Who is a journalist now? Recognising atypical journalism work in the digital media economy

Abstract

For the past two decades, understandings of the scale of digital disruption in journalism work in post-industrialised countries have relied on data about newspaper closures, newsroom job losses, and the creation of new full-time jobs in journalism. Yet, the digital economy has fostered new employment and work arrangements, and there is less secure employment in journalism, making it more difficult to define who is a journalist now. Using a case study of Australian journalists seeking re-employment after newsroom job loss, this article examines some of the emerging patterns of atypical journalism work. It concludes that attempts to measure the current extent of journalism work need to explicitly account for hybrid careers characterised by professional activities at the margins of or outside of traditional newsroom work. In the digital economy, journalists may undertake a range of journalism and non-journalism work simultaneously or sequentially.

Introduction

Two longstanding questions in journalism research and within media industries have been 'who is a journalist?' (Ferrucci and Vos, 2017; Singer, 2019) and 'how many journalists are there?'(Jurkowitz, 2014; O'Regan and Young, 2019). In some critical respects these are becoming more difficult to answer. The 21st century transition to digital media economies has been marked by dramatic shifts in journalistic employment and ways of working under pressure from economic and technological forces, resulting in considerable industry volatility (Authors, 2018; Deuze et al., 2020), that was further heightened by the Covid-19 pandemic's complex and ongoing range of impacts on journalism (Hanusch, 2022).

These developments have complicated research on two topics of pressing concern to the journalism sector globally: first, quantifying occupational changes arising from large-scale newsroom job cuts over more than a decade, and second, assessing growth in reporting capacity related to innovative new forms of digital content production. The literature on change in the journalism sector gives scant attention to shifts of this kind in workforce density and composition, perhaps seen by media companies as an employer prerogative (Author, 2000; Authors, 2022), but such shifts are also influential in shaping news quality and supply (Babington, 2020) and therefore need investigation. Moreover, as automated news

production increases (Beckett, 2019), it is important for journalism scholars, professionals and consumers alike to consider the changing contours of human-produced news (Carlson, 2015; Lewis et al, 2019) including the impact of precarious employment and working conditions (Gollmitzer, 2019) on its supply, and the implications of these changes for public life. While impossible to pin down to a single definition, focusing on the question of who is a journalist will also provide insights into how to engage with the question of what is journalism now.

This article is based on longitudinal data collected by the (name of project) study from four annual surveys of Australian journalists whose roles were made redundant between 2012 and 2014 (Authors, 2018) from what have been characterised as traditional or 'legacy media' newsrooms (Warren, 2020a). We argue that their re-employment and post-redundancy work patterns point to the increasingly porous boundaries between journalism and other forms of work that draw on journalism skill sets, raising new questions about the complexities of creating a threshold definition of who is a journalist now. In so doing, we go beyond the familiar spaces and conventional definitions of news production and types of news work to examine different and distinct ways of being a journalist that may encompass work in multiple roles, organisations, and sectors, both within and external to the media. We further argue that atypical and non-newsroom-centric work arrangements need to be considered in any assessment of the capacities of journalists and journalism to inform citizens and contribute to public debate. This article thus makes an empirically informed contribution to theoretical debates about 'who is a journalist' in the context of ongoing digitally influenced disruption.

Literature Review

The literature review considers continuity and change in journalism employment and work by drawing on three strands of existing research: the framing of large-scale job losses as a crisis, the disconnect between analysis of atypical work and labour market trends, and other conceptual constructs supporting further development of research on atypical work in the digital media economy.

The Job Loss 'Crisis'

The 'crisis in journalism' frame (Franklin, 2012), which was especially prominent in the 2010s, has focused on threats to journalism's traditional business models arising in the context of digital transformation of the media and the Global Financial Crisis (GFC). Typically this framing has highlighted financial challenges due to declines in circulations and lower advertising revenues (Lee-Wright et al, 2012; Paulussen, 2012), changing (and more stressful) work practices arising from digitisation (Reinardy, 2013), the disappearance of thousands of journalism jobs (Franklin, 2012: 665), and the shuttering or 'ghosting' of newspaper titles, leading to 'news deserts' (Abernathy, 2018; Stites, 2018; Public Interest Journalism Initiative, 2020). (Abernathy, 2018; Public Interest Journalism Initiative, 2020; Stites, 2018). A common feature of this approach is the ongoing centrality of the newsroom as the normative (if besieged) locus of journalism, and the persistent use of those working within them as default survey populations (Ekdale et al., 2015; Weaver et al., 2019). Much of the scholarship and commentary on the impact of journalist job loss has been motivated by concerns about the role of journalism in democratic societies that run beyond financial and technological considerations (Luengo, 2014). And in the context of changes to news production, monitoring levels of newsroom employment and journalism job loss through layoffs/redundancies and newspaper closures has contributed to understanding the scale and implications of disruption in news industries and consequent threats to the availability of news to citizens (Downie Jr and Schudson, 2009; Zelizer, 2019).

