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# **A different breed altogether?**

## **Distinctions between local and metropolitan journalism cultures**

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### **Abstract**

While a number of scholars have explored the special exigencies of local as opposed to metropolitan journalism, rarely have studies examined such differences in relation to journalism culture as constituted by journalists' professional views. To address the gap in our knowledge, this study reports results from a representative survey of local and metropolitan newspaper journalists in Australia. Findings suggest that territorial context accounts for some significant differences in journalists' demographics, as well as their role perceptions. In line with past research, local newspaper journalists exhibit much stronger support for the community forum and advocacy role. At the same time, and contrary to expectations, there is very little difference in their support of the watchdog role compared with metropolitan journalists. By combining questions about journalistic ideals and enactment in their work, and finding differences in the two, this study also has important implications for the methodological development of survey studies.

### **Keywords**

community, journalism, local, metropolitan, professional views, regional, role perception, survey

### **Introduction**

Journalism as it is practised outside metropolitan centres is still one of the least researched fields of journalism studies. Yet, the transformations that are taking place in journalism across the world, brought on by technological, economic and cultural developments, have not only affected the large and well-known news organizations that have so often been the subject of scrutiny. Invariably, smaller organizations, such as local and regional newspapers, television and radio stations, have also been affected by these wider societal shifts, although perhaps to differing extent. Research on local journalism has suggested employees of local media may be a "different breed altogether" (Pretty 1993, 117), with ample evidence outlining their function as a forum and advocate for local communities. At the same time, most existing studies have tended to study local media in and of themselves, rather than in a direct comparative perspective with metropolitan media. Studying local journalism culture is important, as "local journalism is part of the social cement which binds communities together and is widely and rightly viewed as an essential element in the construction of local identity" (McNair 2006, 37).

This paper aims to address these issues by exploring contrasts between local and metropolitan journalists' professional views in Australia, a country with a particularly vibrant local media, which has been the subject of a number of studies in the past. Hence, there are ample opportunities for putting results into the context of local as well as international studies, and to provide food for thought for researchers in other countries. The paper draws

on the first representative survey of Australian journalists conducted in more than 20 years. It extracts the answers of journalists working for local and metropolitan newspapers (N=314) and identifies differences in demographic composition, as well as their respective role perceptions through both qualitative and quantitative means. This latter aspect, it will be demonstrated, is an important methodological aspect of this study as it points out one way in which differences between journalistic ideology and practice can be taken into account and even measured to some extent in survey studies.

### **Exploring territorial journalism cultures**

The study of journalism culture has become a central concern for scholars across the globe in recent years. While studies of journalists' professional views have always been a mainstay of the journalism studies field, the large-scale comparative work overseen by Weaver (1998), Weaver and Willnat (2012), as well as Hanitzsch et al. (2011), has provided the field with a large body of evidence and somewhat of a new impetus. Many studies of journalism culture have tended to focus on the national level for analysis, although some argue that it may be more meaningful to concentrate on differences in journalistic culture within nation states, rather than across them. Hanitzsch (2006, 171) identifies six potential classifications, which include territorial, essentialist, milieu-specific, value-centred, organizational and professional journalism cultures. This paper concentrates on the first of these classifications in aiming to determine whether the geographic location of journalists is related to any significant differences in journalistic culture. In doing so, it focusses on differences between local and metropolitan journalism. This distinction in terms of geographic location has received renewed interest in recent years, and, as the following review shows, provides ample food for thought in considering differences in journalistic culture within nations.

It should be noted at the outset that there is considerable disagreement in the literature about terminology when it comes to local journalism (see Hess 2013, 49-51; Richards 2013, 628). News organisations which serve areas outside large metropolitan centres have invariably been called 'community' (Lauterer 2006), 'country' (Pretty 1993), 'local' (Franklin 2006a), 'regional' (Richards, 2013), or 'rural' (Bowd, 2010) media. One common approach in the past – particularly in the US context – was Lauterer's (2006) definition of community newspapers as those in a distinct geographic space, with a local focus and with circulations of less than 50,000 copies. In Australia, Kirkpatrick (2001) used 'community journalism' to cover both suburban and provincial non-daily newspapers. However, Hess (2013, 50) notes that the term community media is now typically "used to describe and theorise alternative, independent underground and radical media, particularly public broadcasting, blogging and internet sites", whose communities are not determined by their geographic location but rather "united by participation, activity or points of view". 'Regional' or 'rural' journalism are also terms used in discussions of journalism outside metropolitan centres, and are often meant to denote "a 'smaller' version of the journalism practised in major cities, with few, if any, distinguishing characteristics beyond the size and scope of its audience" (Bowd 2010, 2). The term 'local' journalism is typically used in more recent discussion of small newspapers outside metropolitan areas, but even here Hess (2013, 51) notes there is some confusion as to whether 'local' refers to geographic territory or a people-orientation. In doing so, she points to Franklin's (2006b) in-depth discussion of the problems around the 'local' in local journalism, which will be explored further below. While there is, in light of these terminological discussions, an argument to be made for a recasting of the term (Hess 2013), this paper will refer to local journalism because it is the description most widely

used thus far. It is important, however, to note that the use of local is here merely related to geographic location in consideration of territorial journalism culture.

