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TITLE PAGE

WHERE DO JOURNALISTS GO AFTER NEWSROOM JOB CUTS?

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This article explores the aftermath of job loss for a sample of Australian journalists who were made redundant in 2012, a year of dramatic press industry restructuring. It reports the findings of a pilot study of 95 redundant journalists, undertaken as part of the New Beats project, a five-year longitudinal study of job loss in journalism. Three related questions drive the analysis: Where do journalists go after job cuts? How do they make sense of job loss? What happens to professional identity? In contrast to a recent study of journalists laid-off from the British press, and the literature on the aftermath of job loss for older professionals, this study finds Australian journalists who lost their jobs in 2012 had traumatic but relatively better than expected post-job loss experiences. All but two of the survey respondents seeking re-employment found some form of work within one year, and, thanks to union-enforced redundancy agreements, most left newsrooms with severance payments that smoothed an otherwise traumatic experience. Nevertheless, the article argues the sense of leaving a newspaper industry in seemingly terminal decline amplified feelings of anxiety about journalism work and lost identity, prompting many to leave the profession and seek jobs elsewhere.

KEYWORDS Australian journalists, British journalists, press, feelings, industry restructuring, job loss, journalism, news quality, professional identity, trade union

Introduction

In 2012, the Australian news media experienced the most serious contraction in its history. The Media Entertainment & Arts Alliance (MEAA) the national trade union of media workers, calculates around 1000 journalists were made redundant or lost their jobs in that year alone (Christensen, 2013), with further losses of between 500 to 1000 jobs in the 2013-2014 period, for an overall decline of around 20 percent in Australia's mainstream journalistic workforce (*The Australian*, February 17, 2014). While some commentators use sobering figures of this kind as evidence that quality journalism is coming to an end (Beecher 2013; Patterson 2013), this paper instead focuses on those who lost their jobs and have been forced to remake their media careers, asking if and where they found work and how they dealt with redundancy. It reports the findings of a pilot survey of 95 journalists who lost their jobs in 2012, undertaken in September 2013 as part of the *New Beats* research project, a collaborative university-industry investigation of mass redundancies, career change and the future of Australian journalism.

The downturn in journalistic employment in Australia follows similar trends in the US and UK (Brownlee and Beam 2012; Nel 2010). One driving factor is the decline of the newspaper industry and resulting closure of mastheads that once employed big cohorts of journalists. Brownlee and Beam (2012, 348) reported 13,500 jobs were lost from daily newspapers in the US in 2009 alone, with total employment in newsrooms shrinking by just under 27 percent in the decade to 2010. Nel's (2010) study of laid-off British journalists estimated the UK's mainstream journalism workforce had shrunk between 30 to 40 percent in the ten-year period from 2001 to 2010. In this volatile context, it is important to find out more about the challenges journalists face in regaining employment after job loss, and in dealing with the news industry's changing dynamics.

This article is the first attempt to capture and examine how Australian journalists responded to job loss and workforce contraction in 2012. There are three standout characteristics of the participants in our study: their age, occupational sub-group, and journalistic experience. On average, the respondents were 49 years old, with around 40 percent of the sample aged 50 years or older. Some 94 percent of the respondents identified themselves as newspaper journalists at the time they lost their jobs and about half of them left

from senior editorial roles. In terms of experience, the respondents had been employed as journalists, on average, for over 25 years.

Research in the field of the sociology of work that examines the aftermath of job loss has found older professionals can be more unsettled and traumatised by the experience than younger people. Work is more often central to older professionals' sense of identity and well-being, and forced career change late in life often means they have to accept lower paid and less stable jobs (see, for example, Gabriel, Gray, and Goregaokar 2013, 2010; Taylor 2013; Letkemann 2002). Nel's (2010) study of 144 UK journalists confirms these findings. It argues job loss made life "tough" for the laid-off journalists — 50 percent were over 40 years of age, and 63 percent had held senior positions as managers or production editors — because only 18 percent of them had found full-time work doing a similar job in journalism, while 42 percent were still looking for work, up to two years after been laid-off (Nel 2010, 29).

Our main interest therefore was to establish whether the journalists in our study were affected to the same extent. This first New Beats survey on the aftermath of job loss suggests, fortunately, they were not. In terms of re-employment, this article reveals the Australian journalists in this study had difficult, but relatively better, post-job loss experiences than their UK counterparts because 89 percent had found work of some kind by September 2013, a period of just over one year from the beginning of major press industry job cuts in June 2012. However, many of them were working in more insecure forms of employment (e.g. part-time, contract or freelance) and less high-powered jobs, for lower wages and/or for fewer hours per week, and only one in four had resumed their journalistic careers at that point in time. The New Beats project, which has adopted a longitudinal approach to the investigation of job loss in journalism, will monitor and analyse the employment trajectories of these redundant journalists in subsequent annual surveys to 2017.

This article argues re-employment, even in reduced circumstances or outside the profession, enabled the redundant Australian journalists to "move on" in practical terms to the next phase of their lives; at the same time, psychologically, the redundant journalists experienced a wide range of complex and conflicting emotions that proved more difficult to process and resolve, including sadness, relief, anger, disillusionment, betrayal, guilt, elation, resignation, and anxiety. The main contention in this article is that the sense of leaving a newspaper industry in seemingly terminal decline amplified the trauma of individual job loss. It also explains why many of the respondents, when faced with the redundancy option, made the decision to leave the profession and seek jobs elsewhere.