The Covid-19 pandemic amplified these concerns by triggering a further sharp and sudden decline in advertising revenue globally, leading to the loss of more journalism jobs and news publications in everything from newspapers to online start-ups (Lewis, 2020, 682; Meade, 2020; Radcliffe, 2020, Warren, 2020b). Journalists affected by these developments include not only those who had held permanent newsroom jobs but also freelance and contract journalists, many of whose already precarious livelihoods have been severely impacted by the closure of publications and the slashing of casual budgets (McCluskey, 2020). In Australia, as elsewhere, the impact on regional media has been especially severe (Dickson, 2020), with the loss of local news outlets reducing a sense of belonging in communities (Park and Fisher, 2020).

Australia's world-first News Media Digital Platform Bargaining Code, which was legislated in 2021, introduced a new revenue stream into the funding of public interest journalism by enabling eligible news businesses to bargain individually or collectively with digital

platforms over payment for the inclusion of news on platforms and services (Australian Communication and Media Authority, nd). But while the scheme, which at the time of writing is under review, has led to the funding of some reporting jobs, the distribution of funding has been seen to lack transparency and to favour large companies over smaller and not for profit players (Ketchell 2022). As such, its overall effects are not yet clear.

At the periphery: boundary and atypical work

Growing fluidity around the definitions of journalists (Deuze et al., 2020; Eldride II, 2017; Singer, 2019) and journalism (Lewis, 2019; Steensen and Ahva, 2015) has also complicated the quest to measure the extent of the journalism workforce. (Carlson, 2016; Carlson and Lewis, 2015; Lewis, 2019; Örnebring, 2018; Örnebring and Möller, 2018). Tandoc (2019) examines the increasing influence in news production of actors who might not fit into traditional definitions of a journalist but are taking part in processes that produce journalism, raising definitional questions. He contends that grappling with how to refer to these actors, variously described as interlopers, strangers, new entrants, peripheral and emergent actors, requires reflecting on the assumptions that underlie emerging labels. 'These include: 1) what journalistic tasks are involved; 2) how and why these journalistic tasks are performed; 3) who is making the definition; and 4) where and when these actors are located.' (138). In a three-country case study that includes Australian participants working at digital publications, Schapals et al. (2019) examine what motivates people to work at the periphery or for non-traditional outlets, concluding that motivations are altruistic and that they are preserving, rather than disrupting, the essential functions of journalism (27).

Less considered by researchers is how best to characterise those working across journalism (however defined) and other forms of work, either simultaneously or sequentially. Acknowledging the relevance of such actors, the Worlds of Journalism study (Hanitzsch et al., 2019) which set out to compare journalists' patterns of employment and work across 67 countries, needed a workable definition of 'a journalist' that applied to both Western and non-Western contexts. It settled on 'a somewhat conservative' definition, which excluded non-professional contributors, arguing: 'journalists are individuals who contribute journalistic content to news outlets as either employees or freelancers and who earn at least half of their income from news organizations' (9-10). This benchmark of just half their income does constitute an advance in acknowledging the contemporary realities of precarious work and career portfolios (Örnebring, 2018). At the same time, it also raises questions as to what

kinds of contributions those in hybridised careers make to meeting the information needs of citizens.

The question of who is a journalist has also become more complex for the judiciary, legislators and policy makers who adjudicate media practice as it interfaces with the law. As Johnston and Wallace (2017) argue, 'just "who is a journalist" and "what are the news media" remain works in progress, as courts, legislators and policy makers rethink and reframe the answers to these questions, sometimes controversially and often incorporating fundamental differences of opinion' (862).

The growing problem with labour market trends

A notable consequence of definitions being in flux is that labour market statistics, traditionally intended to serve as barometers of the health of the profession (Pew Research Center, 2019), have become increasingly problematic as tools to measure journalism workforces or reporting capacities. Examples of data-gathering for industry and labour measurement purposes from the USA, UK, Australia and Canada, illustrate some of the growing complexities of the task in the digital era, and, we would add, in the Covid-19 context, where journalists who are equipped to deliver relevant information on the pandemic (and more) could be envisaged as essential workers who require additional support during a crisis (Lewis, 2020).