### **Local journalists' professional views and working conditions**

A recurring and key aspect of journalism in news organizations outside metropolitan centres is the importance of providing local news. A vast array of literature has focussed on this 'localness' of local news, to the extent that we can call it a *raison d'être* of local journalism. Hurst and Provis (2000, 2) note that "the demands of country newspapers differ from those of the capital cities in that local news is the highest priority", and Kirkpatrick (2001, 21) has argued that local audiences demand very local information in their newspapers: "When you work on a community newspaper you soon absorb the message that the everyday life of the community is of interest to your readers". More than 20 years ago, a study of Australian country newspaper journalists had found strong support for the "community integration hypothesis", arguing that country journalists were "a different breed altogether" (Pretty 1993, 117). These journalists were more involved in local community groups, had greater knowledge of and higher regards for their readers compared with other journalists around the country. They also focussed heavily on the local community in their answers, noting that it was important to play a role in building community consensus and focussing on providing local information and serving the local community. Journalists were less likely to support the adversary function, but exhibited stronger support for the neutral information function (Pretty 1993). A similar trend has also frequently been mentioned in the British context (Aldridge 2007).

Yet, recent evidence suggests that local journalists may not actually be as much in tune with their audiences as they like to proclaim. Franklin (2006c) notes that the trend towards larger, centralised district newspaper offices, which are located on cheaper sites outside of towns, has taken journalists away from readers and local people. A study of three British local newspapers also showed sourcing trends similar to metropolitan newspapers (Ross 2006). Ross believes that one possible explanation could be "that notions of newsworthiness and source credibility, which have traditionally privileged these particular perspectives, exert a stronger influence than a desire to more accurately reflect the views or seek the opinions of their local constituency in all their vast diversity" (2006, 243). O'Neill and O'Connor's (2008) study of four British local newspapers found the percentage of local readers as sources to be at a mere 5 per cent. They argue that "as a passive recipient of information rather than an active investigator, the local journalist is not keeping an ear to the ground and interacting with the local community" (O'Neill and O'Connor 2008, 498).

An important aspect is the influence of local politicians and business people, which can make for a more problematic environment due to local journalists' proximity to these interests (Richards, 2013), and their inclination to advocate for local community interests. Harrison (2006) traces the evolution of local council communication departments and outlines a number of ways in which these provide copy ready to be used by local news outlets. Increasingly, it appears that such local government press officers are able to control the message as local journalists rely on them heavily for information. A content analysis of four West Yorkshire newspapers' stories showed that these exhibited "a significant unquestioning reliance on council press officers or press releases" (O'Neill and O'Connor 2008, 493). Studies in the US have also shown that local newspapers tend to enforce local authority (Paletz, Reichert and McIntyre 1971; Smith 1987; Zimmer 1983). Such developments have led Franklin (2006c, 13) to believe that "the established local newspaper groups have little ambition to disrupt the local networks of economic and political power into which they are so closely integrated". Kirkpatrick (1998, 100) has also pointed out that

historically the different purpose of the local press in providing local representation meant journalists tended not to be “card carrying members of the Fourth Estate”. This would suggest lower support for journalism’s watchdog function among local journalists.

In fact, local journalists tend to see themselves as “community promoters and advocates, often highlighting achievements by local businesses or entrepreneurs” (Bowd 2011, 76). Walker (1976, 176) has pointed to the important principle of vigorous promotion and social advancement of the local town and district, a function also found in the early years of white settlement in North America (Altschull 1990). Studies of US editors have shown that smaller newspapers in local areas are more likely to focus on community affairs and local leadership (Gladney 1990), while others have found them to be less inclined to focus on negative news (Donohue, Olien, and Tichenor 1989; Olien, Donohue, and Tichenor 1968; Zimmer 1983). Indeed, the tendency by local newspapers to avoid controversial reporting was found as far back as 50 years ago in the US (Janowitz 1952). A content analysis of local newspapers in Australia also showed that news values such as ‘community expansion’ and ‘communal rites’ were much more prevalent than ‘conflict’ or ‘sensation’ (Vine 2001). This tendency, it has been argued, has led to significantly different journalistic cultures developing in local areas, prompting Bowd to point out that “while country newspaper journalism incorporates elements of conventional journalism, it has also evolved in ways which appear to have more in common with non-Western forms of journalism than with the journalism practised in major Australian cities” (2003, 117). In fact, she sees more similarities with objectives of development journalism than traditional Western journalism. Similarly, Kirkpatrick believes local newspapers have a role to play in providing an alternative: “In many instances, the community newspaper is communicating the good news that nothing terrible has happened in the past week whereas the metropolitan daily has communicated all the bad news...” (2001, 21). Kaniss (1991) has criticised this advocacy approach, referring to it as “cheer-leading boosterism” that runs the risk of ignoring faults in the community.