Employment, Job Loss and Career Change in Journalism

Adverse trends in journalistic employment are widely reported in the Australian press but have yet to be conclusively investigated in journalism research, particularly in relation to the social impacts of the digital transformation of news production (Picard 2014).

Defining the occupation's parameters is one sticking point. While media economist Robert W. Picard (2014, 273) uses the term "journalism" to refer to both legacy and digital news workers, he cautions against any "idealized and illusory vision of journalism in days past" and urges researchers to contextualise concerns about journalistic employment by broader inquiry into changes in the news business. Journalism scholar Glen Fuller (2014) prefers explicit recognition of industry change when discussing journalism jobs, and so refers to "the news-based media industry, formally known as journalism". The Australian Bureau of Statistics (ABS) (2012), which tracks people employed in arts and culture industries and occupations, takes a third approach, focusing on distinctive skill sets, and lists all journalists in the category of "writers and print media workers", even when they work in radio, television, or online.

Significantly, as Fuller (2014) notes, the ABS data provides evidence that contradicts gloomy newspaper headlines about job cuts, and reveals the number of Australian journalists increased modestly in the five years to 2011, from 15,573 to 16,125, with strong growth in the generic category of “journalists: not further defined”, and the catch-all category of “not elsewhere classified”, which covers bloggers, critics, editorial assistants and photo journalists (ABS 2012, 2013). This positive employment trend is confirmed in the Australian Government Department of Employment’s Job Outlook for “Journalism and other writers”, which shows job growth of 2.9 percent in the five years to 2012, slowing to 1.4 percent in the 2011-2012 period in line with the overall trend across all occupations of 1.9 percent, and a projected increase of 2.4 percent in the next five years to 2018 (Australian Government 2014).

Conversely, the ABS data reveals a notable decline in the number of print journalists, from 6,306 in 2006 to 5,510 in 2011, a clear indication that this is the group worst hit by industry change and job loss. It is important to note that the ABS data is based on the 2011 ABS Census of Population and Housing, and all the figures included in the data refer to employment levels before the 2012 job cuts at Fairfax Media and News Corp Australia (previously News Limited), the two major newspaper companies. The Job Outlook forecasts also rely on this ABS data, which will only be updated after the next census in 2016.

Research on media occupations, in the media studies field, suggests digitisation and convergence are driving irreversible changes in media work, reconfiguring traditional forms of employment, daily work routines, norms and values, skill sets, and professional identities, and calling into question the ongoing possibilities for creative autonomy, and meaningful, socially-purposeful work (Hesmondhalgh and Baker 2011; Witschge and Nygren 2009; Deuze 2007; Ursell 2006; Tunstall 2001).

In *Media Work*, a landmark study of media work in the 21st century, Mark Deuze (2007) argues all media work is now characterised by increasingly complex interconnections between four key elements — content, creativity, connectivity and commerce. He says, “Media industries produce content, yes, but also invest in platforms for connectivity - where fans and audiences provide free labor. Media work is culture creation, yes, but tends to take place in a distinctly commercial context” (Deuze 2007, 57). In this view, media workers have no option but to adapt to increasingly dynamic, if chaotic, work contexts, and to find ways of regenerating the specific “media logic” of their occupational group (e.g. work cultures, ethics, professional identity) amidst disruptive, wide-ranging societal shifts driving the convergence of the creative industries (e.g. new technology, business integration, intensifying competition) (Deuze 2007). In this view, journalism careers and professional identities are in decline as news work is done by a more diverse, flexible and multi-skilled array of “media workers” with “portfolio workstyles” (100). The paradox of 21st century media work is that media professions are struggling to survive job cuts, new business models, and inadequate regulatory regimes (e.g. copyright), when, at the same time, proliferating media platforms, devices, services and contents are driving exponential growth in media work opportunities (Deuze, Elefante, and Steward 2010).

Tamara Witschge and Gunnar Nygren’s (2009) study of Swedish and British journalists extends Deuze’s (2007) analysis by providing empirical evidence that professional identities are in a state of flux, and weakening, in the face of changes in journalistic work and organization (49). Their research on journalism as a “profession under pressure” identified two co-existent trends: first, the de-professionalization of news work, in the context of new demands for multi-skilling, faster content production, and use of cross-platform content management systems, as well as the new imperatives of “web journalism” (e.g. to integrate user-generated content, increase interactivity, and adopt market-driven news values), and, second, at the same time, pushback from professional journalists in defence of their expertise,

norms and standards, but from the diminished position of a workforce increasing divided by differences in work content, daily routines, pay rates, and levels of employment security. These authors concluded that, “The question is thus whether the trend of returning to professional values can counter the former trend—the seeming fading of the profession—or that the de-professionalized practices prove the stronger force” (2009, 57).

For David Hesmondhalgh and Sarah Baker (2011), the quality of working life in the cultural industries remains an under-researched theme in media studies; they argue not enough is known about the everyday realities of all types of “creative labour”, including the question of how media workers respond practically and emotionally to growing employment precarity, constraints on creative autonomy, and other changes in their working conditions arising from convergence and digitisation. Their innovative investigation of British television, magazine and music industry workers adopted a qualitative methodology to analyse and catalogue perceptions of changing work conditions, with a particular focus on workers’ “emotional responses” or “states of mind” (Hesmondhalgh and Baker 2011, 7). While media jobs are widely seen as highly desirable, the study found very uneven and ambivalent feelings about working conditions: for example, many were frustrated and exhausted by long hours, on casual contracts, and in situations where workplace bullying or self-exploitation were common; yet, at the same time, some found great pleasure in doing complex, varied, and interesting work that required individual autonomy and freedom (136-137).