The USA is one of the few countries where trends in the journalistic labour market and employment statistics for journalists are well-documented (Gollmitzer 2019; Weaver, Willnat, and Wilhoit, 2019). The US Bureau of Labor Statistics' (BLS) Occupational Employment Statistics (OES) survey is an important data-gathering instrument. Drawing on these survey results, the US-based Pew Research Centre has estimated that newsroom employment in the US declined by 25 per cent between 2008 and 2018, driven primarily by job losses in newspapers (Grieco, 2019).

The American Society of News Editors (ASNE) also monitored and published figures estimating total newsroom employment since 1978. In 2015, it calculated a faster rate of workforce decline than previously, estimating that between 2007 and 2015, the number of newsroom employees at daily newspapers fell by 40%, from 55,000 to 32,900 journalists

(Edmonds, 2015). However, in 2016, ASNE announced that it would no longer estimate newsroom job losses because 'the structure of modern newsrooms makes it impractical and error-prone to try to estimate the number of working journalists' (Maskl and Liu, 2016).

But even in this statement, the focus remained on which jobs could be classified as journalism roles *within* newsrooms. A noteworthy trend for research in this area is that what can appear to be contradictory findings in levels of journalism employment can be attributed at least in part to whether the primary unit of analysis is journalistic jobs in traditional workplaces (where numbers are broadly in decline), or individual journalists, many of whom subjectively identify in some way as journalists, but who may be working across a range of roles or in part-time or irregular capacities. This juxtaposition has been exposed in research conducted on the journalistic workforce in the UK and Canada. In the UK, the Office of National Statistics collects data on employment in journalism through its Labour Force Survey. Following a surprise finding that the number of journalists had risen from 65,000 to 73,000 between 2012 and 2017 (Spilsbury, 2018: 14–15), at a time when it was assumed numbers were in decline, the UK-based National Council for the Training of Journalists (NCTJ) commissioned an online survey to further investigate employment patterns and working conditions. It found evidence of journalists' 'dispersion away from the mainstream publishing areas of newspapers and magazines' to other sectors, including broadcasting, PR and communications, and self-employment across a range of platforms, and conceded that some might dispute that all those working in other sectors should be classified as journalists even though they had self-identified as such (6).

In the Canadian context, Wilkinson and Winseck (2019) seek to challenge 'crisis' journalist job loss narratives derived from findings from Canadian journalism unions by analysing data from Statistics Canada, which, they argue, provides a more nuanced view. They find that the number of journalists may have actually increased over time, but with the important caveat that 'it is impossible to tell whether the fluctuating number of journalists are employed at traditional news firms, vertically integrated telecommunications firms that also have some kind of stake in journalism, or new and evolving forms of independent and digital native forms of journalism, or are just people who call themselves journalists' (381). They also acknowledge that 'there may be many unemployed journalists who still call themselves such, even though they may never be paid a stable wage or salary to practise their craft again' and suggest consideration of 'the possibility that jobs not considered journalistic in the traditional

sense (e.g., in the marketing departments of news outlets) are now being staffed by journalists who would still self-identify as such' (382).

In Australia, methodological issues around what kinds of jobs can be classified as journalism roles have also been critical to evaluations of the size of the journalist workforce (see, for instance, Hanusch, 2013: 32) and shifting conceptions about what kinds of roles can be seen to constitute journalism work (Young and Carson, 2018). For example, as part of the national census, every five years the Australian Bureau of Statistics (ABS) collects data on employment 'to provide an authoritative basis for government, workforce and corporate planning', which is then coded by occupation and industry sector (O'Regan and Young 2019, 15). In the 2016 census, journalists were grouped with writers, and found in the newspaper, broadcasting and internet publishing industries. The results were inconclusive, however, because large numbers were classified as journalists and other writers 'nfd' ('not further defined') or 'nec' ('not elsewhere classified'). Furthermore, as O'Regan and Young conclude (2019: 31), census data has not so far provided a way of identifying a specific range of work practices that are categorically aligned with journalism. This demonstrates that the occupational contours of journalist employment established in census data are limited.

In the 2021 Australian census, the 'journalists and other writers' unit group was retained for classification purposes with the following subsets: copywriter, newspaper or periodical editor, print journalist, radio journalist, technical writer, television journalist, and 'journalists and other writers nec ('not elsewhere classified')' (Australian Bureau of Statistics, 2021). At the time of publication, no other details as to the number of journalists had been provided, nor had details been provided on how the ABS might account for those who moved between journalism and other work, or between different forms of journalism. Tellingly, neither online nor digital journalists were represented by separate categories.

