident in journalistic professional identity does seem to be linked to the ability to practice in a major media institution, at least for these participants. This work therefore supports the stream of research that establishes that professional journalists do not place a high value on new forms of journalism, such as content generated by citizen journalists (Hermida and Thurman 2008; Singer 2010), or use tools such as blogs or Twitter outside traditional journalistic boundaries (Lasorsa, Lewis and Holton 2012). Instead this study found that, without the ability to practice journalism in a major media outlet, many of these participants could no longer define themselves as journalists. However, this study also indicates just how complex the issues of journalistic professional identity can be – as it also found evidence to suggest that those who were not employed in journalistic roles reported their identity as intact.

Some of these participants indicated that they considered themselves to be 'journalists at heart', which does perhaps indicate a commitment to journalistic ideology. But most commonly these participants noted that they used their journalistic skills in their new roles – even in those roles that were clearly public relations. Participant 11 noted "At heart, I still consider myself a journalist, applying the same rigid ethics and the same skills - especially in writing exercises", though he was a political media adviser. This provides evidence to support a model of journalistic identity that is clearly linked to practice, rather than ideology. It also provides further evidence for Lewis' (2012) contention that 'control over content' is the defining feature of journalism's professional logic.

Like other work that explores the growing field of journalists who have some employment in public relations (for example see Fisher 2015b; Fisher 2015a; Koch and Obermaier 2014; Obermaier and Koch 2015), these results also indicate that journalistic professional identity contains a certain flexibility, and that journalists working in this field develop certain coping mechanisms to deal with the negative connotations that public relations work traditionally holds.

Findings of this kind point to the growing ambiguity of occupational identities that were once more clearly defined (Deuze 2008). They also show how journalists are actively negotiating their professional identity at a profoundly challenging moment. While there are significant structural forces at work, journalists are retaining at least some agency in how they define themselves. Moreover, this study indicates that research on journalists and journalism may require some re-shaping of definitions in an age of increasingly precarious journalism work, where media workers who might once have solely been employed in journalism work and in one or a small number of organisations now take on multiple roles and work in multiple organisations. Moreover, this research encourages researchers to reconsider traditional claims about professional identity in journalism in the context of new industry and employment conditions and changes to newswork.

This study makes an original contribution to understanding professional identity in a digital era. It explored a population that once worked in legacy newsrooms, but are now likely to be employed across the media industry, or even outside of it. It thus offers a unique exploration of the new generation of journalism and media workers, who are often engaged in fragmented, precarious work. This paper highlights the importance of institutional legitimacy when considering professional identity, culture or logic, and how it enables (or potentially disables) journalists' ability to perform key functions of journalism. Therefore, this paper

finds reason to support Waisbord's (2013) model of journalistic professionalism, which links journalistic professional identity to work rather than to an independent system of values. It concurs with more recent conceptualisations (Cohen 2012; Gollmitzer 2014), which call for research that explores broader definitions, populations and sites of journalism work in the 21st century. While evaluations of change in legacy news work and news workers are still crucial to understanding the future of journalism, scholars need to acknowledge changing patterns of professionalism in the context of changing patterns of employment, as well as the ways in which individuals are active participants in such processes.

This study has several limitations, which we want to acknowledge here. First among them is the fact that the research sample is skewed to older and more experienced journalists, who may be more likely to adhere to traditional notions of journalistic work, that includes the inability to practice functions of journalism outside a legacy media newsroom. Younger journalists may well feel able to pursue the watchdog function of journalism without the backing of legacy media, particularly as previous research indicates younger newsworkers have a more flexible approach to traditional journalistic identity (Grubenmann and Meckel 2015; Hanusch 2013). The online survey design and method also has limitations. In terms of the survey instrument, there was only one open-ended question on participants' professional identity, which made for a limited dataset even when respondents had a lot to say. In addition, the phrase 'professional identity' was used without giving participants a definition of the term, which may have been interpreted in multiple ways. The results are therefore based on the views of a particular cohort of participants, who defined professional identity for themselves. Moreover, the online survey method includes no ready mechanism for probing participants' answers, this would allowed for a much more nuanced discussion of professional identity for the respondents, especially in relation to statements such as 'I'm still a journalist, always will be'. Despite these limitations, the researchers affirm the importance of enabling the research participants to discuss professional identity in an open-ended way, especially given their unusual circumstance of mid- to late-career job loss and, in some cases, forced career change.

Future research might usefully include more extensive qualitative investigation of changing professional identities in a range of national contexts, such as the UK and US, where legacy media outlets are similarly undergoing large-scale downsizing and closures. In addition, research that further explores the nature of journalistic identity in newsworkers who are not employed in traditional newsrooms would add richness to the field.

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