The newspaper crisis in Australia in recent years, as elsewhere, has sharpened academic interest in understanding changing patterns of journalism work (O’Donnell, McKnight, and Este 2012; Siles and Boczkowski 2012; Este, Warren, and Murphy 2010; Young 2010). Journalism researchers across the world are interested in mapping and analysing the evolving digital media ecosystem, with its new business models, multimedia newsrooms, network logic, and changing power dynamics between journalists and users/consumers (Peters and Broersma 2013; Anderson, Bell, and Shirky 2012; Grueskin, Seave, and Graves 2011). This literature frequently focuses on new stakeholders in the news business, particularly citizen journalists and other content-creating users, in order to identify emerging news agendas, values, practices, structures, and relationships (Picard 2014; Bruns 2012; Heinrich 2012; Deuze 2011).

There is relatively less attention given to the experiences of working journalists, still typically located in legacy media newsrooms, or to their perspectives on what is happening to journalistic practice and professionalism (O’Donnell, McKnight, and Este 2012; Lee-Wright, Phillips, and Witschge 2012; Lowrey and Gade 2011). The research that has been done has addressed how legacy media journalists are adapting to newsroom restructuring and the shift to digital-first editorial models, and the factors that help or hinder the transition (for instance, Reinardy 2010; Usher 2010). In the Australian context, news managers have identified changing the “print mindset”, and getting the job done with tighter resources and fewer staff, as their biggest challenges; senior journalists instead pointed to the lack of employer-funded staff training in multimedia skills, suggesting their media companies preferred to hire new, young, staff with digital media skills to work on their digital platforms (O’Donnell, McKnight, and Este 2012). These concerns about “de-skilling” or what Witschge and Nygren (2009) would call “de-professionalization”, echo research elsewhere on the deteriorating work conditions in legacy newsrooms (Lee-Wright, Phillips, and Witschge 2012; Lowrey and Gade 2011); at the same time, they serve as a reminder that we know too little about recruitment policies and practices in either transitional newsrooms or across the growing number of digital news services.

The literature canvassed here includes various snapshots of change in professional journalism at specific moments over the past five years. The *New Beats* research project

proposes extending this area of research by adopting a longitudinal approach to the study of journalism work. It will track the post-redundancy experiences of Australian journalists who lost their jobs in 2012 over a five-year period, to 2017, in a bid to discover what their patterns of re-employment indicate about shifting notions of journalistic expertise, career opportunities, and professional identity. This article uses data collected through a pilot survey in 2013, to identify where our survey respondents are now working, explore some of their shared experiences of and reactions to redundancy, and highlight their loss of certainty about the future of print journalism and professional identity based in print culture.

Method

The research problem this study explores is what happens next to the careers of redundant journalists? We explored this problem by locating and surveying Australian journalists who were made redundant in 2012, asking them for descriptive information about job loss and looking for work, including their subjective perceptions of these experiences and related employment, income, health, professional identity and well-being issues. We aimed to produce a study of job loss that addresses the whole experience of what is considered to be a disruptive major life event that is difficult to prepare for.

The population of concern comprised all Australian journalists who lost their jobs in 2012, with industry reports suggesting the number affected at around 1000 journalists (*The Australian*, 17 February 2014). The initial sampling frames used to locate and contact potential research participants were published lists of journalists who had been made redundant (see Crikey 2012), and industry contacts provided by the MEAA. In addition, a *New Beats* website was created to publicise the study, profile the research team, explain the aims and objectives of the project, call for participants to respond to a pilot online survey, and act as a centralised point of contact for respondents (see newbeatsblog.com/about). Mass media interest in the research topic led to various news and media stories about the *New Beats* project (Aedy, 2013) and this coverage, which usually included hyperlinks to the website, helped promote the study across the journalism profession.

The research sample was recruited using the non-probability method of snowball sampling. Atkinson and Flint (2001, 1) define snowball sampling as “*a technique for finding research subjects, where one subject gives the researcher the name of another subject, who in turn provides the name of a third and so on*”. This sampling strategy has generally been applied to research hidden populations that are otherwise hard to find, and, in particular, where the research topic is of a sensitive nature. For example, snowball sampling has been used successfully in research on the job satisfaction levels of temporary workers, such as freelance journalists (Ryan, 2009). It was considered the most appropriate sampling technique for this study for two reasons: first, the potential sensitivities of investigating job loss experiences, and, second, the logistical difficulties of contacting journalists who had moved from a limited number of major newsrooms, where contact details were public and easy to obtain, to an unknown number of dispersed workplaces or unemployment.

