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What if I want to Put a Cow Down with a Gun? Sociological Critical Media Analysis of Non- companion Animals' Representation in Rural Australian News

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Abstract

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Keywords: *sociology of animals, critical animal studies, media, discourse, content analysis, rural, culture, attitudes.*

Introduction and Literature Review

Human population, development, and pollution are causing extensive habitat loss for non-human animals (henceforth ‘animals’), unprecedented biodiversity decline, and increased endangered/critically-threatened species listings worldwide (European Environment Agency, 2010; IUCN, 2013; WWF, 2016). Animals’ lives continue to be affected by humanity’s ideas, laws, and notions of progress, with Western civilisation’s history of pastoralism and industrialisation exemplifying how human attitudes reconfigure wilderness and shape human-animal interactions (Clutton-Brock, 2015; Tovey, 2003). European settlement accompanying colonialism in North America and Australia brought frontier and terra nullius ideologies that contrasted with Indigenous attitudes about, and actions towards, native animals (Burgin, 2015). In Australia, for example, colonialist attitudes construed kangaroos as ‘pests’, economic liabilities obstructing agribusiness that compete with livestock grazing and require population management, in contrast with Indigenous attitudes that all animals demand spiritual respect (Boom et al., 2012; Burgin, 2015).

Despite attitudes and culture affecting human-animal interactions, contemporary research evidences little sociological investigation of animals (Burgin, 2015; Crampton et al., 2016; Chen, 2016; Cherry, 2016; Taylor and Twine, 2014). Further, extant sociological studies exhibit anthropocentric bias by prioritising ‘human’ experiences and issues when researching animals (Coulter, 2016; Peggs, 2012; Taylor, 2013; Tovey, 2003; Twine, 2010). Re-conceptualising animals as sociological subjects, who may be commodified by the same economic and political systems affecting humans (Nibert, 2002; Irvine, 2008), offers scope to expand sociological research beyond animal rights activism and social movement theory (Cherry, 2016). By presenting findings from a media analysis of animals in a rural Australian newspaper, the present article commences the task of sociologically exploring how humans’ attitudes about animals affect and shape their experiences as social beings granted or denied agency, autonomy, and ‘right’ to coexist in Australia’s rural environments. Before proceeding to describe the methods used to conduct the study, media’s role in shaping humans’ attitudes towards animals is presented next.

Media is a major social institution guiding how humans construct knowledge about their environments and social identities (Castells, 2000). Media influence attitudes and public opinion by creating news that reflects socio-political agendas, selects what information qualifies as ‘newsworthy’, and present heterogeneous issues as homogenous (Powel, 1995; Singleton et al., 2006). Media’s role in homogenising public images of Australian country towns, and urban policymakers’ corresponding absence of meaningful engagement with rural residents’ concerns (Costello, 2007; Ragusa, 2011; Rogers and Collins, 2001), offers one example among many demonstrating linkages between politics and news production. For instance, research documenting how media represent farming issues argues that agrarianism’s moral hegemony in Australian national identity reproduces cultural myths around the sanctity of animal husbandry and farming that censors and silences rigorous, critical debate involving rural policy in a highly urbanised society (Botterill, 2006). Routine journalism norms, such as inconsistent application of evidence, perspectives, and balancing voices when reporting sociocultural issues deviating from cultural norms, particularly animal-related issues such as veganism (Breit, 2008), affect attitudes about animals. Animal studies scholarship further describes media’s cultural hegemony to popularly represent animals in specific, often exploitive, ways (Fitzgerald and Taylor, 2014). Several media analyses show that speciesism and animal exploitation are institutionalised in Britain (Cole and Morgan, 2011; Steward and Cole, 2016), America (Freeman, 2016), and Australia (Masterman-Smith et al., 2014). Such studies, along with American research (Broad, 2013) examining media representation of dogfighting, animal rights organisations, and intersectionality, highlight the relevance of using Castell’s (2009) theory to explain how power affects discourse production and content, specifically by excluding/promoting arguments and framing techniques for reporting human-animal interactions.