Among the key influences deemed to have a special impact on local journalism is the economic environment. While in the past, local newspapers in Britain tended to be enormously profitable, recent times have seen a more precarious environment, with Franklin (2006c, 4) noting the decline in the number of newspapers, and strong declines in circulation. Increasingly, local papers have been merged into larger newspaper chains, and there has been a number of job cuts in trying to maintain economic efficiency, as well as lower salaries. In fact, the consolidation of ownership of local newspapers into media groups is a feature across many European countries and elsewhere (Williams 2006). Advertising influences may also be stronger in local areas. Richards (2013, 629) points to the undue influence that local advertisers may have on journalists, “because offending them could lead to the withdrawal of advertising”. In a small region with limited economic resources, pressures to conform with advertisers and avoid asking the hard questions are likely to be greater (Franklin 2006c; Richards 2013). Even more than 25 years ago, Donohue, Olien, and Tichenor’s (1989) study of US editors had found those in small newspapers placed a higher priority on advertising. Similarly, Australian country journalists placed a high value on ensuring the local economy was doing well (Pretty 1993, 111).

Franklin (2005, 2006a) points to a transformation in British local newspapers’ news values in recent times. He notes that local journalism in Britain has seen a “shift away from the perception of local newspapers as central to the local political life of communities and a vital ingredient in local democracy, to an understanding of local newspapers as businesses in which the achievement of profit and a preoccupation with the bottom line too readily trumps any journalistic ambition” (Franklin 2006b, xxi-xxii).

Despite the range of research which exists in terms of local journalism’s special exigencies, there are surprisingly few studies which directly compare it with metropolitan

journalism. In Australia, the last such attempt was conducted more than 20 years ago, and in other contexts local journalism is often studied within itself, rather than comparatively. Thus, in order to assess differences in local and metropolitan journalism cultures, two research questions were developed.

RQ1: To what extent, if any, do local and metropolitan newspaper journalists' demographic profiles and work conditions differ?

RQ2: What are the differences and similarities in local and metropolitan newspaper journalists' role perceptions?

It should be noted that this study only examines newspaper journalism, for two reasons. First, the vast majority of past studies in this field have focused on newspapers, allowing for better comparison of results. Second, including broadcast journalists would complicate the analysis by introducing public service broadcasting, which is a particularly important service in regional Australia. This would necessitate additional analysis between public and private journalism cultures, which is beyond the scope of this paper.

### **Methodology**

This paper focusses on local journalism in Australia, a country which has a long history in local journalism, brought about by the "tyranny of distance" (Pretty 1993) that has seen its population spread around the continent, while maintaining a number of large metropolitan centres. Colonization resulted in numerous local newspapers set up in order to ensure local representation (Kirkpatrick 2000), and there has always been a strong divide between local and metropolitan journalism. Australia thus provides a vibrant local journalism environment, which, it is hoped, will be of use for local journalism researchers in other countries due to the fact that many of the issues apply across borders.

The analysis draws on a sub-sample from a representative survey of 605 Australian journalists, conducted between May 2012 and April 2013 (see Hanusch 2013), and which was part of the cross-national project *Worlds of Journalism Study* ([www.worldsofjournalism.org](http://www.worldsofjournalism.org)). Journalist studies have a long history in Australia, dating back more than 50 years (Hudson 1963), although the first large-scale, representative survey was only conducted in the early 1990s (Henningham 1993, 1994). It was followed by a number of other studies, most of which suffered from small sample sizes or only examined sub-sections of journalists (Schultz 1998; Brand and Pearson 2001; Forde 1999; Nicholson, Zion, and Lowden 2011; Hanusch 2012; North 2012; Josephi and Richards 2012). Thus, the present study constitutes the first large-scale, representative survey of Australian journalists in more than 20 years.

In deciding who is a journalist, the definitions from seminal studies in the field (for example, Hanitzsch et al. 2011; Weaver and Wilhoit 1986; Weaver and Willnat 2012) were employed. Accordingly, a journalist for the purpose of this study was someone who has some editorial responsibility over news content. Only professional journalists were surveyed, which meant respondents had to earn at least 50 per cent of their income from paid work for news media and had to be involved in producing and editing journalistic content, editorial supervision or coordination. This also included freelance journalists, who had been excluded from other, similar studies (for example, Henningham 1993; Weaver et al. 2007). It also included so-called 'alternative media', such as Indigenous and ethnic news organisations, community radio stations, as well as alternative online news sites.

In sampling news organisations, letters were posted to a representative sample of 290 news organisations, requesting information on staff numbers and names. Due the low response rate (11.7 per cent), follow-up phone calls were made, which raised the response rate to 26.5 per cent, although most only supplied staff numbers. As a result, further sources were consulted, such as by-lines on news stories published in print and online, information published by government agencies and trade publications, academic sources, as well as news media stories. From the available information, random staff lists were generated across all sampled news organisations. Subsequently, the sample was stratified to be representative of the distribution of journalists working in various media categories, such as metropolitan newspapers, regional newspapers, metropolitan radio stations, and so on. A total 676 journalists were sampled, with telephone surveys conducted by trained research assistants between May 2012 and March 2013. The response rate was 89.5 per cent, resulting in a final sample of 605 journalists. Of these, 314 worked primarily as newspaper journalists for local or metropolitan organisations – 51.9 per cent of the total sample.