The call to participate in a study of job losses in journalism, initially issued on the *New Beats* website, was sent directly to those listed on the public and private lists obtained from media and union sources. It was also widely distributed across journalists’ networks using Twitter and other social media platforms. The details of journalists who responded positively to the call were collated into a database of potential survey participants, and personalised invitations were then sent, via email, asking each respondent to complete the online survey. Where necessary, this initial request was followed up with two reminders. Individual communication and reminders are two strategies found to have positive effects on response rates in online surveys (Cook, Heath, and Thompson 2000; Sánchez-Fernández,

Muñoz-Leiva, and Montoro-Ríos 2012). Those who responded to the survey were asked to pass on the project details to colleagues who might also join in the study. Some 225 of the estimated 1000 journalists who lost their jobs in 2012 were located in this way.

The online survey opened on September 1, 2013 and the data presented in this article was gathered over a five-week period, until October 7, 2013. A total of 130 of the 225 journalists in the database answered questions in the online survey, which was a response rate of 57 percent. However, 35 of these responses were subsequently excluded from the data set either because the respondents did not meet the 2012 job loss criterion, or due to invalid responses. Therefore, the final sample was 95 journalists, which represents 42 percent of the target sample, and just less than ten percent of the estimated cohort of Australian journalists who lost their jobs in 2012.

The data collection instrument was a self-administered online survey of 33 questions, created and accessed using the cloud-based *SurveyMonkey* survey tool. Three main considerations guided the design of the questions: first, interest in measuring and analysing how job loss affects journalistic careers; second, interest in gathering both descriptive information about journalists and job loss, and explanatory accounts of journalists' perceptions of the job loss experience and, third, interest in formulating a clearly-worded, concise and coherent sequence of questions that would effectively elicit relevant answers via an online survey. The study reported here was conceived as a pilot study to test the quality of the questionnaire design and its suitability for use in a further longitudinal study (Saris and Gallhofer, 2014).

To quantify post-job loss employment trends, the online survey asked 17 questions about the job loss process, current employment status, and journalism career prospects (including interest in legacy and digital media jobs, retraining opportunities, and networking with former colleagues). A comment field was included in these questions to give respondents the option of providing supplementary information or feedback. There were also six questions about demographic characteristics (age, gender, language spoken at home, education, journalism training, and years working in journalism). Additionally, to understand the meaning of redundancy and employment insecurity from the journalists' perspectives, the survey asked six open-ended questions about issues arising from looking for work, re-skilling, and changing income levels as well as the impact of job loss on professional identity, emotions, health and well-being. Respondents were then invited to nominate themes or topics they would like the *New Beats* project to explore in subsequent surveys. Finally, there were four questions asking respondents about their possible future involvement in the *New Beats* project.

In terms of data analysis, the answers to the quantitative questions were tabulated, with ranges and averages calculated. These findings were compared to those of Nel's (2010) study of laid-off British journalists to provide an initial exploration of cross-national variation in post-job loss experiences.

The pilot study identified the lack of detailed measurement in the quantitative questions as problematic. These questions asked for descriptive information only, using either Yes/No answers such as, "Were you a member of the MEAA union at the time of your redundancy?", or forced choice answers, such as "Were your salary and working conditions better, worse or the same post-redundancy?" The online survey did not ask for detailed quantitative information on, say, income levels, or use Likert scale assessments, for example, to gauge levels of satisfaction with the union's role in the redundancy process. This is a limitation of the current study. Income loss was found to be a major issue arising from the redundancy process and precise information on variation in post-job loss incomes would have provided useful insights. More detailed measures will be included therefore in the next stage of this longitudinal study of redundant journalists in Australia.

The answers to the open-ended questions were collated and analysed using the qualitative data management software NVivo. Coding processes outlined by Saldaña (2013) were followed. Initial descriptive and NVivo analysis identified the topics of most concern to the respondents, and then a second-level data analysis was conducted to group the range of perspectives on each of these key topics, using more formal categories. This data set provided two types of findings: first, systematically organised information about journalists' perceptions of the job loss and post-job loss experiences, their emotional toll, and resulting preoccupations; and, second, rich and extensive insights, expressed in the respondents' own words, about key aspects of these experiences.

The presentation of the findings that follows is purposely structured around three related questions: Where do journalists go after newsroom job cuts? How do they make sense of job loss? What happens to professional identity after leaving the newsroom? This structure draws attention to three of the respondents' principal concerns, as identified through analysis of the qualitative data set, namely, post-redundancy career outcomes and pathways, surviving redundancy, and the lost professional identity of redundant journalists. Answers to the three questions are then developed by integrating findings from the quantitative questions in the survey with relevant insights and extracts from the qualitative data-set.

One final observation on method: the results presented here represent the job loss and post-job loss experiences of only this particular cohort of 95 journalists, rather than the whole population of journalists who were made redundant in Australia in 2012. The use of the non-probability method of snowball sampling explains this limitation of the study. More effort will be made to gain control over the sampling method in the next stage of this longitudinal study, by increasing the number and diversity of survey participants.

Findings

The demographic profile of the survey cohort points to a group of professionally successful, career print journalists in the prime of their working life, or, rather, "cut off in their prime" as one veteran explained: *"My heart goes out to the very talented journalists who have been shown the door with years still left in their productive lives...I had more than 40 years in newspapers, but they have been cut off in their prime"* (Respondent 52). The average age of the 95 redundant Australian journalists in this study was 49.1 years old, with a range of 24 to 69 years old, and the average time spent working in journalism was 25.7 years, with a range of experience from one to 44 years. In terms of gender and cultural representation, 50.5 percent of respondents were men, 49.5 percent were women and 99 percent spoke English at home. Some 54 percent of the participants had completed an industry cadetship, and over two thirds of them (69.5%) also had tertiary qualifications, including 18 percent with a postgraduate degree.