Research examining how discourse affects attitudes about animals, specifically kangaroos, reveals complex relationships among media, policy, legislation, and public opinion that are informed more by economic interests than scientific research (Ben-Ami et al., 2014; Boom et al., 2012; Ramp, 2013). Legal histories of Australia’s commercial kangaroo industry, the ‘largest consumptive mammalian wildlife industry in the world, harvesting ten times the number of harp seals taken in the Canadian seal hunt’ (18), show that law and government policy

carefully use discursive strategies to change public attitudes about legitimated animal killing (Boom et al., 2012). Government use of a Parliamentary Enquiry to shift kangaroo culling imagery from ‘pest control’ to ‘resource management’ prompted backlash from ecologists and animal welfare/advocacy groups who documented that economic gain, not environmental degradation or wildlife populations, drove policy change (Boom et al., 2012).

Hunting broadly illustrates the cultural contingency of human attitudes about animals. Contrasting with North America’s pro-hunting culture, with legislation and government policy explicitly ‘conserving’ wildlife for hunting, throughout Australia, hunting for recreation or environmental conservation generally is disapproved. Citing legislation, gun policy, political party membership, and popular culture research, Burgin (2015) notes: ‘extreme difference in the preference for recreational hunting between North Americans and Australians’, asserting, ‘overall, the numbers of recreational hunters in Australia remains very low compared to North America, which Sharp and Wollscheid reported had the largest number of hunters worldwide’ (771).

Australian attitudes about animals are complex. Although 62% of households have pets (Animal Medicines Australia, 2016) and 11.2% are vegetarian (Morgan, 2016), Mehmet and Simmons’ (2016, 4) media analysis illustrates that western culture’s ‘deeply entrenched “mastery” view over animals ... [and] “human/nature dualism” where humans see themselves as inside culture but outside nature’, combine with urban/rural geography and social desire to achieve attitudinal consistency with ideas ‘held by others with whom they share close ties’ (Kahan et al., 2012, 732) to form cultural attitudes. Attitudes held by those with whom we routinely interact and/or respect constitute a crucial element of culture affecting individuals’ attitudes about animals. For example, Australian research investigating public attitudes about kangaroo culling found that, in addition to conservative politics and agrarian economic interests, ‘differences of opinion stem not from understanding of [animal] issues but more from conflicts of interest among sub-cultural world views’:

Proponents of culling very frequently expressed allegiance to farmers and rural residents in justifying assertions about the need to kill kangaroos. They angrily asserted that opponents of culling must be from urban areas and must be ignorant of the realities of rural life, and frequently linked opposition to killing kangaroos with green or leftist political views. (Mehmet and Simmons, 2016, 15)

This inherently *social*, rather than individualistic, explanation of attitude formation compliments Canadian research finding social group affiliation with various animal positions (i.e. hunting, wildlife conservation) affects attitudes in addition to demographic variables, namely gender and urbanism (Dubois and Harshaw, 2013). The present study contributes to this growing body of social research examining attitudes about animals by analysing how a rural Australian newspaper reported about animals. By expanding sampling beyond kangaroos, it aims to identify what media representation and framing of non-companion animals illustrates and question the implications the findings have for rural animals.

Methods

International, multidisciplinary anthologies illustrate the variety of theory and methods available to conduct animal studies research (Tylor and Rossini, 2009). Qualitative research seeks to document trends informative to future researchers (Babbie, 2008). The research design prioritised sociological investigation of rurality to create a framework for animal studies researchers to investigate how rural animal media representations elsewhere may compare with the attitudes and cultural norms documented in this study.

Qualitative content analysis (QCA) was chosen for its capacity to identify latent, or invisible, content in comparison with quantitative content analysis (Babbie, 2008; Jette, 2006). The research aimed to discursively investigate Australian attitudes about animals institutionalised in mass media and challenge urbanised notions that human-animal interactions beyond ‘companion animals’ are ‘remote’ to everyday Australians’ lives (Chen, 2016). To advance understanding of animal representation in rural Australian news media, beyond comparative urban/rural analysis (Chen, 2016), and critically consider what rural society’s human-animal

interactions suggest for rural animals, a sociological QCA was created to answer the research question, *How are non-companion animals presented in The Daily Advertiser's news articles?* *The Daily Advertiser* (TDA) was chosen because it is the only mainstream newspaper in the research location, one of Australia's largest inland rural-regional centres by population size, servicing multiple farming communities, and its electronic indexing makes sampling and searching possible.