Acknowledging the shortcomings of official data, the national regulator for competition and consumer rights in Australia, the Australian Competition & Consumer Commission (ACCC) observed that the census estimates of employment in journalism were substantially higher than the full-time equivalent journalist numbers provided by media companies for its comprehensive digital platforms inquiry into the local market power of Google, Facebook and other digital platforms. According to the inquiry's final report, 'census numbers include freelance journalists, do not distinguish between part-time, full time and casual employees

and rely on self-identification by citizens. Census data also include magazine journalists, periodical editors and other journalists working for companies from which the ACCC did not receive data' (Australian Competition & Consumer Commission, 2019: 311). Drawing on data on full-time equivalent journalist jobs provided by media companies to the inquiry, the ACCC found a consistent decline over a decade in the number of Australian print journalists and linked the decrease in professional journalists dedicated to reporting Australian news to a worrying reduction in forms of journalism that are beneficial to society, especially local reporting, 'that are unlikely to be the focus of newer forms of journalism' (18).

Identifying and measuring the extent and nature of new forms of journalism work also presents challenges. In the Australian context, the ACCC found that new media entrants, particularly digital natives, have added only a modest number of journalism jobs (2019: 306), some of which have since been cut, which illustrates that 'new entrants are not immune to the commercial forces affecting production of journalism by more traditional news outlets' (18). Nor are the journalists who worked for them. In 2020, subsequent to the release of the ACCC report, job losses in both digital native publications such as the Australian edition of *Buzzfeed* and across traditional media were considerable due to the severe impact of the Covid-19 pandemic on advertising (Meade, 2020). In addition, the ongoing Australian Newsroom Mapping Project, undertaken by the Public Interest Journalism Initiative, demonstrates that there continue to be more contractions than expansions in newsrooms. The 2020/21 Annual Report, for example, indicated that while 98 newsroom records of growth had been reported, 206 contractions had also been reported (Public Interest Journalism Initiative, 2021: 4).

For Australia's journalism union, the Media, Entertainment & Arts Alliance (MEAA), job loss in journalism presents further concerns: for example, membership decline, loss of bargaining power, growing employer prerogative over workplace change, and new kinds of non-standard work arrangements in digital media. In 2017, the union estimated around 3,000 journalism jobs had been lost from leading media outlets since 2011 (Media Entertainment & Arts Alliance 2017a: 6); in that same period, the Media Section lost just over 2000 members. To survive, and recover some financial stability, the MEAA has created new membership categories -- for freelancers, digital journalists and hybrid professional communicators -- and is seeking to regain membership and revenue through ongoing recruitment drives in these non-traditional sectors (Media Entertainment & Arts Alliance, 2017b: 10).

Other Conceptual constructs

The importance, but also challenge, of further inquiry into employment and working arrangements in journalism is heightened by the fragmentation of news work in an increasingly digital ecosystem. In her study of workers in digital-first newsrooms in North America, Cohen argues that while there is significant research in the context of digital journalism analysing 'journalists' professional identities and practice, including ethics, credibility, routines, and norms' (2019: 571), there is much less explicit focus on working conditions of digital journalists, including occupational structures and work organisation.

Waisbord's proposal of a distinct conceptual approach to analysing 'who is a digital journalist' addresses the changing material conditions of news work by arguing that digital journalism 'is the outgrowth of new ecological conditions for the circulation of news content in contemporary society and the crumbling of the pyramidal model of news that prevailed since the beginnings of industrial journalism' (2019: 352). He contends that this development requires scholars to examine a range of networked practices that happen beyond the newsroom-centred, industrial production of news (358). While industrial journalism sought to maintain jurisdictional control over newsmaking through 'formal and informal work regulations', post-industrial journalism is a 'free-for-all environment without clear, shared rules' (355), and requires a more open analytical lens.

Earlier research efforts to open the analytical lens on atypical news work support our research, most notably Gollmitzer's (2014) pioneering study of non-standard employment in German journalism, which captures and explores issues also identified in this study. Gollmitzer found the working conditions of journalists in precarious employment (e.g. freelancers and interns) were understudied (827), that freelancers regularly increased their incomes by combining journalistic work with corporate publishing and other non-journalistic activities (837), and that the implications of these journalists' experiences of an increasingly casualised labour market needed to be teased out though appropriate conceptual framing (837-838). Elsewhere, Gollmitzer (2019) recommended 'larger longitudinal studies of journalistic labor,' the empirical research strategy adopted in this project. We agree with her view that mapping 'the constant transitions between contract work, self-, under-, and overemployment, as well as journalistic and non-journalistic work in the lives of journalists' (2019: 15) provides a means to broaden conceptualisations of journalism work. It also

provides a means to productively engage with the extensive research on precarious and atypical labour in the cognate fields of creative and cultural industries (see, for instance, Hesmondhalgh, 2018).