In deciding whether journalists should be counted as local or metropolitan, the measures used by the Audit Bureau of Circulations ([www.auditedmedia.org.au](http://www.auditedmedia.org.au)) were used. Any journalists working for one of Australia's 22 metropolitan and national newspapers located in Adelaide, Brisbane, Canberra, Darwin, Hobart, Melbourne, Perth and Sydney were categorised as metropolitan journalists. Those working for regional daily newspapers, the non-daily country press, newspapers with an agricultural focus, as well as suburban newspapers (a total of 355 newsrooms) were categorised as local journalists. This followed past studies' categorisations of what would count as local journalism (see Bowd 2010; Kirkpatrick 2001; Vine 2012). Based on the scoping exercise conducted earlier, it was estimated there would be around 2,500 metropolitan and 1,700 local journalists across the country.

### *Measures*

To examine the research questions, journalists were asked a number of questions that related to their professional backgrounds. To explore their professional views, journalists were asked two specific questions, with the first one aimed at providing a qualitative dimension about journalism's aims. The open-ended question asked: "Please tell me, in your own words, what should be the three most important roles of journalists in Australia?" Respondents' answers were subsequently coded into themes for further comparison. While this question was likely to measure journalistic ideals more generally, a second was asked encouraging journalists to reflect directly on their own work. It stated: "Please tell me how important each of these things is in your work". A total of 21 role descriptions – drawn from previous studies of journalists' role perceptions (Weaver et al. 2007; Hanitzsch et al. 2011) – followed, and respondents were requested to indicate the extent of their importance on a 5-point Likert scale, ranging from extremely important (5) to unimportant (1). These two types of questions were asked in order to address the previously raised issue of the gap between role perception and role performance or role enactment (Mellado and Van Dalen 2013; Tandoc, Hellmueller and Vos 2012). Aspects such as desirability bias, with journalists 'anticipating' ideologically correct answers to questions, have long presented problems for researchers in the field, and measuring this gap is immensely difficult. One way to at least partly address it is to ask journalists about role perceptions, and then ask them how often they are able to enact them in their work (Ramaprasad and Rahman 2006; Ramaprasad and Hamdy 2006). This study differs slightly from that approach. Rather than asking journalists about how important certain roles are and how often they enact these roles, we asked journalists qualitatively what the three most important roles should be (*ideal roles*), before asking them

to rate a number of roles as to how important they were in their work (*enacted roles*). By providing an open-ended question about ideal roles it was hoped that concepts would be generated with less bias as journalists were asked to volunteer, rather than merely agree or disagree with certain prescribed roles. In this way, too, concepts may come to the fore that had not been considered in the quantitative items.

## Results and discussion

### *Demographics of local and metropolitan journalists*

As noted, a total of 314 newspaper journalists were interviewed for this study. Of these, 172 were classified as metropolitan, and 142 as local journalists. In exploring respondents' backgrounds more closely, Table 1 demonstrates some significant differences in their demographic composition.

--- Table 1 around here ---

Firstly, in line with the literature on local journalism, we can see a highly significant difference in the average age of local and metropolitan journalists. The mean difference is just over five years, with local journalists in their mid-30s, while their metropolitan counterparts are almost 40 years old on average. Local journalism has long been a training ground for journalists who end up moving to the cities, and the results appear to support this fact. This effect can be considered medium-size, with Cohen's  $d=.459$ . Related to this is the fact that metropolitan journalists are vastly more experienced, again by around five years on average, once more a medium-sized effect ( $d=.516$ ). As a number of scholars (Franklin 2006c; Pretty 1993) have noted, salaries tend to be quite low in local journalism, and our results support this. Local journalists' salaries rank at 3.48 on a scale of 1-10, as opposed to 5.39 for metropolitan journalists. The effect size for this difference is very large ( $d=1.238$ ). As an indication in monetary terms, a "3" on the salary scale equated to a range between \$36-54,000, while a "5" equated to \$72-90,000. Thus, local journalists appear to be earning roughly \$35,000 less per year, although it would seem their younger age plays a role. In fact, a standard regression analysis shows a number of significant predictors of newspaper journalists' salaries (Table 2).

--- Insert Table 2 around here ---

In combination, journalists' age, geographic location, membership in a professional association, education, type of appointment and gender accounted for a highly significant 53.2 per cent of the variability in salary,  $R^2=.532$ , adjusted  $R^2=.523$ ,  $F(6, 297)=56.37$ ,  $p<.001$ . The results in Table 2 demonstrate that age and geographic location are by far the most important predictors, where 19.1 per cent of the variance in salary can be uniquely attributed to age, and a further 17.3 per cent can be uniquely attributed to geographic location. Type of appointment is also important, with 5.6 per cent of the variance in salary uniquely attributable to whether a journalist is employed full-time or not. Another significant predictor is whether journalists hold a university degree (though only accounting for 0.8 per cent of unique variance). Gender, at 0.6 per cent of unique variance, is just outside the limit of significance ( $p=.052$ ), while membership in a professional association, such as a union, is non-significant.