All news articles published 5 October 2016 to 5 April 2017 were searched using 19 keywords (bee, cattle, cod, cow, deer, glider, goanna, goat, lizard, kangaroo, parrot, pig, possum, sheep, snake, spider, turtle, wallaby, wombat) constituting a non-exhaustive list of common names for prominently-appearing native fauna who were not being reported about as companion animals. This sampling framework yielded 311 articles. After removing duplications, QCA commenced by coding articles for human-relevant and species-relevant news content. Every article was coded using article content, rather than illustration of a theoretical concept (Moretti et al., 2011). No article required dual categorisation.

Findings

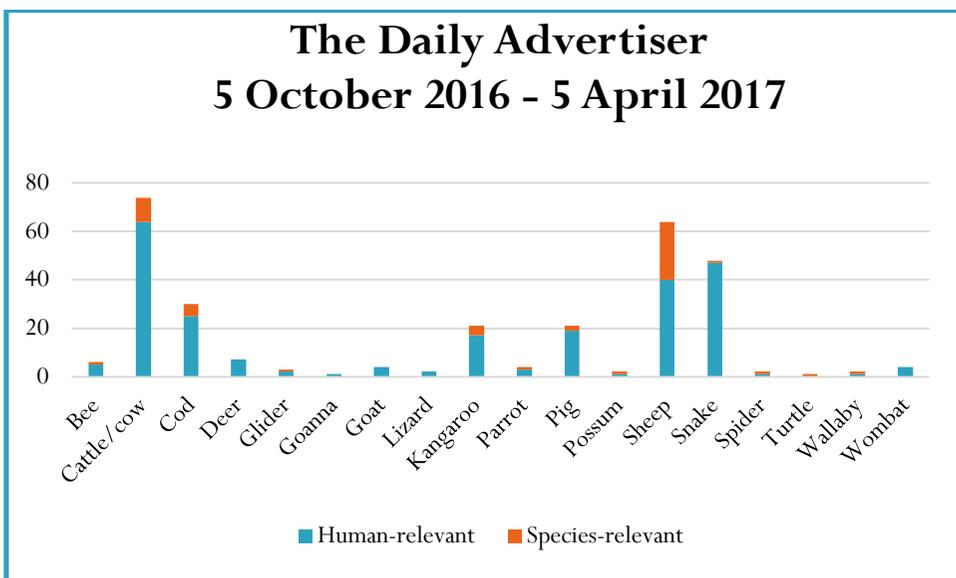
Two general trends existed in TDA's publication of animal keywords: a. most (n=231/78%) appeared as lexicon describing human items; b. in news discussing animals, animals were reported as existing for human use or negatively affecting humans (n=53/18%) more than reported in a species-benefiting fashion (n=12/4%). All articles were categorised into three categories.

Category 1: Animals feature in human lexicon, not animal-related news

Chart 1 depicts the final sample (n=296), illustrating greatest newsworthiness for cattle/cows, cod, kangaroos, sheep, pigs, and snakes, and the division between human- and animal-relevant reporting. Animal terminology exceeded species-relevant news-reporting for all but four species (possum, spider, turtle, wallaby). Most news 'visibility' existed as terminology describing human matters/items: goanna (100%), snake (98%), bee (83%), cod (83%), goat (75%), parrot

