

**Resiliency & Reporting:
Exploring a Journalists' Mental Health in an Unprecedented Year**

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The year 2020 — and the first months of 2021 — were atypical by most standards, and punctuated with one stark headline after another: the coronavirus pandemic resulted in 550,000 American deaths and dramatic changes to everyday life; the country's political divide deepened in the wake of a presidential election that was contested by a twice-impeached incumbent accused of inciting an insurrection; and the continued injustices of racism and police brutality fueled national movements and protests. The Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (2021), the National Institutes of Health (n.d.), and the National Alliance on Mental Illness (n.d.) have acknowledged the negative impact that these events have had on mental health, and suggest limiting news intake to reduce stress and anxiety.

By profession, journalists document and disseminate the news for the masses, and may not as easily flip the switch on their own news consumption. Further, journalists are often among the first responders to violent or otherwise traumatic news events in their daily work. Veteran journalist Christiane Amanpour, whose career has included field reporting during wars, natural disasters, and humanitarian crises, described 2020 as “an unprecedented year in world news” (O’Dowd & Hagan, 2020, para. 1). Annual reports from the Neiman Foundation (n.d.) and the Poynter Institute (Tompkins, 2020) support Amanpour’s assessment and suggest that reporting on the pandemic has impacted the mental health of journalists.

Literature Review

Trauma in Journalism

Trauma in journalism is a relatively new area of research interest, emerging in the 1990s at the intersection of media, psychological, and organizational communication studies. Early research focused on post-traumatic stress disorder among journalists working in war zones and

their psychological symptoms, including anxiety, depression, insomnia, and flashbacks (Feinstein et al., 2002; Feinstein & Nicolson, 2005; Pyevich et al., 2003). Broader studies indicated that workplace trauma spanned beyond warzones, and that journalists are routinely exposed to other traumatic events, such as automobile accidents, fires, murders, mass casualties, and natural disasters (Dworznic, 2011; Seely, 2019a; Simpson & Boggs, 1999).

The topic grew in interest as scholars sought to unpack journalists' complex and evolving role in telling tragic national stories, including the Columbine High School shootings (Chyi & McCombs, 2004; Muschert & Carr, 2006), the September 11, 2001 terrorist attacks (Kitch, 2011; Parameswara, 2006), Hurricane Katrina (Littlefield & Quenette, 2007; Voorhees et al., 2007), and the Virginia Tech shootings (Park et al., 2013; Walsh-Childers et al., 2011).

Further research has considered how a journalists' professional commitments to objectivity and accuracy might conflict with their capacity to process traumatic events. Scholars found that in addition to psychological disorders, journalists exposed to traumatic events are also at risk for emotional distress and moral injury, often based in profound guilt or shame (Browne et al., 2012; Feinstein et al., 2018).

While much of the existing research is quantitative, some scholarship has focused on sharing the first-hand, personal accounts of journalists who have experienced trauma at work. A reporter grieving the loss of a colleague during their coverage of the Oklahoma City bombing expressed hesitation in disclosing her subsequent depression and anxiety, sudden and vivid recollections of the event, guilt in reporting before mourning, and challenges with work-life balance (Aiken, 1996). Decades later, journalists who reported on the Pulse night club shooting expressed similar feelings of anxiety and depression, flashbacks, and guilt about their perceived role as “vultures” at the scene (Peterson & Soundararajan, 2020, p. 80). These accounts,

although decades apart, support the findings of existing scholarship that indicates trauma experienced by journalists negatively impacts their psychological and emotional wellbeing, as well as their professional satisfaction.

Additional research has examined trauma in journalism from the lens of organizational efficiency. Scholars have explored trauma's role in journalists' decreased workplace satisfaction and increased burnout (Beam & Spratt, 2009; Dworznik, 2018; Seely, 2019a), and in some cases, decisions to leave the industry (Jung, 2012; Reinardy, 2011).

Journalists' Coping

Some scholars have argued that a journalists' ability to acknowledge their own emotional responses enables them to be more empathetic and authentic storytellers, and have advocated for the inclusion of trauma education and coping skills in journalists' training and professional settings (Amend et al., 2012; Dworznik & Garvey, 2018; Seely, 2019b). Other scholars have found that journalists are hesitant to discuss trauma among their peers or at work, and instead cope by attempting to detach emotionally and remembering the higher calling of their profession (Greenberg et al., 2009; Himmelstein & Faithorn, 2010). Some journalists build a system of defenses around that higher calling, and manage their workplace trauma by internalizing it as part of their professional identities (Deuze, 2005; Novak & Davidson, 2013).

Additional coping strategies include the use of dark humor, exercise or other physical activities, and drug or alcohol use (Buchanan & Keats, 2011; MacDonald et al., 2016; Monteiro et al., 2016). Some journalists also attempt to balance reports of violence and death with reports about community healing and resources to help themselves and their audiences cope (Dahmen et al., 2017; Muschert & Carr, 2006).

These cognitive and behavioral coping strategies align with foundational literature from the fields of psychology and psychiatry. In his cornerstone psychoanalytic theory, psychologist Sigmund Freud (1910) posited that people are governed by their unconscious mind, and that the reduction of tension and anxiety is a major drive for the mind. Many scholars based their work in furthering Freud's findings about the levels and functions of human consciousness, including his daughter, Anna, whose work focused on child development and psychology. In her most recognized work, Freud (1992) outlined a series of naturally occurring, unconscious defense mechanisms employed to manage anxiety – including denial, displacement, intellectualization, projection, rationalization, reaction formation, regression, repression, and sublimation.

Many scholars seeking to understand stress and related coping mechanisms have leaned on the Freuds' work, including psychologists Richard Lazarus and Susan Folkman (1984), who put forth the transactional model of stress and coping. The model outlines a problem-focused coping style, in which stress is managed through actions such as talking to a friend or exercising, and an emotional-focused coping style, in which stress is managed cognitively through control of one's emotions via empathy, denial, rationalization, or numbing via substance (Lazarus & Folkman, 1978). Many people utilize a combination of both coping styles (Lazarus & Folkman, 1984), which results in mixed efficacy based on a host of other factors, including stress levels, environmental influences, personality traits, and demographics (Afshar, et al., 2015; Ben-Zur, 2009).