Not surprisingly, then, the primary concern of most of these redundant journalists was to get back to work. This study reveals that almost all of them succeeded either in finding at least some form of employment, or opting for the alternative pathways of further study or retirement. This means they had relatively better, post-job loss experiences than their laid-off UK counterparts (Nel 2010). However, the majority of respondents did not go back to work full-time in journalism. The most significant finding reported here is that job loss has meant career change for more of these Australian journalists than the number who were able to resume their journalism careers. At the same time, conversely, the majority of respondents reported improved health and well-being after leaving behind workplace stress.

The findings on where journalists found work are discussed in more detail below, together with findings on two other main themes: the emotional challenges of the redundancy experience, and the impact of job loss on professional identity.

Where Do Journalists Go?

The majority of redundant journalists in this study did not resume their full-time journalism careers. While 89 percent of the respondents found employment of some type, only one in four, 28 percent, found new full-time journalism jobs, mostly working as editors, sub-editors or senior reporters. Four respondents mentioned their new jobs required international travel or moving outside Australia (e.g. Hong Kong, Sweden). New employers included both legacy media (e.g. News Corp, Pagemasters, Seven Network, and ABC News 24) and digital media (e.g. Private Media, Politifact, and Write Media). However, not all digital media outlets provided a stable source of employment, with Politifact closing down in December 2013, two months after our pilot survey, due to lack of commercial funding (*mUmBRELLA*, 17 December 2013). For three of the journalists in this cohort, that closure no doubt meant looking for work again, and their outcomes will be monitored via the next New Beats survey.

The rest of the respondents in this study who found work did so either by changing careers or working in a mix of journalistic and other roles, and in many cases they were employed on part-time contracts or as freelancers. Three percent of respondents were unemployed and actively seeking work at the time of our survey in September-October 2013. Another eight percent indicated they were out of the labour market either because they had enrolled in higher education, retired, or did not want to work due to other personal circumstances.

These factors notwithstanding, our findings indicate Australian journalists had a significantly higher re-employment rate when compared to their counterparts in the UK press. In Nel's (2010) study of 144 British journalists laid-off in 2008 and 2009, some 42 percent of respondents were unemployed and still looking for work in January 2010; only 18 percent had found new full-time jobs in journalism and almost one quarter of those had moved to the Middle-East or Europe to secure the work (Nel 2010, 29).

Yet, leaving the profession and changing careers is a factor contributing to this higher re-employment level amongst these Australian journalists. Significantly, in this study, the decision to leave the profession after job loss was more often intentional than circumstantial. Two-thirds of the 68 respondents no longer working in journalism indicated they chose to leave the profession, while the rest of that group wanted to keep working in journalism, but reported they were unable to find employment opportunities in the industry. A handful of them further specified they did not have the necessary digital media skills to get the journalism jobs on offer. An unforeseen if predictable consequence of this decision by redundant journalists to leave the profession was the post-job loss drop in union membership: while 79 percent of respondents were MEAA members in 2012, only 36 percent were still members of the union at the time of the survey (September-October, 2013).

So, who employs former journalists? Where did they go? In this study, the corporate communications and higher education sectors were the key employers. The most common job titles for those who had changed careers were media manager, media officer and media advisor, or university lecturer and tutor. Some 19 percent of respondents found work in PR, 15 percent had jobs in universities, eight percent were working for public companies, and six percent had obtained positions in government or trade unions. The remaining 13 percent of this group of respondents reported a mix of roles that typically combined some type of freelance journalism (writing, photography, editing or design roles) with part-time, casual or self-employed work in another industry sector.

Deuze (2007) argues life-long journalism careers are in decline as media work is increasingly characterised by "portfolio worklife", based on precarious employment, flexibility, de-skilling and re-skilling, and networking (100). A readiness to be flexible

appears to be a second factor contributing to the relatively favourable re-employment outcomes of the Australian journalists in this survey, which found respondents across the cohort had exchanged stable, long-term, well-paid work in Australia's major metropolitan daily newsrooms for jobs that were less secure and more poorly paid. For example, journalists who resumed their careers often did so by accepting demotion: while the most common pre-redundancy job titles were senior editor, section editor or deputy editor, the most common titles for those working in journalism post-redundancy were editor, sub-editor or senior reporter, with only a handful still working at higher levels of newsroom management.

Furthermore, income reduction was a common, significant, negative by-product of these new forms of employment, with 67 percent of respondents in all types of paid employment reporting they were earning less than they did in their previous newsroom job; only 20 percent reported earning more, and the rest earning about the same. Estimates of 20 to 30 percent less earnings were included in the comments' field for this question. However, as respondents were not asked to provide detailed salary information, precise details on changes in income are not available, a limitation of the study acknowledged above. Nevertheless, this is a sobering finding. It confirms results from Nel's (2010) study of laid-off British journalists, which found widespread money worries amongst survey respondents, including 50 percent listing financial problems associated with income reduction or unemployment (Nel 2010, 38).