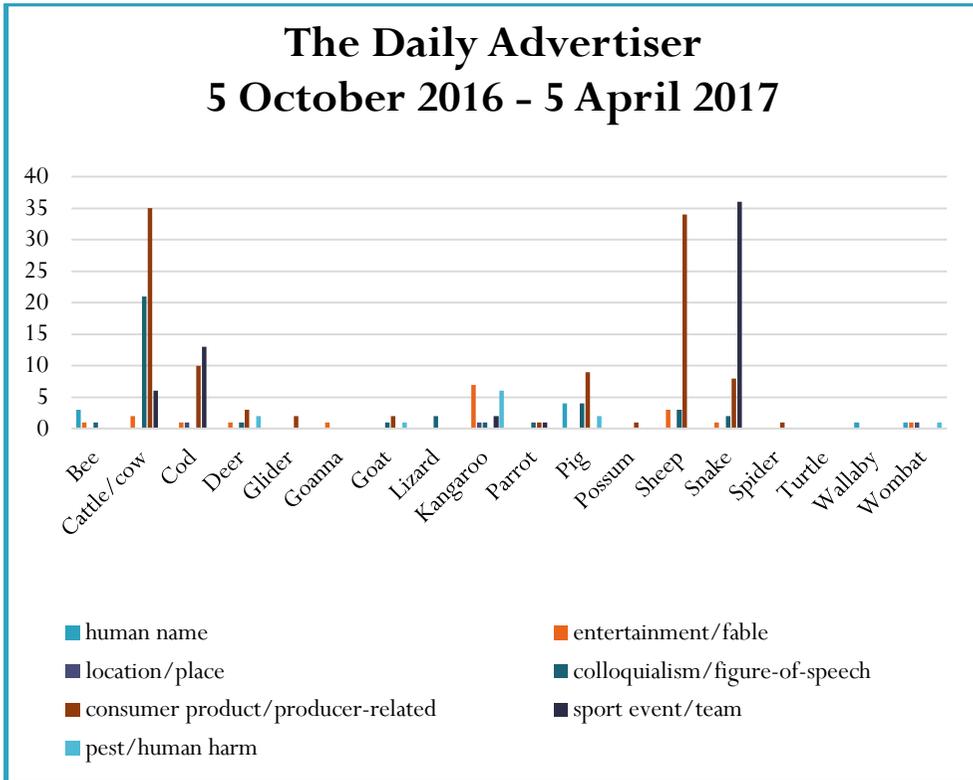
(75%), wombat (75%), deer (72%), and glider (66%), while sheep and cattle/cow predominated as descriptions for sheep/cattle farmers and production issues as food or consumer products. For these animals, all species-relevant news related to their death/harm from bushfires, vehicles, flooding, or poor farming treatment, with sheep experiencing more adversity (n=24/37%) than cattle/cows (n=10/16%). Although ‘cattle/cow’ (n=74), received the most visibility, it often related to human endeavours, such as getting ‘a B-double with two decks of cattle through’, or human profit, ‘explore the option of supplementing your income with a few cows, sheep or horses’. *TDA* described ‘cattle properties’ owned by ‘good’ men and reported cattle market activity; 7.4% (n=10) discussed cattle issues and animal advocates’ letters-to-the-editor constituted the only species-relevant advocacy. Likewise, ‘sheep’ news reflected market activities and negatively described *TDA* readers for, ‘blaming council which all of the sheep that read this publication will jump right on board with’.

Chart 1: *TDA* animal news representation



Human-relevant news was represented by seven categories appearing in Chart 2.

Chart 2: TDA human-relevant animal news visibility



Native species' common names described people, places, events, products, or appeared as figures of speech and received less media visibility than agricultural animals. 'Kangaroo' news existed as lexicon in 52% of instances, such as 'Kangaroo Island', 'Kangaroo Preschool', and reporting kangaroo skin was 'the best' for whips. All reporting except for one Indigenous article negatively depicted kangaroo-human interactions. 'Bee' had 11 articles until excluding the Bee Gees band, items named 'Bee', and a 'working bee' left three, 'wombats' referred to a sport team, theatre production, location, and endearing childhood nickname, but no wombat-news existed. 'Snake' described government, traffic movement, and consumer products and 'Snake Gully' horserace receiving most (n=37/63%) 'snake' reporting. Three 'spider' articles appeared, albeit one described 40,000 fake spider-webs Spotlight anticipated selling for Halloween and of the two 'wallaby' articles, one used 'wallaby' as a human nickname. Lizards

described humans, ‘flat out like a lizard drinking’, yet were otherwise invisible, while ‘cod’ were reported with fishing. Rural Australians travelled on ‘goat roads’, took a ‘sheep dip’ in the river, and bought deer-proof fences, real-estate promising abundant cod fishing, or cattle-dogs. ‘Fat pig’ and ‘old cow’ appeared among ‘nasty nicknames’, and ‘cattle’ described football players alongside products, including farming and ‘shonky’ supplements turning into ‘cash cows’.

Category 2: Animals hurt/kill humans and each other and exist for anthropocentric purposes

Twelve (4%) articles promoted conservation or observation in natural habitats. The remainder discussed animals’ role in harming/killing humans despite the infrequency. ‘Close call: Bee could have killed’ headlined a 2017 article about the threat, and reality, of death from bee stings, using a farmer’s death in 2008 from anaphylactic shock to advocate first aid training and lament mobile blackspots perpetuation: ‘bulldozing trees on his property when he stirred up a bee hive and was stung...the town's mobile reception failed him...[causing] an undignified death ... that focused the eyes of the national media on mobile services in the bush’. Likewise, the only ‘wallaby’ article discussed their role as ‘things’ spreading disease to humans:

Wagga residents have been warned mosquitoes are spreading a distressing disease...Things like wallabies and kangaroos can carry the virus and they have a lot more mobility than mozzies...To pass the virus on to a human, the mosquito must first bite an infected mammal – like a wallaby or kangaroo – during the course of it's [sic] two-week lifespan.