Broader organizational communication research has explored stress and coping mechanisms in a variety of professional settings, and found that while an individual may be reluctant to discuss trauma or their personal coping strategies at work, the availability of work-related interventions and perceived compassion from management and peers improved an

individual's ability to return to work effectively following workplace trauma (Ahmed, et al., 2021; Latack & Havlovic, 1992; Stergiopoulos et al., 2011).

The Current Study

Scholars have contributed to a deeper understanding of the trauma experienced by journalists at work, and more broadly, how people cope with workplace stress. While more recent studies have shifted focus to explore reporters' use of social media (Mourão & Harlow, 2020; Santana & Hopp, 2016) and their role in combatting disinformation (Rodriguez-Perez, et al., 2021; Cavaliere, 2020), trauma in journalism remains a relevant research interest as the industry continues to evolve. Much of the existing literature is outdated and therefore not representative of current newsroom landscape, which has been dramatically changed by emerging technologies, evolving audiences, and dwindling resources in the last decade. Further, scholarship on trauma experienced by journalists has traditionally been focused on violent and relatively brief episodes, and has not yet thoroughly explored the cumulative toll of multiple, concurring events over an extended period of time.

Much of the emerging scholarship around the pandemic's impact on mental health has focused on the experiences of healthcare workers (Choi et al., 2020; Jaiswal et al., 2020; Vizheh et al., 2020) or police officers (Drew & Martin, 2020; Stogner et al., 2020), although journalists have often been on the frontlines reporting on the crisis. Early findings from a forthcoming quantitative study suggest that experienced journalists from well-funded newsrooms are exhibiting signs of anxiety and depression while reporting on the pandemic (Selva & Feinstein, 2020).

The current study was designed to address gaps in the existing literature and contribute to forthcoming literature by asking the following research question:

1. What effect did reporting on the COVID-19 pandemic have on the mental health of journalists?

Method

Qualitative Research Paradigm

This inquiry was guided by the constructivist paradigm, which epistemologically holds that knowledge is constructed socially through an individual's personal experiences and reflections, resulting in multiple realities and truths (Means Coleman, 1998). Constructivism is a flexible, fluid approach in which ontological and epistemological beliefs blur, and the methodological approach is hermeneutical in its dependence on the researcher's individual study execution and interpretation (Means Coleman, 1998). This paradigm allows for the inductive prioritization of an individual's lived experiences over a priori ideas, while also acknowledging the role that the researcher's own experiences play in the process (Lindlof & Taylor, 2017; Means Coleman, 1998).

Participant

The single participant for this study was selected using purposive sampling, which identifies candidates through a predetermined set of specific personal characteristics or experiences (Lindlof & Taylor, 2017). The participant, who chose the pseudonym Liz, was selected because of her profession and previous participation in a panel discussion about mental health and journalism. Liz is a 36-year-old white woman who self-identified as cisgender and heterosexual. Liz is in a relationship, with no children. She holds a bachelor's degree in journalism, and has been a news reporter with a Detroit-based radio station since 2014. Since March 2020, Liz has developed a flexible work schedule, in which she alternates working from home and coming into the station or field reporting.

Procedure & Interview Guide

To accommodate ongoing public health and safety protocols, I completed the 53-minute interview via Zoom video call in March 2021. The interview was transcribed using a combination of Scribie's automated transcription services and manual transcription for quality control and accuracy. Both the researcher and the participant were in a quiet, private location within their homes for the interview, which was scheduled at the convenience of the participant. The participant did not receive any form of compensation.

Reflective of the constructivist paradigm, this study was designed to explore the participant's self-described experiences of reporting during the pandemic and any related impacts to her mental health. I used a semi-structured interview design, which allowed me to ask specific, open-ended questions in service of the research question, while also allowing flexibility to accommodate the conversation based on the participant's responses. The full interview guide and transcript are included in the Appendix.

Researcher Reflexivity and Positionality

Reflexivity is the ongoing, reflective practice in which a researcher considers how their own biases, experiences, and beliefs influence the implementation and analysis of their qualitative research (Lindlof & Taylor, 2017). At the time I designed this project, my own professional and personal worlds were turned upside down by the pandemic. News and changes related to the pandemic have dramatically and negatively changed my job in media relations and university communications. While I have friends and family members who work in hospitals, schools, and retail and service industries, my own pandemic paranoia seems to be the most extreme in my personal circle, for reasons I am struggling to understand. Additionally, during this project I was consciously limiting my own news consumption as a means of self-

preservation. This project emerged from my own stress and anxiety related to the pandemic, and its negative impact on my own job.

My background, experiences, and training as a communications professional shaped why and how I executed this project. My positionality as a white woman with an undergraduate degree in journalism and experience working with reporters aided my ability to recruit and establish rapport with the participant. I simultaneously held emic status as a white woman working in Detroit media and etic status as a researcher (Fetterman, 1998). Additionally, after the interview, the participant revealed that we had several mutual connections (though we had not previously met), which enhanced my ability to establish trust.

While my background and identity presented benefits to this project, my personal experiences and current professional and mental health challenges created limitations for my work. As someone whose work and mental health has been negatively impacted by the pandemic, I was hypersensitive to the potential effects of pandemic-related news, and perhaps subconsciously seeking to affirm my own experiences through another's experiences. However, I accounted for that hypersensitivity by allowing the participant's experiences and responses to speak for themselves and guide the interview process. Some of my planned interview questions were changed or abandoned entirely because our conversation took a different direction than I had anticipated, and focused more on coping strategies and balance rather than stress and anxiety.

Data Analysis

I used an inductive, grounded approach to identify themes in the data (Lindlof & Taylor, 2017). This approach was based on the constructivist desire to allow for the participant's lived experiences to guide the research by allowing the data to speak for itself without the influence of

a priori ideas or theories (Lindlof & Taylor, 2017). I first listened to the interview while reading the transcript, taking extensive notes about recurring ideas and phrases. I compared these notes with my field notes from the interview to notate any behavioral cues, like changes in speech patterns, body language, and pauses. I then re-read the transcript and annotated a second, third, and fourth time. From there, I began to develop codes from my notes and annotations, focusing on the participant's description of events, emotions, people, and beliefs and values (Lindlof & Taylor, 2017). Once an initial set of codes was developed and defined, I compared them for redundancy. Comparative review allowed me to identify similarities and differences among the codes (Lindlof & Taylor, 2017). I identified a set of 13 codes.