Other significant differences between local and metropolitan journalists exist in terms of their political beliefs. On a scale of 0 to 10, where 0 is left, most of the newspaper journalists interviewed here position themselves slightly left of centre ( $M=4.31$ ), a result that



is in line with findings in many other countries (Weaver and Willnat 2012). However, local journalists are significantly less to the left than metropolitan journalists, in line with general voting tendencies in Australia, where regional areas tend to be more conservative (Comitatus 2009), as well as past evidence on journalists (Pretty 1993). Cohen's  $d=.363$  indicates that geographic location accounts for a small- to medium-size effect in relation to newspaper journalists' political beliefs. In terms of education, we can also see some differences. While the respective percentages of university-educated journalists are almost the same at around four in five, the results show that the percentage of those who studied specifically journalism is significantly higher in local areas. Here, the percentage is around 70 per cent, as opposed to just over half in metropolitan areas. Cramer's  $V=.173$  indicates a small effect. Reflecting the more multi-cultural nature of Australia's big cities, we also find a significant difference in relation to where journalists were born, with three in four metropolitan journalists born in Australia, as opposed to almost nine out of ten local journalists. Cramer's  $V=.143$  indicates a small effect.

Unionisation is much less prevalent in local areas than in the cities, a finding that is reminiscent of developments in Britain where employers had derecognised union agreements before the National Union of Journalists was able to claw back some of that ground (Gall 2006). The results show that the level of professionalism is roughly 20 per cent lower among journalists in local areas compared to the cities – a small- to medium-size effect ( $V=.208$ ). Even 20 years ago, country journalists were found to be less likely to belong to a union and more likely to hold a lower opinion of them (Pretty 1993, 92). In general, the numbers here point to the decline in journalistic unionisation over the past 20 years. In the early 1990s, Henningham (1996) found that 86 per cent of all Australian journalists were members of a union. Among the newspaper journalists studied here, overall membership in a professional association is only 57.8 per cent, while it is even less (47.8 per cent) for the overall sample of 605 journalists across all media.

A further interesting aspect relates to religious beliefs, where we can find significant differences in the numbers of journalists who consider themselves affiliated with a particular religion. While official statistics do not find many differences in Australians' religiosity in terms of geographic location (Australian Bureau of Statistics 2013), our results indicate that local journalists are significantly more likely to affiliate with a religion ( $V=.119$  indicates a small effect), and more likely to consider religion of religious beliefs important to them (again a small effect,  $d=.270$ ). We could not find any significant differences for two other aspects: First, the levels of full-time employment are comparable, with perhaps a slightly stronger trend towards casualization of the workforce in the cities, although this difference is non-significant. Second, it appears that the difference in the representation of female journalists is not statistically significant, even though the raw data suggest a trend towards a slightly higher number of women local journalists. In either case, women are in the majority among newspaper journalists overall, a significant finding in itself given that historically women had been highly under-represented in Australian journalism (Henningham 1993).

Overall, the results are broadly in line with differences found more than 20 years ago. Back then, country journalists' median age was 27, compared to 32 for all Australian journalists (Pretty 1993). Women were also better represented, with 41 per cent in country newsrooms, compared to 33 per cent overall. Country journalists surveyed by Pretty were also more likely to lean to the right and to practise religion. One difference is the level of education: In 1992, only 22 per cent of country journalists had a university degree, compared with 35 per cent of all Australian journalists. Today, there is little difference in tertiary education levels.

### *Professional views*

### Qualitative analysis

Journalists' responses to the question of what should be the three most important roles of journalists in Australia show a pattern that appears to be very much in line with aspects raised in previous research (Table 3).

--- Insert Table 3 around here ---

While journalists' role to inform was ranked first by both groups and to similar extent, the results show that the theme of community was raised by a significantly larger proportion (40.4 per cent) of local journalists, compared with metropolitan journalists (11.6 per cent),  $\chi^2(1, N=305)=32.18, p<.001$ , with  $V=.333$  suggesting a medium-size association between journalists' support of a community role and their geographic location. Examples of the community theme included statements such as being the voice for a community, engage with the community, a forum for community debate, the need to listen to the community, and to advocate and be a champion for a community. Local journalists also appear more reluctant to support journalism's investigative role, with statements to that effect being made by 9.9 per cent, compared to 24.4 per cent of metropolitan journalists. Again, this is a statistically significant difference ( $\chi^2(1, N=305)=9.91, p<.01$ , although  $V=.189$  suggests the association is quite small. Metropolitan journalists seem to place more importance on the entertainment function, with 28 per cent naming it among journalism's three most important roles, compared with only 9.2 per cent of local journalists. Again, this is statistically significant,  $\chi^2(1, N=305)=16.04, p<.001$ , with  $V=.238$  suggesting a small- to medium-size association. Local journalists were significantly more likely to mention the importance of being accurate in their work,  $\chi^2(1, N=305)=6.17, p<.05$ , but  $V=.149$  suggests this association is quite small. In a similar vein, metropolitan journalists were more likely to mention it was journalism's role to educate,  $\chi^2(1, N=305)=9.67, p<.01$ , but again  $V=.190$  suggests only a small effect.