Rather than report humans’ responsibility for self-protection, news-reporting held animals accountable for human harm. When a Temora councillor was hurt during herding, the cow was blamed: ‘He was knocked to the ground and trod on by a rogue cow as he was moving cattle’. Kangaroo-human interactions endangered humans: ‘She was on a jogging machine the day before when startled by a kangaroo. Luckily she escaped serious injury and it wasn't enough to stop her taking her place in the final and running a big race’, and jeopardised stationary objects: ‘Wagga driving instructor Glen Gaudron has blamed potholes and kangaroos for the majority of

collisions with stationary objects'. Kangaroos also interfered with horse racing, albeit the horse 'injur[ed] herself', in contrast with humans who were victimised by animals, 'since a incident with a kangaroo cost her a place in the Group One Bathurst Gold Tiara...taking fright and injuring herself when a kangaroo bounced into her paddock'. Animals hurt by other animals were newsworthy only if related to human interest. A racing horse and cow collision in 'The Haus of Meat Pace' received media interest only for the horse's injury when an accident caused, 'more than a year off the tracking following an [sic] tendon injury caused by a freak accident with a cow'.

In rural Australia, untidy yards also were risky, particularly for human-snake encounters. 'Snake catcher Tony 'Snakeman' Davis said overgrown lawns posed a 'big snake danger'. Hence, 'yards put neighbours at risk from fire or snake bites.' *TDA* reported, 'paramedics responded to 28 reports of snake attacks across the state in October alone – a significant increase from the 18 recorded in the year prior'. Aside from one article reporting the, 'courageous redback' spider who made national news for 'tak[ing] on a brown snake' and a call 'to rescue a small snake which was caught in a spider web', every *TDA* article about snakes reported they bit humans and dogs, such as Buddy, who, 'paid the ultimate price for his battle with a brown snake when he tragically died', after his owner, 'innocently enough – didn't realise the severity of the injury and brushed it off as a minor scrape'. Ten articles (17.5%) discussed snake bites, none fatal to humans, and eight (14%) reported sightings/captures by the Snakeman averaging '350 calls from September through to March', or medical responses, warning residents, 'to be on alert for snakes and mosquitoes'. Five (10%) stressed snake-avoidance, half for pets' livelihoods, but only Snakeman noted that new suburban development of farmland drove human-snake encounters.

Quantitatively, neither snakes nor spiders were newsworthy in contrast with sheep and cattle/cows, despite paramedics 'attend[ing] many cases where people [were]...bitten by spiders and even snakes'. News-reporting reflected economic more than human/animal-health interests. Few articles discussed conservation activities (n=6/2%) and those focused on humans' benefit from wildlife observation, such as children gaining 'insight into the farming activities near the trail', rather than reporting about the briefly mentioned Superb Parrot, a local threatened species. Except letters-to-the-Editor 'drawing attention to the violence inflicted on

female farmed animals’, most reporting displayed anthropocentrism and the economic interest driving ‘love’ of agricultural animals:

I checked with a consultant vet in Wagga, he looked and said...nothing to worry about...‘We’ve opened our doors and if (the activists) had the decency to ask we’d probably have given them coffee, brekky and a guided tour, but like mongrel dogs they sneak in.’ Mr Cartwright isn't alone in his criticism. For years, farmers have complained of break-ins and they were discussed at a private meeting between Deputy Prime Minister Barnaby Joyce and NSW police, RSPCA and NSW Farmers last year. A summary of the meeting said piggeries in the area, along with poultry farms in other states, were known to have been ‘invaded for the purpose of installing unauthorised surveillance devices, ostensibly to “reveal” animal husbandry practice believed to be poor’. Outspoken animal activist Lisa Ryan had previously told Fairfax Media that activists were ‘forced to act’ when regulatory bodies failed to do so...Mr Cartwright said...‘Most pig farmers I know try to do the right thing, it’s in our interest to have the animals in their best condition...I’ve had pigs since I could stand up, I’ve been here 35 years and when people say I don’t love these animals it makes me angry’.