Once codes were identified, they were reviewed again within the transcript more broadly for connections. This review prompted the development of five broader themes: health, stress, personal coping, interpersonal relationships, and professional sense of duty. These themes, and their respective codes, were compiled into a mind map chart for visual representation. After considering a hierarchy developed on the mind map chart, I re-read the transcript to confirm all relevant data was coded accordingly. During this round of annotation, I focused on portions of the data that fit related codes, and therefore may have belonged to multiple themes. Each passage of data that encompassed multiple codes was assigned a dominant theme in the annotations. Each theme was assigned a color, and I revisited my annotated transcript to organize and color-code my notes by theme. Following this review of the relationships between themes, final theme summaries were defined. The coding scheme and theme summaries are available in the Appendix.

Trustworthiness of Research

I made special effort to tend to the authenticity of this study. To allow for progressive subjectivity, I made note of my own experiences, assumptions, and findings from the existing literature before the interview to ensure I did not unfairly privilege any of my own expectations (Means Coleman, 1998). To further support credibility, I engaged in peer debriefings during class workshops with other student scholars to discuss my processes, analysis, and emerging results (Lindlof & Taylor, 2017; Means Coleman, 1998). Additionally, I conducted a member check at the end of the interview, and answered any questions the participant had about the study (Lindlof & Taylor, 2017). Further, when the participant responded to a post-interview thank you email, I took the opportunity to schedule a brief phone call to serve as an additional check in which the participant and I discussed the themes that I had interpreted from our interview and the participant confirmed that they were representative of her experiences (Lindlof & Taylor, 2017). Transferability was made possible by thick description (Lindlof & Taylor, 2017), including diligent observations and note-taking of the interview setting, careful transcription of the interview, and use of participant quotes. My own reflexivity exercises conducted before, during, and after the study, along with post-analysis audit of notes, codes, and themes supported dependability (Means Coleman, 1998).

Results

Liz's experiences as a journalist reporting on the pandemic were multi-faceted, and she spoke often about changes and adaptations made in 2020. Despite some changes in health and increased stress, Liz described a feeling of overall balance that resulted from a combination of her personal coping, interpersonal relationships, and a professional sense of duty. Table 1 presents the definitions and an example of each of these themes.

Health

The theme health captures Liz's self-assessment of her physical and mental health during the pandemic. She described positive changes in her physical health, including a new routine of yoga and hiking. Liz also reported negative changes in her mental health early in the pandemic. She reported interrupted sleep patterns and frightening dreams. Liz also described paranoia and anxiety about germs when reporting to work at the radio station.

We have a routine of wiping everything down before and after our shifts, but I just felt like germs or the virus could be anywhere, and it was terrifying. And I'm not a germaphobe at all, but I was like, "this is what it must feel like to be a germaphobe." I couldn't get past it, it was like the dominant thought, and I think my heart was probably beating faster and this whole...I felt like I was going into a contaminated place to work, and it was terrifying.

Liz's paranoia about cleanliness in the workplace subsided as the pandemic progressed, and scientists learned that the virus is not as transmissible via surface contact. However, Liz remained aware of the inherent risk, and has accepted that the risk is exacerbated by her role working with the public.

Now, if I go in and cover a shift, I don't...my heart doesn't race at all. I still wipe everything down before and after, but I don't feel like sketched out the same way I did before. So, I feel more at ease in general. But whenever I report, I am encountering people sometimes who aren't wearing masks. Even though I always wear my mask, sometimes it's kind of like, "ooh"...I come home and wash my hands and sing *Happy Birthday* twice and do my due diligence. But, you never know....It's out there, and you could get it.

While Liz experienced some changes during the pandemic, she described her overall health as “balanced,” indicating her ability to adapt. She was able to improve her physical health through new habits, and has managed to accept new mental health challenges over time.

Stress

The theme stress captures the participant’s sources of stress during the pandemic, which included pre-existing factors unrelated to the pandemic and new, pandemic-related factors. Liz reported that most of her stress had been related to pre-existing factors that were amplified in 2020, including the risks involved in working with the public. She also reported ongoing internal conflict and emotional turmoil related to her own white privilege as a primary source of stress. That stress has been compounded in a year hallmarked by racial injustices and related social movements.

I will say it is difficult for me being...working in a city where I am a minority and where I have a lot of privilege and trying to tell stories...I try to tell the stories of a majority Black city...Luckily in 2020, there has been a racial reckoning – that is so good – but that makes it even harder for me to grapple with my role as a reporter, as a white reporter in this city...That’s something that has stressed me out for as long as I’ve been reporting. But it’s even more something that I grapple with now, and that I don’t know what...I don’t know how to reconcile it.

In addition to that continued internal dissonance, Liz also described increased stress about germs and mask policies, and conflicted frustration with her inability to receive vaccine at the same time as workers in other public-facing sectors.

We’re not eligible for the vaccine yet. I’m sure there are some reporters who’ve been able to get it, but nobody at my work has been able to get it for being a reporter...I guess I

wouldn't say I feel like we deserve it more than other people who've gotten the vaccine...I'm okay with waiting my turn, so it's not something I'm like, "oh, that's an injustice," but I think some people might be surprised to know that we...we have been out there, but we definitely are not prioritized on the same level as some of the other front line workers. I don't know if that's necessarily bad.

Liz's patience with vaccine eligibility requirements and her ability to differentiate her role and risk from that of "other front line workers" suggests that she understands that the pandemic has created stress for everyone, and that she is not alone in her anxieties. Her rationalization displays a level of self-awareness and control, which enabled Liz to view her personal stresses from a broader, community-oriented perspective. Although the pandemic presented new stress into Liz's life, she was most impacted by unrelated and pre-existing stressors. Liz's primary sources of stress during the pandemic were her own perceived privilege and inability to effect change in ongoing social justice movements, and concerns about working with an unpredictable public. While Liz has previously been able to manage these non-pandemic stressors, the additional pandemic-related pressures created a compounded, but manageable, stress.