In contrast to previous evidence that local journalists were less supportive of the watchdog role, the results do show lower numbers of them supporting it, however, the difference is statistically non-significant. Similarly, we could not find any meaningful differences in journalists' support for the need to be objective and fair, to pursue the truth and to provide a voice for people.

### Quantitative analysis

The quantitative analysis of journalists' role perceptions shows some similarities, but also significant differences between local and metropolitan journalists' aims in their work (Table 4).

---Insert Table 4 around here ---

Overall, by far the most important item relates to journalists' role as objective bystanders who merely report events and 'facts', that is, report things as they are. Both local and metropolitan journalists gave this role description the strongest support, although the results in Table 3 show there was significantly more support for this role among local journalists. Cohen's  $d=0.319$ , however, shows this effect is relatively small. A larger difference is indicated for the second-highest ranked item, with local journalists demonstrating stronger support for educating the audience, with the comparison showing a medium-sized effect. Percentage differences are not enormous, however, with 92.2 per cent

of local journalists saying this role was very or extremely important in their work, compared with 85.5 per cent of metropolitan journalists. Surprisingly, the education function was not rated highly in the qualitative statements on what roles should be the most important. As discussed earlier, only 13.4 per cent of metropolitan and a mere 2.8 per cent of local journalists had named this role among their top three. This would suggest a gap between ideal and enacted roles in that journalists focus more on educating audiences than they say they ideally should.

A finding that speaks to a much-observed aspect of local journalism is found in the quantitative results for the role description of letting people express their views. This relates to journalism's role of providing a forum for the community to air their views about local issues, and received significantly higher support among local journalists. Cohen's  $d=0.620$  shows that this is a medium-to-large effect. It is further supported when we consider that 91.6 per cent of local journalists saw this role as very or extremely important in their work, as compared with only 75 per cent of metropolitan journalists. This finding supports existing evidence about the importance of local media as community forums (Kirkpatrick 2001; Pretty 1993), as well as the findings from the qualitative analysis. Promoting tolerance and cultural diversity also appears to be much more important to local journalists, with Cohen's  $d=0.586$  indicating a medium-sized effect. Almost three-quarters (73.2 per cent) of local journalists said this was very or extremely important, compared with only around half (53.5 per cent) of metropolitan journalists. This result is perhaps somewhat surprising, given that cultural diversity is largest in Australia's metropolitan areas, and one might expect metropolitan journalists to be more aware of cross-cultural aspects. At the same time, it may point to the importance in smaller communities for journalists to ensure harmonious relationships between members of those communities. It also relates to evidence from other studies which have suggested that local media avoid sensationalising issues and promote harmony (Janowitz 1952; Vine 2001). In the open-ended responses, however, only very little mention was made of issues that would relate to this aspect, neither for local nor metropolitan journalists.

As discussed earlier, Bowd (2003) has argued that local journalism has some tendencies in common with development journalism in its focus on being an advocate for and supporter of local communities. The results here provide some support for this view in regard to two key role descriptions. First, a medium-sized effect ( $d=0.418$ ) could be found for the difference in local and metropolitan journalists' support for journalism's role to advocate for social change. Among local journalists, 70 per cent thought this role was very or extremely important, but among metropolitan journalists it was only 39.4 per cent. This is in line with Bowd's (2003) argument that local media are more active in terms of campaigning for change in their communities. Second, we also found stronger support among local journalists to support national development – a role perception often associated with development journalism (Romano 1998; Waisbord 2010; Xu 2009). The effect was of similar size ( $d=0.398$ ). In percentage terms, it equates to 41.5 per cent of local journalists regarding it very or extremely important, compared with 24.7 per cent of metropolitan journalists.

The study also found important differences in terms of other aspects of the advocacy role. Local journalists were significantly more likely to want to support government policy and to convey a positive image of political leadership. For supporting government policy, the effect size was even considerable, with Cohen's  $d=0.479$  indicating a medium effect. Such results speak to the scholarly discussion around local journalists being beholden to political power in their communities (Harrison 2006; Kirkpatrick 1998; Pretty 1993; Richards 2013; Zimmer 1983). At the same time, it is important to note that both of these role descriptions were the lowest ranked for each of the two groups. Thus, in terms of their importance relative to other roles, these aspects of the advocacy dimension are overwhelmingly rejected among

both local and metropolitan journalists. This highlights a clarification required around the similarities between local and development journalism. Often, advocacy and watchdog roles are considered mutually exclusive, but the results here point to the fact journalists are able to reconcile them, though with a caveat. To them, advocating for communities and their development also means they need to act as a watchdog on those in power to fulfil these goals. This is similar to the same argument being made in respect of development journalists (Ogan 1982).