Category 3: Animals can be used for fundraising, hunting, ‘culling’, and killing

TDA normatively reported misappropriation of animals for human purposes, justifying and legitimating humans’ harming/killing animals. ‘What if I want to put a cow down with a gun or I'm moving cattle, you can't have people just popping up’, objected a farmer to a proposed rail trail’s intrusion on his right to kill cows and environmentally pollute; ‘I've got a big irrigation dam next to where the trail would go that I put chemicals in’. Beyond food production, cows were used for rodeos and fundraisers. ‘Steer wrestling’, ‘roping live cattle’, and ‘Jackpot bull rides’ were celebrated and ethics of using/killing animals for human fundraisers were absent:

15-year-old rugby player Lui Polimeni died, just days after being critically injured in a match... The community rallied behind Lui’s family and is now supporting Herd of Hope cattle drive ... aimed at promoting organ and tissue donation in Australia.

Reporting normalised cattle drives/slaughtering for mental health fundraising:

the hefty price wasn't the result of a sudden spike in beef prices, rather a very worthy cause... several buyers ... purchased 11 donated cattle ... to aid mental health awareness in Wagga and surrounds. The RSL made the high price charity bid because so many of its own members were affected by mental illness... Wagga RSL's \$10,000 purchase wouldn't see any rising bistro beef prices, but the high price would mean greater mental health outreach... Mr Bell's prized purchase will be fattened up and later sold.

Sporting activities endorsed killing undesirable species, such as carp-fishing to protect the Murray Darling Cod's habitat, as cod events promoting animal welfare killed 'pests' obstructing cod fishing's future:

It is a strict 'catch and release' competition for native fish... while noxious species like carp and redfin are disposed of in bins... the number of native fish species...[has] explode[d] in recent years, helped along by restocking and removal of pests. It's very important we get everyone in the practice of catch and release so we can all continue to enjoy our sport for years to come.

Prize categories for 'the biggest bag of carp', not catch-and-release, evidenced speciesism. In Gundagai's annual 'carp-a-thon', 'pest control is carried out to preserve [other] species ... spearheaded by the Gundagai Anglers Club', killing '494 carp' in 2016. 'Organisers hope that number will increase'. Cod reporting illustrates ethical issues accompanying introduced species, namely what animals have a right to exist and why only cod was 'a beautiful fish deserv[ing] to be put back'.

Cod competitions' social good was promoted by alignment with human-benefiting charities, 'the Pirtek fishing challenge which is pretty much the biggest fishing comp in Australia and this one aids prostate cancer' and 'Murray Cod Hatcheries is holding a children's fishing competition to raise money for the Crisis 91 Appeal'. Often, the social and environmental worthiness of cod fishing co-appeared:

proceeds of the charity event would benefit Ronald McDonald House, Country Hope and the Wagga Breast Cancer Group. 'It's a great family event, and you don't need a boat; you

can fish from the river bank...all catch and release...you have to take a photo of your fish and release it, apart from carp and redfin, which are pests.'

One article suggested cod endure stress from 'catch and release' but continued prioritising human pleasure from fishing. The motor-neurone disease fundraiser, 'unlike other fishing competitions, the Riverina Classic is "photo entry only", in order to minimise any negative effects on fish welfare and ensure anglers have maximum opportunity to chase the elusive "big one"'. Fish with the greatest sporting interest received heightened 'conservation' reporting. To ensure 'the fishing and boating season is going to be fanbloodytastic', illegal fishing practices must be avoided; 'if you happen to catch large female cod during the breeding season, when they stress they will re-absorb the eggs that they may be carrying.' Cod fishing's newsworthiness bifurcated between chastising regulation breaches and celebrating 'big' catches in sporting competitions 'attract[ing] hundreds of entrants from across the country, with eager anglers flying in from Perth and driving down from Brisbane to wet their line in the Murrumbidgee' that applied cod conservation principles to perpetuate fishing:

These people [illegal fishers] are damaging fishing for all... they obviously don't have kids or grandkids as they are removing the opportunity for the next generation to have as much fun and love for the sport... [go to] any waterway and you will find illegal set lines, evidence of people harvesting undersize fish and other aquatic life. Three men face serious fisheries charges after they were allegedly found in possession of a combination of threatened species of fish and prohibited size Murray Cod during an inspection.