Intriguingly, in contrast, job loss and re-employment precipitated notable positive lifestyle changes amongst the majority of the survey cohort, who reported improved well-being associated with leaving stressful workplaces, enjoying better working conditions, and achieving a better work/life balance. Some 55 percent of respondents who were working reported their working conditions had improved. Many of these mentioned feeling healthier than before because they had more free time, and used it to exercise, go to the gym, cook healthy food, relax, or just enjoy life. The following quote sums up the feeling of those who linked their re-employment experiences to positive lifestyle change:

"I work a lot from home, I make my own rules and decisions, and I don't have a third of the stress I had in my last job. That was an impossible workload, with minimal or no support from a misogynistic management. My life now is creative, stimulating and purposeful. My health has no doubt improved due to reduced stress levels, my income is more or less the same, although less regular, and my well-being has skyrocketed. I can think of no negatives in my experience" (Respondent 38).

In the experience of this respondent, any problems associated with less frequent income were more than offset by a range of positive outcomes associated with career change and re-employment.

Yet, as Deuze (2007) reminds us, individualised work options, flexible working conditions, and portfolio workstyles are fundamentally "precarious" or insecure forms of employment, although they can be seen in different lights as delivering both personal gains (e.g. opportunities for creative autonomy, better work-life balance, finding new identities) as well as unfortunate and unforeseen consequences (e.g. insecurity, end of career aspirations, loss of belief and hope in the future) (22-23). It is therefore important to look in more detail at the varying ways the redundant journalists in this study experienced job loss.

Making Sense of Job Loss

According to Gabriel, Gray, and Goregaokar (2013) job loss is particularly traumatic for older workers, including professionals in their fifties, because unemployment is typically unexpected, and can have "catastrophic" effects on their lives, forcing them to negotiate the

“flexible employment patterns” and “contingent workforces” on the rise across the global economy, and to deal with problems of lost careers, identity fragmentation, reduced circumstances, and confusing feelings such as shock, grief, stigma and shame (57-58). In their longitudinal study of unemployed managers and professionals, these scholars explored the concept of “narrative coping”, that is, the idea of making sense of traumatic experiences and intransigent emotions through storytelling, as a framework for analysing the long-term effects of job loss (Gabriel, Gray, and Goregaokar 2013). The New Beats pilot survey took an initial step in this direction by asking the redundant journalists to talk about their 2012 redundancy experience, and issues arising from that experience. This section focuses on the answers to those two direct, open-ended questions. The answers provide preliminary insights into the respondents’ emotional responses to the trauma of job loss, responses that we plan to investigate in more detail in subsequent New Beats surveys.

This study confirms the assertion found in the research literature that job loss is very unsettling for older professionals: two thirds of respondents in this study expressed negative feelings about their 2012 job loss, including sadness, relief, anger, disillusionment, betrayal, guilt, elation, resignation, and anxiety. The two unemployed journalists in the survey cohort were in the most difficult position, as the following quote from one of them indicated: *“Still unemployed, depressed somewhat and feeling worthless — with not much hope of getting back in the industry”* (Respondent 85). Results from the UK study mirror this finding from the Australian study, as 62 percent of British respondents indicated that job loss had been a very negative experience, leaving them “hurt”, “miserable”, or even heartbroken (Nel 2010, 36); one contributing factor appears to be that 59 percent of respondents had expected to work in newspaper journalism until retirement before being laid-off (Nel 2010, 33).

Conversely, 18 percent of the Australian respondents reported positive or neutral emotions when talking about their redundancy experiences, including the journalist who applied for redundancy because it offered *“the chance for some time off”* (Respondent 24), another who saw it *“as an opportunity to move on and do something else”* (Respondent 9), and a third who felt *“it was time for a break”* after two decades of working the nightshift (Respondent 17). The following statement captures the most poignant reaction amongst this group: *“To some extent [redundancy] was liberating, freeing me from a place of endless mourning. In other respects it was dispiriting. I’d rather be a journalist than a former journalist”* (Respondent 58).

Gabriel, Gray, and Goregaokar’s (2013) study suggests one measure of the trauma of job loss experiences is that professionals clearly remember what happened, even long after the event (62). In this study, the three most common recollections producing negative reactions to the redundancy experience were anxiety over making the decision to apply for redundancy, sadness at leaving long-term workplaces, and conflicted feelings about moving on to the next phase of life. These will be examined in more detail.

“Making the decision” is a very interesting moment in this study, because almost all of the 95 journalists who completed our survey left their jobs through a *voluntary redundancy process* (85) rather than *forced dismissals* (10). The reason for this is that at the time they departed newsrooms there were union-enforced collective agreements in place, which stipulated that in the case of industry restructuring, voluntary redundancies with severance pay allowances, had to be offered before lay-offs (see, for example, Fairfax Media – Metropolitan Journalists Collective Agreement 2011-2013, archived on the MEAA website, www.alliance.org.au). Journalists in the British press industry are typically supported by similar collective agreements, achieved through the advocacy of the National Union of Journalists, but there is no data on the rate of voluntary redundancies in Nel’s (2010) study, as the topic was not canvassed in that survey.