The iterative nature of surveys conducted for this study over a four-year period, which form the empirical basis for this article, enabled us to capture nuanced understandings of employment experiences as they changed over time, sometimes rapidly and repeatedly. The unusual and specific dynamics of career transition post-redundancy might otherwise have gone unnoticed. What started as the study of forced journalism career change amid industry restructuring for digital-first news production evolved into an exploration of multiple re-employment destinations, job descriptors, working conditions, and changes in the professional identities of Australian journalists who exited newsroom jobs between 2012 and 2014. We found that subjective understandings of journalistic identity, practice, and working conditions were fluid and evolved over time in dynamic ways that are contingent on context - in our case, industry volatility, employment precarity, life stage, transferrable skills, and ongoing changes in news work.

Against this background, this article focuses on the following two research questions:

RQ1 What do the post-redundancy career paths of Australian journalists tell us about who can be considered a journalist now? and

RQ2 What are the implications for how we study journalism work in the digital era, both in academic and industry contexts?

Method

This article is authored by members of an Australian-based research project established in 2014 that has been investigating the aftermath of journalism job loss through a range of approaches. The (details withheld) project that provides the basis for this article sought to capture dimensions of journalism job loss and career transition by gathering quantitative and qualitative data via surveys on what happened next to those journalists whose jobs were cut between 2012 and 2014. The four annual surveys, conducted between 2014 and 2017, consisted of both open and closed questions, some of which recurred across each of the surveys, with the aim of providing a longitudinal lens of the kinds of work and life adjustments they experienced in the years that followed their departure from what were

mostly long-term full-time roles in newsrooms (Authors, 2018, 2019, 2022). In all four surveys, the mix of questions varied according to whether participants identified primarily as working in journalism, working in a mix of journalism and other work, or working outside of journalism. For the final survey, some of the questions (details of which appear below) were specifically designed to provide reflections from participants about their working lives over the three to five years since they left their newsroom roles. While our sample was heavily skewed towards mid to late career newspaper and TV journalists, in line with employers' preference at the time for cutting senior newsroom staff positions (Authors, 2016), our surveys capture important and original data on transitional experiences that to date have been under-studied. Our approach identified a wide variety of career transition trajectories amongst those who were re-employed in journalism and those who found work elsewhere, or – as often turned out to be the case in this study – a mixture of both journalism and non-journalism work.

This article provides new understandings of the complexities of change in journalism work in the digital era based on further analysis of that data. Specifically, following a detailed review of the final 2017 survey data, we decided to spend more time unpacking the complexities of changing work patterns in journalism by moving beyond the initial binary of 'working in journalism/working outside journalism'. Instead, we looked in more detail at the types of employment and work that laid-off journalists were doing, both inside and outside journalism and traditional newsrooms, in order to capture changes in the industry that were reshaping journalistic work.

The results are presented in two parts. First, we provide frequencies and percentages to demonstrate the characteristics of our cohort, including their occupational status over the four years of the survey [Table 1]. Second, we present a qualitative analysis of key themes of relevance to the research questions of this article that emerged from the open-ended written responses. Such themes were identified by considering the specific issues discussed by participants in their answers, as well as the language and words used in those answers (Waller, Farquharson, and Dempsey, 2016).

We note three limitations of our study. First, our research was motivated by interest in the re-employment destinations of journalists who lost their jobs in the context of industry restructuring for digital-first news production in 2012. However, access to our cohort was

only possible through convenience sampling, and therefore we are not able to make statistical claims from the data or generalise our findings. The second limitation is that we experienced an attrition rate in the number of participants over time. As noted by other researchers undertaking longitudinal research, this is a common feature of such studies (Wang et al., 2017; Woodman, 2019). The benefits of being able to analyse the insights provided by participants who contributed to the project over time, however, outweigh the costs of attrition, as we are not making claims around causal relationships or statistical significance over time. The third limitation is that our study captured a specific historical moment of digital transformation and disruption in Australian journalism. One way that our project has addressed this limitation is by collaborating with other researchers outside of Australia who have examined comparable structural changes related to digitisation processes in their media systems (Authors, 2022).