In addition, we found some evidence to suggest that local journalists aim to generate stronger political participation in their communities. They were more likely to support the role of providing information people need to make political decisions, as well as to motivate people to participate in political activity. Both of these differences were rather small in size, though they appear to support some of the discussions in the literature. Similarly, local journalists were slightly more likely to want to provide the kind of news that attracts the largest audience, but this effect was also small. Contrary to the responses in the qualitative question, we could not find any significant differences in terms of other market-oriented roles: local and metropolitan journalists exhibited similar levels of support for journalism as the provider of entertainment and relaxation, as well as advice, orientation and direction for daily life. This does contrast with arguments from the literature (Franklin 2006b; Pretty 1993), which have noted a stronger proclivity in local journalism for consumer-oriented news. Similarly, there were no meaningful differences in views of journalism's watchdog role, reinforcing results from the qualitative analysis, with both local and metropolitan journalists supporting it to comparable extent. It appears, then, that local journalists are equally interested in being a check on power, despite their stronger support for an advocacy role. This relates to some of the more recent discussions on development journalism, which note that the watchdog and advocacy role are not necessarily mutually exclusive (see also Pretty 1993).

## **Conclusion**

Scholarship on territorial journalism cultures has a long history, yet direct comparisons between local and metropolitan journalists' professional views are rarely made. This study aimed to contribute to the debate about the extent to which local journalism culture is really different by examining a sample of Australian newspaper journalists. The results show that while some of the assumptions are confirmed, others may require a reassessment and further examination. In terms of their demographic composition, local newspaper journalists in Australia are significantly younger, less experienced, less well paid, less likely to be a member of a professional association, and less left-leaning than their metropolitan counterparts. At the same time, they are more likely to have specialised in journalism at university, and are more likely to consider themselves affiliated with a particular religion, as well as seeing religion as important in their lives. As the in-depth analysis of local journalists' salaries demonstrated, geographic location, as well as age, are important predictors of how well they are paid. This points to a radically different pay structure in regional areas of the country, as local journalists earn roughly \$35,000 less per year than metropolitan journalists. This is a very considerable margin.

In terms of their professional views, respondents' answers to a qualitative question about what should be journalists' three most important roles supported the much-discussed tendency of local journalists to focus more strongly on local communities. Quite clearly, advocating or being a forum for the community was considered as highly important in local areas. In contrast, local journalists were less likely to see a role as investigating issues, as well as entertaining audiences – supporting past evidence (Hanitzsch 2006; O'Neill and

O'Connor 2008), but contradicting more recent assertions that local journalists were becoming more consumer-oriented (Franklin 2006b). A number of studies had pointed to local journalists being less supportive of the watchdog role, but the results here show very little difference between local and metropolitan journalists in this regard.

The analysis of responses to quantitative assessments of role perceptions supported some of these results, in demonstrating stronger support among local journalists for the community forum role and to motivate political participation. Similarly, the watchdog role was equally supported by local and metropolitan journalists, which further reinforces the lack of difference found in the qualitative statements. In line with past studies, local journalists also supported the advocacy role more strongly, and appeared more beholden to political power. Overall, the results reinforce the vast amount of literature in that local journalists express a desire to play a role in their community, to focus on news relevant to it, provide a forum for the community, and to advocate for the community. At the same time, we could not identify a lack of belief in journalism's watchdog role in local areas. In fact, support for it was reasonably similar to that found in metropolitan areas. This would suggest that local journalists or not just mere "lapdogs", but rather want to combine advocacy and watchdog roles. This has important implications for our understanding of how journalists practise these roles, in line with research on development journalism that comes to similar conclusions (Ogan 1982). Hence, local journalists are strong advocates for their communities and for them to be developed, but they also see a need to be a check on local governments to ensure such development takes place.

Are local journalists then still "a different breed altogether", as Pretty (1993, 117) asserted more than 20 years ago? The answer is probably yes and no. While there are some obvious and continuing differences in demographic composition and support for some roles, in some ways local and metropolitan journalists are also very similar. It should be pointed out here that the overall pattern in regards to journalistic culture was largely similar as concerns the individual ranking of items. Hence, while some aspects may be more accentuated in local journalism, such as local media's role as a community forum and agent for change, geography appears to account for relatively minor differences. This would support Franklin's (2006c) argument that local media are becoming less local and more like their metropolitan counterparts. One aspect mentioned only briefly in this paper is the fact that local newspapers are still the primary training ground for journalists, who after a few years tend to move on to metropolitan publications. To what extent, therefore, local journalism cultures may be influencing metropolitan ones, is a question deserving of further research.

In addition to highlighting local journalistic culture in Australia, this study also has important implications for methodological developments of survey studies. A problem in surveys and interviews with journalists has always been the gap between what journalists say, and what they actually do (Tandoc, Hellmueller, and Vos 2012). This is no less a limitation of this study, although to address it at least partly, a qualitative question aimed to capture journalistic ideals by asking what *should* be the most important roles, while the quantitative items asked how important they *actually were* in journalists' work. While this approach still relies on journalists' self-reports, it is interesting to see that there does appear to be a gap in relation to some aspects, such as journalism's entertainment function. Much fewer local journalists said it should be one of the most important roles, yet in the quantitative responses support for this role was almost the same among local and metropolitan journalists. This suggests that an approach of combining questions on journalistic ideals with questions that ask journalists to relate various roles directly to their work may be useful in examining in more depth such differences, while still acknowledging potential desirability biases in results. Clearly, more work needs to be undertaken in this area, however.