Many animal deaths were reported from human negligence and intent. RSPCA inspectors finding a dead sheep led to investigating 'animal neglect at the Livestock Marketing Centre [that]...saved the lives of almost 200 sheep' and 'two cages of small animals left without water in full sunlight on a 47 degree day', albeit *TDA* found, 'only 56 per cent of people polled saying people convicted of deliberate neglect should be recorded'. Reporting sanctioned government-led culling for native and introduced species. Like carp, pigs' 'feral' cousins were hunted without regret: 'a whopping haul of feral pigs has been culled in a western Riverina aerial shooting program, aided by the use of thermal imaging technology to track the damaging porkers'. Technology enabled Government-funded killing in 180,000 hectares of 'previously

inaccessible country...[that] allowed shooters to hone in with deadly accuracy and deliver an impressive cull... A two week aerial shooting program destroyed 4416 feral pigs, with shooting team in two helicopters.’ One article deplored killing pigs because negative implications resulted for a pig farmer during ‘a late-night June hunting spree costing the farmer three pigs’. Death by ‘being stabbed with the knives and spear’ was labelled ‘grisly’, yet charges related to economic loss and failure to abide by socially-legitimated killing: ‘the worst was saved for a large black barrow which, after being caught, was stabbed...then decapitated. Police believed the head was taken as a trophy due to the animal’s size’ and the assailant was charged ‘with two counts of killing cattle with intent to steal and one count of committing an act of aggravated cruelty’. Strong governmental support for livestock’s welfare was reported: ‘there was a zero-tolerance policy for negative animal welfare outcomes council would help ensure those responsible were held accountable’, yet pig deaths were typically un-newsworthy. Pigs appeared in restaurant names, ‘The Pig & Pastry’, and were celebrated as food: ‘Every Friday night, while the town ate boring fish, Paddy would be in his backyard roasting pig on a spit with the sumptuously tempting smell of pork driving the rest of the town to tears’.

Humans’ animal exploitation was normalised in festivals promoting ‘drenching a fake sheep’ as a challenge everyone could do to ‘celebrate living in the country’. Occupations raising and slaughtering animals were glorified: ‘David Dunbar has been a “meat artist” for more than three decades. He learnt his craft creating a perfectly carved slab of meat from his farmer father, who used to slaughter and keep half a sheep as part of his wages’. Concurrently, reporting celebrated ‘saving’ sheep stranded from flooding and lamented hundreds of sheep and cattle dying in bushfires, without concern that their intended fate was slaughter for human food. Beyond dying from heat or lack of water, only letters to the Editor, citing national news media, focused on farm animals’ welfare:

In footage, secretly filmed at an Echuca abattoir, frightened animals were violently and repeatedly stabbed in the neck with the prongs of an electrified stunner... A pig was struck four times with a captive bolt gun. She thrashed and moaned. She was laughed at and sworn at. Then she was shot. Twice... Over 1000 videos were sent to authorities cataloging abuses to cows, calves, goats and sheep.

Culture affected attitudes towards kangaroo populations. Two articles by an Indigenous author described kangaroos' self-regulating populations, contrasting with the CWA lobbying for policy to eradicate 'plague' populations:

Wambuwuny (kangaroo) have also been growing in their numbers, they are balugan (animals) that can regulate their mob's numbers in accordance to what is happening in our ngurambang (country). Good conditions coming, madha (many) babies, bad conditions, breeding stops.

...The Country Woman, the CWA's state magazine, it was interesting to observe the range of current issues being taken up on behalf of country people with government ministers. They included train services, communications, mail services, drought policy, plague kangaroo populations, reviewing policies on pest animals.

Possum killing also depended on social attitudes. In March, 2017 readers learned 'a unique Aboriginal learning tool – a possum skin cloak ... which represents reconciliation and healing, was handed over to the Riverina Environmental Educational Centre by Aunty Joycelan Williams, who spent weeks crafting the 20 possum skin garment', while a month earlier readers learned, 'a unique new project incorporating schoolkids and local "green warriors" could help save the future of a winged possum on the fringes of Wagga'. Incongruent behaviour towards animals in the same genus, killing 20 possums to make a ritualised clothing item and a 'whole of community effort' in box-making to 'save' other possums highlights animals' vulnerability to human attitudes. Likewise, the single newsworthy turtle reported 'hurtling through the air after being hit by a car' was reliant on a holidaying Sydney couple who believed care-seeking was worthwhile. '[They] handed their new reptilian friend to Sydney-based wildlife rescue organisation Wires, who nursed him back to full health' and 'contacted Regional Express Airlines (Rex) for help. The airline jumped at the opportunity and flew the eastern long neck turtle home free of charge [to] his native habitat in Cooma, a requirement under national parks and wildlife law. Nevertheless, *TDA* did not encourage locals to watch out for turtles, well-known for being killed by traffic on rural roads during mating season.