Most of the respondents in the Australian study who left print journalism jobs in 2012 benefited from this type of agreement, although, as one journalist pointed out, *“it was voluntary, but in the same way as getting on a lifeboat from the Titanic also would be voluntary”* (Respondent 77). Another journalist said many staff applied for redundancy in 2012 because they believed it was their last chance to get a decent severance payment from their company under this type of union agreement (Respondent 5). A third journalist claimed *“it was impossible to ignore the option to take the money and run”* because *“the working environment had become so toxic over the years leading up to the redundancy round”* (Respondent 7). Nonetheless, for the Australian journalists in this study, applying for voluntary redundancy was typically a tough decision, as this veteran journalist explained:

The decision to apply for redundancy was agonising. I had spent most of my working life with the same company. I really liked my job (even if it did shit me at times) and I loved the people I worked with. I was a well-respected and well-liked member of staff. I was good at my job. I didn't really know how to do anything else, and there were going to be a lot of people out there fighting over the same jobs. On the flip side, with at least 70 people walking out the door, the paper was never going to be the same again. Despite all the assurances from management, quality would suffer. How could it not? I had many sleepless nights tossing up all sorts of scenarios. I changed my mind every other day. In the end, I decided to go (Respondent 27).

Poor management of the process was one factor that made the decision-making more stressful for various respondents. A major complaint was the lack of transparency about which redundancy applications would be accepted, a problem that led to both unhelpful speculation – *“they were targeting long-serving, mostly high paid staff; they clearly wanted to keep productive, cheaper workers”* (Respondent 6) – and unnecessary anxiety, as this veteran journalist explained: *“Time of great anxiety. Had to make the decision to go and then wait in limbo until they finally decided I could go. After 22 years with one employer, I believe I was quite institutionalised”* (Respondent 43). In some cases, journalists’ right to fair treatment and severance pay entitlements was only achieved through union intervention and advocacy, as this journalist explained:

Applying for a voluntary redundancy was one of the hardest decisions of my life. The actual process was made unnecessarily difficult by the company, which never “officially” acknowledged there was a redundancy process underway. If not for the MEAA becoming involved, informing staff, and tying the company down to a redundancy process, people like myself would have been operating in the dark. Being accepted for a voluntary redundancy by my employer was a mixture of relief, and regrets that left a knot in my stomach (Respondent 53).

The moment of “leaving” long-term workplaces turned out to be an emotionally wrenching experience for most of the journalists. Many talked of sadness, a feeling that was intensified for those who walked out the door on their last day “without a word of thanks”, by unexpected hurt. The memory of being under-valued by employers in this way remained vivid for some respondents, as described by this journalist:

I was told three days before I finished that my redundancy application had been approved. No editor spoke to me about my record on the paper, let alone thanked me. On my last day at work, I edited two pages of foreign news, had a page one by-line, did my job and then signed off, with a mixture of relief, guarded optimism, professional pride - and anger (Respondent 77).

The process of “moving on” from job loss was dogged by even more intense and messy emotional reactions, in part because respondents, in many cases, had decided to leave the

profession, change careers, or seek work in other sectors. One respondent captured the complexity of feelings in this telegraphic statement:

Bewilderment that younger, inexperienced people were kept to do jobs they were not qualified for; anger that loyalty had been so betrayed; despair since, at my age, my job prospects had diminished; relief at having departed such a toxic environment and at size of payout; happy since so much stress had been relinquished (Respondent 88).

Another journalist articulated clearly and concisely the underlying source of the emotional turmoil, that is, that the trauma of individual job loss was amplified by the sense of leaving a newspaper industry in seemingly terminal decline:

It was a mixed experience emotionally. I was glad of the opportunity for a new career start, and very happy with the financial payout. But the circumstances that gave rise to it are depressing -- a newspaper industry in seemingly terminal decline. I worry for the fate of younger people who have started careers in newspapers in the past decade. I feel fortunate to have started out in journalism in better times (Respondent 2).

One of the most consistent reactions amongst our respondents was their anger over the fact that redundancy had become the least-worst option, because market pressures and deteriorating working conditions in newsrooms were destroying their profession in front of their eyes. As one journalist explained: *"I loved my time as a journalist but felt the ethics and standards were being eroded by the grab for cheap headlines and money. Serious journalism was regarded as a joke"* (Respondent 45). Another journalist pointed to steady decline over time, saying *"Being told to do more with less for years took its toll on the people left doing the work, and there was no sign that things would improve any time soon"* (Respondent 7). A third journalist associated leaving with the irreconcilable differences that cause the breakdown of relationships: *"Staying seemed a stupid choice —particularly in light of the uncertain media future— but leaving was awfully, dreadfully hard, one of the most difficult decisions I've ever had to make, as heart-wrenching as a relationship break up"* (Respondent 20). The journalist in this last example suggested leaving the job provided a means of regaining some professional self-respect:

I was ready to go: the paper's reactionary stance on everything from climate change to gender equality and its willingness to more and more tamper with news stories to give them a partisan edge, was causing me a lot of anguish. I felt as if I was complicit in the paper's headlong descent into journalistic debauchery, so I was ready to go (Respondent 91).

These feelings took time and effort to process and resolve. One journalist questioned the role and responsibility of news companies, arguing *"there was not enough emotional care for myself and others who lost their professional career and livelihoods"* (Respondent 59). Several respondents indicated that they were still struggling to come to terms with their experience; in effect, they were saying they were stuck, that there was no "moving on", at least for the time being.