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**Table 1: Demographic differences between local and metropolitan journalists**

	<b>Local</b> (N=142)	<b>Metropolita n</b> (N=172)	<b>Total</b> (N=314)	
Age (years)	34.33	39.63	37.23	***
Experience (years)	11.03	16.92	14.26	***
Salary (Scale 1-10)	3.48	5.39	4.51	***
Political stance (Scale 0-10)	4.61	4.07	4.31	**
Gender (female)	61.3%	52.3%	54.8%	
Full-time	93.0%	86.6%	89.5%	
Member in an association	47.9%	68.4%	57.8%	***
University degree	80.3%	81.4%	80.8%	
Specialised in journalism	70.4%	53.5%	61.6%	**
Born in Australia	88.7%	77.9%	81.4%	**
No religion	55.6%	67.3%	60.6%	*
Importance of religion (Scale of 1- 5)	2.19	1.88	2.02	*

\*p<.05; \*\*p<.01; \*\*\*p<.001

**Table 2: Unstandardized (B) and Standardised ( $\beta$ ) Regression Coefficients, and Squared Semi-Partial Correlations ( $sr^2$ ) for each predictor in a regression model predicting newspaper journalists' salary**

Variable	B [95% CI]	$\beta$	$sr^2$	
Age	.079 [.065, .093]	0.495	0.191	***
Geographic location (1=Local newspaper)	-1.604 [-1.904, -1.303]	-0.437	0.173	***
Membership in a professional association (1=Yes)	-2.05 [-.504, 0.94]	-0.055	0.003	
Education (1=Holds a university degree)	.435 [.047, .824]	0.094	0.008	*
Type of appointment (1=Fulltime)	1.512 [1.015, 2.010]	0.246	0.056	***
Gender (1=Female)	-.308 [-.618, .003]	-0.083	0.006	

N=304. CI=confidence interval.

\* $p < .05$ ; \*\*\* $p < .001$ .

**Table 3: Qualitative assessment of the three most important roles of journalists (Top 10 Themes)**

<b>Local Journalists (N=141)</b>		<b>Metropolitan Journalists (N=164)</b>	
Inform	44.7%	Inform	47.0%
Community focus	40.4%	Watchdog	40.9%
Accuracy	33.3%	Entertain	28.0%
Watchdog	32.6%	Investigate	24.4%
Objectivity	19.1%	Accuracy	20.1%
Truth	18.4%	Objectivity	16.5%
Investigate	9.9%	Educate	13.4%
Entertain	9.2%	Truth	11.6%
Public Interest	7.1%	Community focus	11.6%
Advocate	5.0%	Record	6.7%

Note: Up to three mentions per respondent were possible; hence percentages do not add up to 100.

**Table 4: Local and Metropolitan newspaper journalists' role perceptions**

	Metropolitan Journalists		Local Journalists		Total			Effect size <i>d</i>
	<i>M</i>	<i>SD</i>	<i>M</i>	<i>SD</i>	<i>M</i>	<i>SD</i>		
Report things as they are	4.50	.765	4.72	.551	4.60	.683	**	0.319
Educate the audience	4.16	.683	4.48	.702	4.31	.708	***	0.456
Be a detached observer	4.09	.963	4.24	.914	4.16	.943		
Let people express their views	3.84	.999	4.39	.734	4.09	.929	***	0.620
Tell stories about the world	4.09	.926	3.96	1.247	4.03	1.083		
Promote tolerance and cultural diversity	3.52	1.111	4.13	.921	3.80	1.071	***	0.586
Provide the kind of news that attracts the largest audience	3.62	1.104	3.96	.941	3.78	1.046	**	0.332
Provide information people need to make political decisions	3.60	1.171	3.97	1.121	3.77	1.161	**	0.322
Monitor and scrutinize political leaders	3.72	1.290	3.77	1.201	3.74	1.249		
Provide analysis of current affairs	3.67	1.140	3.82	1.074	3.74	1.111		
Monitor and scrutinize business	3.67	1.145	3.64	1.081	3.66	1.115		
Provide entertainment and relaxation	3.49	1.121	3.68	1.062	3.57	1.097		
Advocate for social change	3.18	1.090	3.64	1.123	3.39	1.127	***	0.418
Provide advice, orientation and direction for daily life	2.91	1.139	3.08	1.143	2.99	1.142		
Support national development	2.67	1.178	3.15	1.232	2.89	1.224	***	0.398
Influence public opinion	2.84	1.153	2.69	1.046	2.77	1.107		
Motivate people to participate in political activity	2.58	1.204	2.93	1.201	2.74	1.213	*	0.290
Set the political agenda	2.52	1.212	2.57	1.193	2.54	1.202		
Be an adversary of the government	2.18	1.109	2.23	1.191	2.20	1.146		
Support government policy	1.51	.762	1.89	.826	1.69	.812	***	0.479
Convey a positive image of political leadership	1.55	.852	1.77	.875	1.65	.868	*	0.250

\* $p < .05$ ; \*\* $p < .01$ ; \*\*\* $p < .001$