Personal Coping

The theme personal coping captures the participant's ability to recognize and manage her stress during the pandemic, and the related tactics. Liz described finding escape and relief in different places, including physical outings in nature and mental distractions in reality television. Both forms of escape were made possible by Liz's ability to consciously limit her own news consumption, despite her job. Technology also aided in Liz's coping by way of escape. She reported using alert settings to limit unsolicited, after-hours news notifications. She also

described using streaming services and chat tools with her friends to maintain their pre-pandemic tradition of watching reality television together. Liz took pride in her ability to maintain a healthy work-life balance.

Like when I'm off the clock, I'm really good at not working...I don't get a lot of alerts on my phone...So mostly for me, I would have to decide to seek those things out, and I don't want to because I like when I'm not at work to be able to focus on other things, so it's really not a priority unless there's a big thing happening.

Liz reported with confidence her ability to establish professional and personal boundaries, and described having conscious control of her free time. While some of these existing boundaries were adapted during the pandemic, they remained effective in helping Liz prioritize her own wellness and cope with stress.

Interpersonal Relationships

The theme interpersonal relationships captures the participant's interactions with her audience, her coworkers and friends. Though she spoke of them rarely, Liz described her relationships with her friends as a source of continuity during the pandemic, and found happiness and humor in socialization. Liz also described feelings of empathy and commitment to her radio audience, though she does not know her listeners personally. This empathy served to provide meaning to Liz's job.

I also think about one of the stories I did that was on the people who called for unemployment and couldn't get through. And I can hear this man's voice in my head. He told me, he would just call constantly on repeat and he would say...He would hear it in his sleep, because all he did all day long was try and call unemployment. I think he...

Yeah, he just was haunted by it, and he had so much anxiety, because he didn't have an income because of it. I can just hear the despair in his voice.

This connection Liz described suggests that, even in a remote and anonymous environment, she was moved by the experiences and stresses of others. While she did indicate that such exposure was personally troubling at times, she found purpose in the potential to impact her audience.

Liz also spoke with respect about her boss and the overall culture of her workplace. She described a new emphasis on wellness from management, including a station-wide mental health day observation, in which all employees were encouraged to take a paid day off for self-care. Additionally, her boss supported that initiative, and encouraged personal health and balance.

He doesn't perpetuate like a culture of news, news, news, get it done, get it done. He really does remind us to take breaks and get outside. He also has shared a couple of webinars that have been on burnout. So yeah, I think at least my direct boss has been really good. I think actually kind of even the station overall has a culture of reminding us to try and be balanced when possible.

This top-down emphasis on wellness from Liz's employer suggests that her professional relationships became more supportive and understanding during the pandemic, at the same her relationship with her audience was becoming more personal in nature. Liz's various interpersonal relationships kept her grounded in reality, despite the presence of shifting and stressful news in her life. She found human connection in a virtual environment, and was able to draw on those connections for purpose and support during the pandemic.

Professional Sense of Duty

The theme professional sense of duty captures the participant's role as journalist and the related sense of responsibility to share information. Liz seemed to like her job, and was excited to describe the technical aspects of audio recording and radio broadcasting, as well as her passion for storytelling. She described feeling empowered by her access to information, and found comfort in being able to help herself and her audience with that information. Liz described how the need-to-know nature of news during the pandemic, including information about coronavirus testing and vaccines, had created additional pressure.

I feel like I'm providing a service and I feel like maybe I have a little bit more skills than the average person, or maybe the average person could maybe find the same answer, but they're like... It's not their day job, they're busy trying to get by, and so yeah, I just feel... I also feel like it just felt like more important than... I mean, I think it's really important to tell a good story, but I felt like... And I think even in the pandemic, there were a lot of good stories that were really impactful and important to be told, but it just... To me, it felt like less of a priority when there were so many unanswered questions, sometimes life and death questions, sometimes just really helpful or important questions that needed to be answered.

While Liz's ability to answer "life and death questions" gave her a sense of empowerment and control, it also seemed to contribute to an increase in her own professional sense of responsibility. Liz, however, seemed to view this responsibility as just another part of her "day job," suggesting that it has become an internalized, normal pressure for her. The nature of pandemic-related information increased this sense of responsibility, but Liz seemed well equipped to process the added pressure because of her own definition of and favorable outlook on the profession.

Table 1. Study Themes

Theme	Definition	Example Quotation (Liz)
Health	Participant's assessment of overall health, including physical and mental health.	"There have been many times during the pandemic where I have woken up crazy early and just not been able to fall back asleep. I've also had...the pandemic dreams where you're in a crowded place and nobody else is wearing a mask."
Stress	Sources of stress during the pandemic, including those related and un-related to the pandemic.	"I'm not terrified the way I was during those initial hosting sessions, but it is a more pronounced fear in those moments than just, like, the general day-to-day."
Personal Coping	Participant's ability to manage stress through behavioral and cognitive tactics.	"It's helpful to go outside and go for a walk and try when possible to do things with other people rather than just be constantly obsessed with the news."
Interpersonal Relationships	Descriptions of interactions with participant's audience, coworkers, and family and friends.	"We make time, and we hadn't really done that before the pandemic. It almost feels like these are extra efforts and management is recognizing everything that's going on right now."
Professional Sense of Duty	Descriptions of participant's role as a journalist and the related sense of duty.	"While there have been ways to work safely, many of us have also been on the front lines. And in order to tell some of the most important stories, we have put our lives at risk."

Discussion

This study provides a first-hand perspective about the impact of the coronavirus pandemic on a journalist's mental health. The participant's self-described experiences revealed that while the pandemic changed the nature of a journalist's work, it did not cause major disruptions to her well-being. Journalists are trained – either formally or informally – to deal with trauma and secondary trauma as part of their jobs. That learned skill, along with a

combination of unique personal and environmental factors, shapes the lens through which journalist's view their work and cope with stress.