Employment Pathways Since Redundancy

The demographic characteristics of the participants in the current study reflect their relative seniority and experience prior to leaving their newsroom jobs. As we have noted elsewhere (Authors 2016), the survey cohort of 225 participants in 2014 had a median age of over 50, had spent on average more than 25 years in journalism, and 184 of them (82%) had left roles in either of Australia's two largest newspaper companies, Fairfax Media (now Nine) or News Limited (now News Corp Australia). In terms of year of redundancy, 161 (72%) left in 2012, far more than in either 2013 (n= 41 (18%)) or 2014 (n=21 (9%)), following the newspaper industry's shift to digital-first production in that year, and the 2012 cohort continued to be the largest group participating in the three subsequent surveys. Most participants (n=173 (77%)) undertook their redundancies voluntarily, which roughly corresponds to being bought out, rather than involuntarily (n=52 (23%)) (which roughly corresponds to a layoff), though in both cases the payouts were determined by the same industrial relations legislation. In total, 174 (77%) participants exited from full-time roles. Almost three quarters (n=167 (74%)) had not received or undertaken any re-skilling in digital content creation before their redundancy. There were more male (n=130) than female respondents (n=95).

With respect to employment post-redundancy, in each of the four annual surveys we asked participants to select one of six options that best reflected their work status. A majority said that they continued to work in journalism in some capacity (Authors 2018). Yet if taken only

at face value, this masks the extent of the shift in both the kinds of work they were doing and the abrupt transitions that many respondents made from mostly long-term full-time jobs in newsrooms to more precarious work arrangements that often traversed a range of occupational roles, including journalism freelancing (see Table One for details over the four years of the survey).

Insert Table One here: Occupational status of respondents, 2014-2017

Table 1 Occupational status of respondents, 2014-2017

	2014	%	**2015**	%	**2016**	%	**2017**	%
Working in journalism (including freelance)	70	31.1%	33	29.2%	40	32.5%	33	27.5%
Work includes a mix of journalism and other	67	29.8%	38	33.6%	38	30.9%	30	25%
Working in non-journalism role	50	22.2%	37	32.7%	31	25.2%	39	32.5%
Looking for work	17	7.6%	2	1.8%	1	0.8%	3	2.5%
Taking a break	9	4.0%	0	0	2	1.6%	5	4.2%
Retired	12	5.3%	3	2.7%	11	8.9%	10	8.3%
	N=225	100%	N=113	100%	N=123		N=120	100%

Note: N is different in each year (2104, 2015, 2016, 2017), as there were a different number of respondents in each year of the survey

Source: Authors

One of the most notable changes to work life post-redundancy was the shift away from full-time work, and an immediate drop in income (Authors, 2016). It is important to note that in response to a specific question on this issue in the 2017 survey, most of those who did not work full-time said this was their choice (Q4 80% (58 of 72)), and this proportion was relatively consistent across different age segments within the group. To gain a more detailed picture on work patterns over time, the first question of the final survey conducted in 2017

asked respondents to describe their career pathways since redundancy, including all employment since they left their former roles. At this time, between three and five years had passed since redundancy. While many of the participants indicated that they had worked for more than one employer, either sequentially or concurrently, and had worked in multiple jobs, including freelancing, others said they had worked in the same organisation or role since redundancy. Further to this, in the three to five years since leaving newsrooms, some mentioned that they had moved between different jobs, and between journalistic and non-journalistic roles. This experience is illustrated by the following responses:

> I initially took a journalism job at a new start-up newspaper and stayed there for two years until we moved interstate. I picked up some freelance work for a couple of months and when we were settled in our new city, I took a job as a senior reporter/columnist at a major metropolitan newspaper and stayed there for six months until accepting my current role as a corporate speechwriter just over a year ago. #115, 2017 survey

> I walked straight into a one-year media adviser contract for a grouping of regional universities. I then secured a full-time position as a writer/editor/comms adviser for a federal agency. I have maintained a small amount of freelance work throughout. #10, 2017 survey

> Editorial manager for health promotion organisation. Maternity leave. Health communications officer for non-profit organisation. Plus freelance journalism. Maternity leave. #118, 2017 survey

> Journalism, content creation (ad agency), journalism (again). #116, 2017 survey

Perceptions of job security appear to have been a factor for some participants in decisions to move beyond journalism, but as this next response illustrates, the process could be protracted for some participants, punctuated by 'permanent' roles that turned out to be temporary:

> Since redundancy in 2014, I spent roughly a year in short term contract roles that included editing and content management before landing a permanent role thanks to a former manager. That position helped me get back on my feet and helped me gain some confidence back, but it was always a stop gap. I stayed approximately 8 months before moving on to another role where I stayed for approximately 18 months. I have recently taken up a new permanent role. All the permanent jobs I've had since redundancy were not in journalism. #38, 2017 survey

To interrogate work patterns in more depth, we invited participants in the final survey in 2017 who identified as working at least to some extent in journalism to discuss their post-redundancy work with the following prompt in question 15: 'Previous surveys have indicated

that many participants are working across multiple roles. We are interested to know more about your work. Please use this text box to tell us about these roles, and how much of your current work is in journalism.' There were 58 responses to this question. Descriptive accounts from these respondents included instances of what could be understood as boundary work and career hybridity – moving between different kinds of roles or working in different kinds of roles simultaneously - as the following typical responses illustrate:

> One day a week, I write articles and produce podcasts for the University …. This feels like journalism. Four days a week, it's communications work, specialising in social media. That feels more like marketing. #112, 2017 survey

> Have been working full-time on a non-fiction book until early this year. Since its publication have returned to some freelance journalism. I also lead cultural/art tours to the Himalayas and elsewhere and lecture on Asian art and culture. #65, 2017 survey

> I teach journalism at university and do some freelance work. #108, 2017 survey

> About half of my work is in journalism, the rest could be called journalism-related I suppose - it's all about getting information out to Australians. #3, 2017 survey

Even many of those who said they were working in 'journalism (including freelance)' rather than in the more open-ended category of 'journalism and other' offered current work descriptions that included an acknowledgement that the boundaries of journalism were becoming more elastic. For example, one respondent commented:

> The definition of journalism has changed. It now defines a much broader range of media work. Look at the numbers freelancing. My work includes independent journalism, training, consultancy work to media organisations and voluntary work. I love our industry and have no plans to retire from it. #107, 2017 survey

For this participant, while not all the work they were undertaking was in what would have been traditionally categorised as journalism, a more diverse portfolio of work does not necessarily imply a step change in professional identity, but rather can be interpreted as an affirmation of it. For the following respondent, however, accepting work outside of traditional journalism is seen as an economic necessity rather than a preferred option.

> I try to avoid work that is not journalism proper but doing 'content marketing' and corporate writing work pays the bills. I do not like working for corporate clients, who generally undervalue the skill of writing and take a bureaucratic approach to approval processes. I am quick - possibly too quick - to resign work that offends my values and experience as a journalist. I would say journalism accounts for 70% of my work. #81, 2017 survey

Others were more directly focussed on the tasks they performed in discussing their work portfolios. One respondent, who ticked the 'journalism (including freelance)' box, described their role as being a part-time communications officer for a charity, and listed their duties as follows: 'write articles, cover events, take photographs. Manage our reputation. Liaise w [sic] media. Take and edit videos. Manage social media. Liaise w [sic] internal and external stakeholders' (#72, 2017 survey). Such fluidity in self-categorisation can be further seen amongst those who chose the category 'working in a role that is not journalism' in response to another question about current work. Even when choosing this category, some of the respondents included at least some description of journalism work in their open-ended responses.

These responses reflect profound changes in the working lives of former newsroom journalists. For some participants, working outside of the newsroom, whether in journalism or in other work, provided a form of freedom and autonomy that they valued. As one response put it 'Contract work and sponsorship payments might not have the certainty of being an employee, but I have more freedom, and get to choose with whom I work' (#71, 2017 survey). Another participant, reflecting on their life in general, commented that 'Overall it has changed for the better because I have found a new career in a more positive growth industry. Although it hasn't been an easy path, I am happier because I have accepted my redundancy and am proud to have moved on to a new direction' (#101, 2017 survey). Such comments suggest that many participants were adapting well after redundancy, whatever their current employment, at least in terms of how they understood their quality of life.

Discussion and Conclusion

Our findings make visible the extent to which defining the occupational roles of journalists in our sample who have exited long-term roles in large media companies has proved challenging using traditional understandings of what constitutes a journalism job or journalism work**.** While the participants constitute a historically unique sample in a single country, they provide an in-depth portrayal of the dynamics of the reality acknowledged by the Worlds of Journalism study (Hanitzsch et al., 2019) that many of those who might be deemed journalists are also working in other professional roles (74), by showing how this is happening not only simultaneously but also sequentially across time. This is shown by a pithy single sentence of the participant who told us that their work had consisted of 'Journalism,

content creation (ad agency), journalism (again)' (#116, 2017). Furthermore, the subjective assessments of what is, or 'feels like' journalism (#112, 2017), reflect the reality that there is no agreed binary answer to the question of who is or who is not a journalist. Using the threshold approach of the WOJ study, while perhaps of value in cases where a mix of different kinds of work is being performed at a given time, may be less effective in identifying those who shift back and forth between primarily journalism work and other forms of employment.