Professional Identity

This study found evidence of what Witschge and Nygren (2009) describe as the "weakening" of professional identity amongst the redundant Australian journalists, a trend well captured by one respondent, who asked, rhetorically, *"who are we if we no longer work at the paper?"* (Respondent 19). Some 42 percent of respondents said their identity had been affected by job loss, although one third of these reported that their initial fears had turned out to be groundless, including the journalist who stated, *"I miss my old job but my old job doesn't exist anymore...I haven't stopped being a journalist, I just don't work for News Corp anymore"* (Respondent 69). The other two thirds of respondents in this group had more

negative reactions, and experienced loss of identity in the aftermath of job loss, a feeling they associated with three adverse developments: first, career fragmentation; second, the loss of daily routines, institutional backing, access to sources, a recognisable place in the labour market, and public reputation; and, third, the unexpected challenges involved in re-making oneself and creating new identities, either inside the industry or outside the profession, such as finding a new vocation or passion, regaining a sense of purpose, motivating oneself, or finding new colleagues. As this list suggests, loss of identity was experienced by respondents still working in journalism, although it more commonly affected those who had left the profession or changed careers.

In contrast, The UK study of laid-off journalists found professional identity was an on-going source of pride, passion, and satisfaction amongst the laid-off British journalists, most of whom remained “deeply committed to their profession” despite general pessimism about the future of the industry and their own poor job prospects (Nel 2010, 21).

This variation in perceptions of journalistic identity, in the context of changes to journalism work and organisation in Australia and the UK, is interesting because it evokes the vexed dynamics of a “profession under pressure” identified by Witschge and Nygren (2009), who argue journalistic values and identities are both weakening and fading under the force of de-professionalization associated with “web journalism”, *and* reasserting themselves as resilient and relevant to the new media environment (57). While redundant journalists, by definition, may seem to hold a position at the margins of this struggle between new and old forms of journalism, there is one final result from this study that indicates it is not “game over” yet for many of them.

When asked if they were looking forward to being involved in new forms of journalism, this study found 37 percent of the survey respondents said “no” or otherwise indicated disinterest, while a total of 63 percent said “yes” or expressed interest in specific new forms of journalism. These affirmative responses come from both respondents who are still working in journalism and those who have left the profession, or changed careers for now. Some illustrative examples of their interests include the following: “I am now a new media consultant...my next contract is working on a digital start-up” (Respondent 75); “I am very keen to get into any new forms of journalism – it’s just words in a different format” (Respondent 85); and “you need to look outside the box and I’ve found good work through new forms of media, particularly websites” (Respondent 92).

Moreover, 48 percent of respondents reported having advanced digital journalism skill-sets such as, for example, “social media, live blogging and tweeting, embedding videos, basic HTML, building websites, knowing how to make things go viral, etc.”, or “writing for the web, using web content management systems, social media management, video shooting and editing, e-newsletters, blogging, basic HTML”. And, most interesting of all, 52 percent of respondents knew exactly what they wanted to learn next, including “website design and management”, “video editing, blogging and marketing”, and “better understanding of analytics, ROI and SEO — the “business” side of websites and social media”. These digital skills-sets are notable because they combine content production *and* monetisation, and, thus, exemplify and support Picard’s (2014) assertion that journalistic practices and self-perceptions require adaptation and renewal if journalists are to take advantage of new opportunities produced by change in the business of news.

Taken together, these results suggest there is surprisingly more resilience than resignation to be found amongst this cohort of redundant journalists. As one veteran journalist concluded, “*there are many old dogs learning new tricks...the media world is changing...we old farts can help create that world*”. The New Beats project intends to find out whether and how that happens.

Conclusion

This study produced three new and important insights into job loss in journalism, based on a rich set of quantitative and qualitative findings from a pilot survey of 95 Australian journalists who were made redundant in 2012. First, this study draws attention to the significant “brain drain” from Australia’s main newsrooms, in the context of industry restructuring and far-reaching economic and technological changes to journalism work and organisation. This does not appear to be accidental. Rather, employers have opted for the short-term, cost-cutting measure of substantial job cuts from the senior ranks of their newsrooms, instead of a longer-term business strategy of investing in workforce retraining for digital news delivery (Young 2010). While a detailed analysis of the potential and actual impacts of this brain drain is beyond the scope of this article, the concerns articulated by the survey respondents included the lack of mentoring and guidance now available to young journalists, the rise of “traffic-seeking” reporting, and the likely decline in news quality.

Second, despite the sharp decline in print newspaper job openings in the Australian media, this study provides evidence that journalism skills-sets are recognised and valued by a wide range of employers, many of whom were willing to employ redundant journalists who were looking for work outside the industry. And, fortunately, in many cases, the new jobs drew on the professional journalistic qualifications, experience and communication, research and analytical skills of the redundant journalists (if not their news reporting expertise). In contrast, Nel’s (2010) UK study revealed that of the almost one quarter of the laid-off British journalists who had found new employment, 23 percent, were working in jobs that made no self-evident use of their journalistic skill-sets, including shop sales assistant, dentist’s receptionist, coffee shop manager, council administrator, market trader, and charity volunteer (Nel 2010, 29).

Finally, amidst real and growing fears that print journalism is dying because print journalists are losing their jobs in such numbers, this study confirms Witschge and Nygren’s (2009) argument that there are dynamic interactions as well as tensions between old and new forms of journalism, professional values and journalistic identities. More nuanced, complex and contextualised accounts of trends in journalism employment are needed therefore to assuage the fears and develop our understanding of the future of journalism work, and the future of journalists who have lost their jobs.

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