Trauma in Journalism

While it may be too early to fully understand its impact, the participant did not identify reporting on the pandemic as a source of trauma. The participant described changes and increased stress, but was able to successfully manage her work and maintained a sense of optimism about her role as a journalist, predominantly based on her ability to empower others by sharing information. This supports findings from previous literature about a feeling of higher calling and community service that some journalists develop as part of their professional identity (Greenberg et al., 2009; Himmelstein & Faithorn, 2010). It also supports previous findings that suggest reporters are routinely exposed to varying levels of trauma (Dworznic, 2011; Seely, 2019a; Simpson & Boggs, 1999). The participant's dismissal of the notion the pandemic was "traumatic" and was preceded by her own accounts of increased, but manageable, stress. This apparent disconnect aligns with the idea put forth in previous studies that workplace stress is normalized by some journalists (Deuze, 2005; Novak & Davidson, 2013), and that not all recognize and define such repeated stress as "trauma."

Although this study was designed to focus on the impact of the pandemic, it evolved to explore the complex, interwoven and overwhelming news cycle in 2020. This project suggests that a series of multiple, concurrent events — like the pandemic, a contentious election and political environment, and ongoing racial injustices and social movements — may compound stress. While the participant was able to manage these compounded stresses, other studies suggest that such stress may contribute to an environment in which a journalist could become emotionally numb (Greenberg et al., 2009; Himmelstein & Faithorn, 2010).

Much of the existing scholarship on the topic suggests that workplace trauma and stress increase professional dissatisfaction and turnover in the journalism industry (Jung, 2012; Reinardy, 2011). The participant, however, expressed excitement and fulfillment in her work despite increased stress, and found that employer was placing new emphasis on personal wellness during the pandemic. This contradiction suggests that the participant's supportive workplace environment contributed to her overall job satisfaction, which aligns with broader organizational scholarship about the positive impact of supportive management and camaraderie among colleagues (Ahmed, et al., 2021; Stergiopoulos et al., 2011).

Coping with Stress

The participant's ability to cope with stress enabled her to minimize the impact of the pandemic on her mental health. To manage increased stress, the participant employed a variety of tactics, including behavioral tactics like exercising and spending time outdoors, and cognitive tactics, like taking mental breaks via reality television and finding solace in her ability to access and share crucial information. These tactics support the existing findings that suggest reporters often turn to exercise for stress relief (Buchanan & Keats, 2011; MacDonald et al., 2016; Monteiro et al., 2016), and attempt to balance their news coverage to neutralize stressful stories (Dahmen et al., 2017; Muschert & Carr, 2006). This blend of behavioral and cognitive tactics is in agreement with the transactional model of stress and coping (Lazarus & Folkman, 1984).

This study suggests that the proactive management of stress can be effective. In establishing a healthy work-life balance and limiting after-hours news consumption, the participant displayed a level of self-control and self-awareness that is viewed as foundation to psychological wellbeing (Freud, 1910). This study also suggests that the participant was able to manage emerging stress primarily through focusing her energy and attention elsewhere, either in

her work, relationships or independent activities. Her ability to channel stress into a socially acceptable, constructive way supports Freud's (1992) sublimation mechanism of defense.

This study also affirms the existing scholarship that a journalist's relationship with their audience is participatory and reciprocal (Borger et al., 2014; Lewis et al., 2013), particularly among journalists like the participant who serve smaller, local communities. In addition to this symbiotic relationship with her audience, the participant's favorable perspective about her boss and overall workplace culture supports the previous findings that an individual's professional relationships play a foundational role in their ability to cope with work-related stress (Ahmed, et al., 2021; Stergiopoulos et al., 2011).

Limitations and Future Directions

This project, like all research, has limitations that ultimately shaped its execution and results. One obvious limitation is that only one participant was asked to share their experiences. While one participant and a single interview provided ample information for the scope and goals of this project, her experiences may not necessarily be representative of other journalist's experiences. As a technologically adept, established professional in her career, the participant was able to adapt with relative ease to remote work. Further, her independent living status, and technological prowess enabled the participant to increase efficiency and productivity while working from home. Many journalists may not be as technically savvy, professionally passionate, and/or as efficient when working from home. Future research is needed to explore how journalists of varying career stages and demographics have experienced reporting during the pandemic.

A second limitation of this project is that it was developed to narrowly focus on the pandemic, overlooking the other headlines that dominated 2020. While the participant referenced

both the contentious political environment and ongoing racial and social justice movements in our interview, a broader line of thinking prior to the conversation would have likely yielded different findings. Future research would benefit from exploring the independent and collective mental health impacts of all of the stories that dominated headlines in 2020.

Findings from this project support the need for continued research about the role of news consumption and an individual's well-being, the relationship between specific types of news content and journalist's job satisfaction, public opinion and engagement with local media, and the correlation between workplace support and employee stress, among other topics.

Conclusion

This project highlights the resilience of a journalist reporting in an unprecedented news year. This project found that a combination of behavioral and cognitive coping tactics can support the effective management of increased stress. More broadly, it offers insight about the nuances of a journalist's professional identity, and the meaning and support they draw from their audiences and colleagues. While the pandemic dominated headlines in 2020 and 2021, this project found that the public health crisis was less stressful to report on than the concurring racial and social injustices. While this difference may be based in emotional response, it may also be related to a journalist's internalized responsibility to share information as means of community service and advocacy. In reporting on the pandemic, journalists have been able to share timely safety protocols and public health updates about testing and vaccines, thereby helping their communities and mitigating some of their own stress. However, not every crisis can be as directly addressed, and journalists may feel a sense of professional and personal disconnect when they are unable to share information as a potential solution.

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Appendix

Semi-Structured Interview Guide

Work

1. Tell me about how you came to be a journalist? (TOUR)
 - Probe: What stations/organizations, in what role, for how long?
2. What factors motivated you to pursue that path? (TOUR)
3. Now that you've been working in the field for awhile, what would you say are the most essential skills or qualities to be a journalist? (POSING IDEAL)
4. What do you like/dislike most about your work? (EXPERIENCE/STRUCTURAL)
5. How often are you interacting with news on a daily basis (either reading/consuming, or creating/reporting)? (EXPERIENCE)
 - Probe: What strategies do you use to "disconnect" from the news once you're done with work for the day? (EXPERIENCE)
6. A lot of people, especially lately, find news to be stressful and they actively try to limit their news intake - what do you think? (EMERGENT IDEA).