Where does this leave us? If we accept that careers are often shaped more as circles than linear paths (Deuze, 2020), as was evident in our findings, and that many practitioners will continue to combine journalism with other forms of work in what Johnston and Wallace describe as a 'de-territorialised media space' (850) (as well as work that has no relationship to journalism), then capturing and analysing how the increasing precaritisation and fragmentation of professional journalism plays out at a granular level is important. It provides a starting point for understanding what kinds of questions posed in occupational surveys could help provide more useful data, especially when considering the quality and extent of information provision to citizens. Insights gleaned from this study might not decide the question of 'who is a journalist' but they can complement other attempts to assess reporting capacities such as this project's redundancy timeline (Authors, 2018) and the aforementioned Australian Newsroom Mapping Project (Public Interest Journalism Initiative, 2021), which surveys news production availability in Australian newsrooms as a way of providing insights into the health of public interest journalism. Taken together, different foci of the latter and our own surveys provide a richer portrayal of journalism employment than more standard approaches such as census data.

In this way, our study makes an important contribution to other attempts to define who is a journalist now. For example, while the specific definition of journalism used in the Worlds of Journalism project has merit and has worked well in that context, our research suggests a need also to consider subjective understandings of journalism work which may deviate from a formal definition. In this regard, our research also supports and further develops the arguments of Gollmitzer (2019, Tandoc (2019), and Carlson (2016), among others, that the current context of fluidity and uncertainty surrounding journalism means there is a need to broaden conceptualisations of journalism, and to reflect critically on and to question any assumptions about what constitutes journalistic work. In essence, attempts to provide a

precise definition of who is a journalist are problematic in a societal and workplace context that is contested and in flux.

Some critical questions emerge from our study which provide the basis for a theoretically informed research agenda that extends the current concerns germane to journalism studies, and media and communications studies more broadly. This agenda could include further international comparative research on change in journalism employment and work (Authors, 2022), and the related theoretical challenge of conceptualising journalism globally in terms other than traditional professional work and institutional practice. This could also involve consideration of what elements of reporting can be supplemented or enhanced by those working at the margins of journalism with hybridised skill sets, such as medical experts who have become prominent media commentators since the onset of Covid and meteorologists who are also journalists or who regularly undertake journalistic work (Author, 2017). We encourage researchers to embrace the complexities that flow from this by investigating previously neglected contextual factors that shape and constrain who is, and can be, a journalist, and the implications of this understanding for journalism.

Our research also points to the broader importance of capturing detailed narrative accounts of work patterns over time, that can be cross-checked against normative and emerging categories of work that are relevant to the production of digital journalism. These might include the experiences and perceptions of those doing journalistic work at a time when digitisation, career hybridity, precarity and working outside of newsrooms are regarded as a normal feature of journalism careers.

Part of the value of this approach in the context of journalism work is that disruptions triggered by both digitisation and the Covid-19 pandemic connect to experiences in other occupations also undergoing technology-influenced transformations. While many manufacturing and extractive industry occupations have long been influenced by technological innovation, a range of professions are now also undergoing profound change, raising questions around occupational categories and roles (Gratton and Scott, 2016). Previously stable careers in accounting and law, for example, are being disrupted by digitisation, automation, artificial intelligence, and other technological innovation. In these professions, as in journalism, there is a blurring of occupational roles, boundaries and entry requirements into the profession (Beck, 2000; Elliott, 2019; Susskind and Susskind, 2015),

while the emergence of hybridised careers also challenges the ongoing relevance of standard occupational categories (Elliott, 2019).

In the context of debates about who is a journalist now, our research moves beyond the familiar spaces of news production and news work in newsrooms to examine distinct ways of being a journalist that encompass work in multiple roles, organisations, and media and non-media sectors. In so doing, our findings also underline the challenge faced by those who seek to analyse the health of the profession by measuring the scale of the workforce. In this regard, we propose that future empirical studies and theoretical understandings of journalism need to further consider this complexity and boundary blurring, recognising that this is fundamental to how journalism is practiced today.

Conflict of Interest

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