Discussion and Conclusions

Noting that culture influences humans' attitudes/behaviour towards animals (Burgin, 2015; Cherry, 2016; Tyler and Rossini, 2009) and mass media reflect culture (Freeman, 2016; Stewart and Cole, 2016), the research design addressed the limited non-companion rural sociological animal research in Australia beyond animal-industrial-complex issues (Taylor and Twine, 2014). Alongside recent animal studies in policy (Chen, 2016), legislation (Caulfield, 2017), and social media (Mehmet and Simmons, 2016), the present article's examination of rural Australian media found that culturally-specific attitudes embedded in public discourse reflect power relations which communication theory (Castells, 2000, 2009) and media analysis permit social research to render visible. Using QCA, 78% (n=231) of *TDA* articles only mentioned animals to label 'things', not report animal-related news.

English literature and communication studies highlight symbolism's relevance for conveying covert, cultural meanings through writing (Fadaee, 2011) and communicating complex information, such as science, to the general public (Kendall-Taylor, et al., 2013). Media influence and homogenise public opinion and policy, and use their authority and power to produce news (Powel, 1995; Singleton, et al., 2006). *TDA*'s journalistic practices used imagery normalising attitudes subjugating animals and, consistent with prior research, partially reflected rural issues (Costello, 2007; Ragusa, 2011; Rogers and Collins, 2001). Media symbolism reinforced agricultural animals' low social status, for instance by printing descriptions of humans being as dumb as sheep.

Rural animals' invisibility as news 'subjects' illustrated lack of newsworthiness, anthropocentrism, and supports comparative Australian urban/rural media research documenting rural print media's disproportionately low and ad hoc animal news-coverage (Chen, 2016) and furthering international media and critical animal studies' scope (Almiron, et al., 2016). News quantity and content varied by species, with greater newsworthiness for animals benefitting human agricultural/sport. The content of *TDA* animal news-reporting centred around how animals endangered humans' lives and economic interests, thereby necessitating 'management'/killing, and legitimating/supporting humans' use of animals for anthropocentric purposes and food, with few species worthy of 'conservation'. Findings support

Australian (Pendergrast, 2015) and American (Broad, 2013; Glasser, 2014) media studies noting that animal rights remains counter-hegemonic.

Media and communication theory/research shows that issue framing and power relations affect mediated discourse and cultural debate (Carragee et al., 2004; Halloran, 1998; Hutchins and Lester, 2015). *TDA* framing perpetuated the status quo, supported economic practices reliant on animal death, exhibited anthropocentrism, and socially legitimated animal exploitation.

Animals' cultural relativity was communicated through media representation; squirrel gliders received news-coverage about *their* issues (i.e., habitat destruction, population growth/decline), yet decreased cod populations were lamented because of fishing implications. Kangaroo culling and possum killing illustrated cultural differences between Indigenous/Eurocentric attitudes towards animals (Boom et al., 2012; Burgin, 2015), while turtle reporting further evidenced urban/rural attitudinal differences (Chen, 2016). Using disaggregated attitudinal measures by categorising animals as 'pests', 'pets', or for 'profit' permits greater reliability and accuracy (Taylor and Signal, 2017). *TDA's* selective use of 'pests' framed animal issues and 'profit' underscored agricultural animal news-reporting. Adding a fourth 'p', 'patriotic' may deepen understanding of how culture affects attitudes/behaviours. Census data reveals Australia's growing cultural diversity, noting 83% of Australia's 26% immigrant population lives in capital cities, typically Sydney (Chang, 2017). Critically researching patriotism's role in rural attitudes about non-companion animals may expand research investigating the 'untouchability' of urban sympathy for 'poor Australian farmers'. By deconstructing key ideologies (agrarian sentimentalism, the mythic rural idyll and 'countrymindedness') said to impede critical policy analysis of urban/rural divides (Botterill, 2006), future Australian cultural studies may further American and British media research (Cole and Morgan, 2011; Freeman, 2016; Steward and Cole, 2016) critically questioning the role cultural attitudes play in establishing and/or maintaining attitudes about animals generally and implications for rural animals specifically.

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