Work during the pandemic

7. In what ways has your work changed since the start of the pandemic?
(EXPERIENCE/TIME-LINE)
 - Probe: Tell me about the changes in work logistics (remote work, communications with colleagues, etc.) and the work itself (work load, news content, etc.)?
(EXPERIENCE)
 - Probe: In your experience, what have been the benefits and challenges of those changes? (STRUCTURAL)

8. Tell me about the kinds of news you've been reporting on lately? (EXPERIENCE)
 - Probe: You mentioned coverage of *SUBJECT*, in what ways has reporting on that been different than your previous reporting? (STRUCTURAL)
9. How does reporting on pandemic-related news make you feel? (EXPERIENCE)
10. How have your feelings about work changed in the last year? (STRUCTURAL)

Mental health

11. What does mental health look like to you? (NATIVE LANGUAGE)
12. How are you feeling about your own mental health lately? (EXPERIENCE)
 - Probe: What mental health resources are available to you currently? (EXPERIENCE)
13. What have you learned about yourself during the pandemic? (EXPERIENCE)
 - Probe: What changes in habits/relationships/health have you noticed? (EXAMPLE)
14. How do you usually manage feelings of stress/anxiety? (EXPERIENCE)
 - Probe: In what ways have those self-care routines been impacted by the pandemic?
(EXAMPLE)
15. What mental health resources are available to you currently? (EXPERIENCE)
 - Probe: Has your employer offered any additional tactics to help support mental health? (EXPERIENCE)
16. How do you think reporting on pandemic-related news has impacted your mental health?
(EXPERIENCE)
 - Probe: Can you share an example of a recent news story that resonated with you?
(EXAMPLE)

17. A lot of the current public dialogue around mental health is focused on the pandemic's impact on health care workers – what do you wish more people knew about the experiences of journalists during the pandemic? (EMERGENT IDEA)

Closing Questions

18. Demographic information: age, highest level of education, marital status, kids
19. Is there anything you'd like to add that I didn't ask?
20. Do you have any questions for me?

Interview Transcript

Interview participant: Liz (pseudonym selected by participant)

Interviewed by: Katie McMillan via Zoom on March 5, 2021

Transcribed by: Scribe Transcription service on March 8, 2021 and manually reviewed for quality control by Katie McMillan March 23 – 29

Interview:

0:00:02.7 Katie McMillan (KM): Alright, let's hope that I have access to the recording. We'll see how that goes. All right, so my first question for you today is to just tell me about how you came to be a journalist in the first place. What did that look like for you?

0:00:20.1 Liz: Oh wow, okay. So, I went to a semester program in 2009 at this place called The Salt Institute for documentary studies in Portland, Maine, and that was after I went to undergrad at a college on the West Coast, (school name) for psychology. So, I did this little semester intensive where they really focus on teaching you how to be a public radio reporter. And so after that, I had a couple of internships. One of them I got at (radio station) here in Detroit, and I moved to Detroit from Portland. I wanted to work at (radio station), so I just kind of stayed there until they hired me. It took six years.

[chuckle]

0:01:14.6 *KM*: Okay. There's something to be said for persistence, right?

0:01:16.0 *Liz*: Yeah.

0:01:17.6 *KM*: Okay, so what do you like most about your work and what do you dislike most about your work?

0:01:26.6 *Liz*: Oh wow. Yeah, I really like... I like and don't like meeting all of the people. What I like about it is - you hear this from journalists all the time, but it's so true - you get to connect with people you otherwise wouldn't get to connect with, you get invited into people's homes and you do...you get to see things and go places that you wouldn't otherwise have an excuse to go. And I love that about it. I also really like... for me I like... Again, everything I like I also don't like, so we'll get to that, too. I like the process of molding it into a story. I find that really stimulating and also very challenging, but I really do like the script writing process and trying to take all this different tape that I got and formulating it into a story. I really like trying to find ways to incorporate sound into my stories as a radio reporter. That's a thing that's really important to me, and I also really enjoy the audio editing process.

0:02:55.7 *Liz*: I like how basically this script that I write in paper, I then personally turn into this little audio story. As radio reporters, we do all that ourselves, so then I go and I do my narration and then I take all the elements, and I like being in the editing software and just actually going through those motions. Then at one point, you're done and then you just click 'play' and this little piece comes to life, so yeah, so those are some things I like about it.

0:03:24.3 *KM*: Okay, it sounds like it's kind of the 360 story-telling, because you're taking it from that interaction with someone and then you're actually piecing it together for the finished

product. Can you tell me how often you are interacting with news on a daily basis, either reading it yourself, consuming it yourself, or creating it?

0:03:50.0 Liz: Yeah, my main way of consuming news actually is the radio. But I'm kind of insane, and I listen to the radio - not all day long 'cause I can't listen to it while I'm working - but if I'm not working more often than that, I'm listening to the radio. I listen to our station primarily. We have (national affiliate station) news, so that is my main source, but then I also get a lot of news from my email, because as a reporter, I get all my pitches in and I'm on a lot of newsletters, and so I get a lot of news that way. It takes so long to check my email, but I try to check it at least twice a day, and then, not as much, but I do get news on Facebook and Twitter as well. I'm not one of those people that's super tied to those, especially Facebook. I mostly just post my stories on it (Facebook), but on Twitter, I go in spurts. Especially if I am going on there to post my own stories, then I usually get caught in a hole, and I'll get a lot of news that way as well.

0:05:09.7 KM: You said, "caught in a hole." So, it sounds like it's almost just kind of a continuous, constant thing where it's you're on the radio, you're on your email, you're on social...

0:05:23.8 Liz: Yeah, for radio in particular, I'm not one of those people, though... Some people scroll the news before they go to sleep, that's not me. Like when I'm off the clock, I... Actually I'm really good at not working. I listen to the radio all the time, and even though the news is constant on our station, 'cause we have top-of-the hour news, in-between - a lot of it is not hard news, it's interview shows and things like that. So, I'm not... Even when I'm listening to the radio, I'm not like... I guess technically, I'm not constantly consuming news.

0:06:01.2 KM: Okay. So can we talk a little bit more about the strategies that you use to disconnect, I know that you said that you think when you're off the clock, you're pretty good at being off the clock. How do you do that?

0:06:14.9 Liz: I don't have a lot of alerts on my phone, and I don't get email alerts, or Twitter alerts. That's a big thing. So mostly for me, I would have to decide to seek those things out, and I don't want to because I like when I'm not at work to be able to focus on other things, so it's really not a priority to me unless there's a big thing happening. I'm totally a fair-weather news fan, where if there's debates or a State of the Union (speech), I'm always, I gotta tune into those. And then, I got my Twitter open, and I have my little hashtags, and I'm looking at what everybody's tweeting - but other than that, it's not hard for me because it's not how I wanna spend my free time.

0:07:14.0 KM: Good for you. So it sounds like you have a really healthy kind of work-life balance where you're able to turn it on, turn it off, pick and choose.

Okay, so a lot of people, especially lately, find the news to be stressful and are actively trying to limit their news intake. The CDC, one of their top recommendations for managing pandemic-related stress is to just limit your news, turn it off. What do you think about that?

0:07:44.1 Liz: Yeah, for a lot of my friends, I know that's an issue for them. They are just constantly consuming it, and it really bums them out and... I could see how that would help them. I know for me, it's helpful to go outside and go for a walk and try when possible to do things with other people rather than just be constantly obsessed with the news. Because this year in particular, over the past year, so much of it has been negative. It is hard if you consume a bunch of news. It's hard to feel good about things, so I think it makes sense that the CDC recommends that.

0:08:43.6 KM: Okay. We're gonna shift for a little bit, we're gonna talk about your actual work and your job and how the pandemic has impacted that. So, in what ways has your work changed since the start of the pandemic?

0:08:58.8 Liz: Well, so every day we used to go to the station. Now, since I'm not... I'm a sub-anchor, but I don't have a regularly scheduled on-air shift, so my role has...I work from home now unless I'm called in. I have been called in during the pandemic. I used to do field reporting and would go out and talk to people in real life, but in the beginning (of the pandemic) then everything was phone interviews, which was actually really cool, because we used to not know how to do phone interviews from home. But we got a little cable and now we can do phone interviews, and of course, you can record Zoom interviews and things like that. And also with everything being online now, we can record a City Council meeting without leaving your home. So, it kind of transitioned to that, and my stories lacked that stound rich nature that I used to like, because it was just a lot of phone and Zoom tape. But I will say, I started producing stories a lot quicker because there's no commute time, it's just... It's kind of a streamlined process when you can just do all your reporting from home, and a lot of the meetings, you don't... They're just like already...

0:10:32.9 Liz: There's just a lot of tape already happening, and so you just need to catch wind of it, and then with all the... I didn't cover the Governor that much, but with elections, I did cover a lot of stuff related to the Secretary of State. There's just like press conferences all the time, and so it's so easy, you don't even have to set up an interview, you just get on the press call and get your sound, and then you can do what we call spots from that. So yeah, I noticed that things were getting a lot more efficient for me. Actually, but now, at times when it started to feel safer, I have gone out and started reporting in the field again. I first did that over the summer, I think around

June, and then did that for a little bit and then things got hairy again, and then went back to mostly just reporting over the phone. And now I am actively reporting in the field again, and it's nice to get better sound, but I've noticed it slowed down my process actually.

0:11:47.5 KM: That's interesting, so it sounds almost like the work from home remote environment in some ways made your job a little bit easier, it made it more efficient, it made it faster, you were getting those kind of the audio reaches that you as a radio reporter were seeking. Okay, so can you tell me about the kinds of news that you've been reporting on lately?

0:12:11.3 Liz: Yeah, so as I mentioned a big chunk of the year was election coverage, lots of local election coverage. Especially with Michigan just being a big local election and the presidential election, and how it played out locally...so leading up to that, a lot of my coverage was on how to vote in the pandemic. And also, I've done reporting on COVID impacts. I remember when people started being like... A lot of people in the service industry, in particular, like it was shut down, but then it started to open back up, and there were people who didn't wanna go in the first time around because they were scared. So I did a story on what do you do, and not just for service industry, but what do you do if you are scared to go back to work? Are you gonna lose your job? And legally, what are your rights if you are scared to go back to work? I did a story on people who have been waiting for unemployment for months and months, and how much they call trying to get it through. I did some stories on the different COVID tests, and how accurate they are, and where you can get them. So, a lot of, I would say, serviceable information. Which I didn't used to do so much, but in the pandemic, it was a lot of news-you-can-use type information, if that makes sense.

0:13:58.0 KM: Okay, so you use the word 'serviceable information,' and I think that's fascinating. Because the public, we've really relied on reporters and journalists for need-to-know

information. In some cases, it is life or death with news content right now, and you all are providing a reliable, credible network where people can find that information easily. I have this one highlighted here, and I think you've touched on it a little bit, but how does reporting on that kind of need-to-know serviceable information make you feel?

0:14:46.4 Liz: I mean, it makes me feel... Honestly, a lot of times I'm motivated by questions that I have, or questions that I'm hearing people ask around me, and so I do just feel... To be redundant, I feel like I'm providing a service, and I feel like maybe I have a little bit more skills than the average person, or maybe the average person could maybe find the same answer. It's not their day job, they're busy trying to get by, and so yeah, I just feel... I also feel like it just felt like more important than... I mean, I think it's really important to tell a good story, but I felt like...

And I think even in the pandemic, there were a lot of good stories that were really impactful and important to be told, but it just... To me, it felt like less of a priority when there were so many unanswered questions, and like you said, sometimes life and death questions. Sometimes there were really helpful or important questions that needed to be answered. And with everything changing so quickly, yeah, there was just a lot of... There were a lot of unanswered questions, so I felt kinda like it was like my duty to try and chip away at some of them. Realistically, on the flip side, it did feel like, 'Okay, I answered a few things,' but there was just so much that was... There were so many more questions that I personally didn't get the chance to get to, but hopefully collectively as the media we were able to answer most or all of those questions.

0:16:35.2 KM: Okay, I would tell you from personal experience as a consumer of the news, I've relied on it heavily. I know my parents have too, so I think you're answering the questions.

0:16:47.6 Liz: Okay, good.

0:16:49.2 KM: I'm thankful for that.

0:16:50.5 Liz: Oh, good.

0:16:50.8 KM: So, we've talked a little bit about work and about pandemic news, we're gonna shift gears for a bit and to talk about mental health. When I say 'mental health,' I'm speaking broadly in a non-clinical way, I don't wear a white coat, I'm not a doctor...when I say 'mental health,' I'm talking about things like stress, anxiety, depression, trouble sleeping, any kind of related behavioral changes. It's kind of a catch-all term, and so my first question on that front is how do you define mental health?

0:17:23.4 Liz: Good question. Yeah, I would say mental health describes a mental state that is balanced and that is more beneficial than negative, and that enables an individual to be their... maybe not their most productive self, but to be productive and feel comfortable. And hopefully relatively content, and definitely safe.

0:18:03.5 KM: Okay. Okay. I would choose a lot of those words, too: productive, comfortable, safe - things are generally okay.

0:18:14.2 Liz: Yeah.

0:18:14.4 KM: Kind of like, 'I'm balanced, I'm moving along.'

So how are you feeling about your own mental health lately? I know in our email exchange, you had kind of said, 'I'm doing okay.' You stand by that? You doing okay?

0:18:27.0 Liz: Yeah, it's interesting you say that, because I woke up this morning at 4:00 a.m. because I was thinking about a story. And I started writing it in my head and I couldn't go back to sleep, and I got up and came down here to work. And so I've been up since 4:00. And I have done that at least one other time during the pandemic. I am not a morning person, and there have been many times during the pandemic where I have woken up crazy early and just not been able to fall back asleep. I've also had, and I think this is very common for a lot of people, the

pandemic dreams where you're in a crowded place and nobody else is wearing a mask. (pause)
Lots and lots of those.

0:19:30.7 *Liz*: But, I think in the day-to-day, I feel relatively okay. Although, I remember early on in the pandemic, when I first went in for an on-air shift - this is back when we still felt like we had to wash all our groceries and leave the mail for a couple of days before you touched it - I was...Oh my God, I went in there, I was still wearing gloves, 'cause now it's like, 'don't waste the gloves,' but at that point in time, it was terrifying. I remember I would try and put my hair up before I washed my hands, and before I would and try put gloves on, which is so hard, but I was like, I didn't wanna touch anything. And we already...We have a routine of wiping everything down before and after our shifts, but I just felt like germs or the virus could be anywhere, and it was terrifying. And I'm not a germaphobe at all, but I was like, 'this is what it must feel like to be a germaphobe.' Some friends I have who are like, Ah! (dismissive vocalizations). And... I couldn't get past it, it was like the dominant thought, and I think my heart was probably beating faster and this whole... I felt like I was going into a contaminated place to work, and it was terrifying.

0:21:02.5 *Liz*: But then as time went on and we realized, you can't really get it (COVID) from touch as much. Now, if I go in and cover a shift, I don't... My heart doesn't race at all, I still wipe everything down before and after, but I don't feel like sketched out the same way I did before. So I feel more at ease in general, but whenever I report, I am encountering people sometimes who aren't wearing masks. Even though I always wear my mask, sometimes it's kind of like 'ooh...' And I come home and wash my hands and sing *Happy Birthday* twice and try and do my due diligence. But, you never know...It's out there, and you could get it.

0:21:53.3 *KM*: Really, any of us could.

0:21:56.9 *Liz*: Yeah.

0:22:00.2 *KM*: But, it sounds like you said that you were feeling... You used the word 'terrifying' when you were talking about just going into the station. You're not feeling that same way now that we've learned a little bit more about the virus and we've kind of progressed in terms of the science, right?

0:22:13.8 *Liz*: Yeah.

0:22:14.8 *KM*: Okay.

0:22:15.0 *Liz*: I definitely do not feel terrified as much anymore. I will say, sometimes my co-workers don't wear masks. We have a mask policy at the station, but for whatever reason, when some of them are more than six feet away or even... I think they're like, 'Oh, I'm at a distance.' They won't have a mask on, and then that's a whole stressful thing, because it's like... (shocked facial expression and hand gesticulation). So I've never said anything to their face because it's so uncomfortable, but I've reported it to... like anonymously, I've never ratted anybody out...but I'll just tell my supervisors like, "Hey, please remind everybody at the station that we need to wear masks at all times, even when we're six feet away," because it's scary, and we're indoors. And at the station, they wanted to have a fundraiser, but they wanted us at the station just like six feet apart with masks off. I know a lot of TV stations do that, but to me it just felt like... It just felt like too risky, and it was just like, 'Why don't we just wear a mask for radio, nobody can even see us? You can hear it a little, but it's like, who cares?' So they (the audience) know we're being safe while we're fundraising.

0:23:33.8 *Liz*: So, I spoke up and luckily, they changed the fundraiser and made it so they put us in separate rooms. So that stuff still happens. We have a fundraiser coming up, and so I'm curious to see how it's gonna play out. I do not think they will make us be in the same room

without masks, because I think that they heard the concerns before, and they've recognized that it's still a threat. But when those moments happen, I don't feel the same... Like, I'm not terrified the way I was during those initial hosting sessions when I would initially anchor, but it is a more pronounced fear in those moments than just like the general day-to-day.

0:24:21.4 KM: Okay. But it sounds... What I heard you say was that at least your employer and your station has been receptive to kind of those concerns and they're making their best effort to make people feel safe in the workplace. Is that accurate?

0:24:36.1 Liz: Yeah, I'd say that's accurate.

0:24:37.6 KM: Okay. Good. So has your employer offered any additional tactics to help support the mental health of your employees? It sounds like they're being supportive, are you having those conversations in the workplace, or not really?

0:24:54.0 Liz: Well, yeah, actually... We're technically employed by (university), and so (university) has offered two mental health days, so those extended to us. The idea was that we could just take the day off and do something to help your mental health, but we got paid during for the days. For me it was a little weird. With the first one (mental health day), it was a while ago, but this last one, I had to come in to anchor that day to sub for somebody, so I couldn't take it off. But I asked my boss, I was like, "Hey, can I pick another day next week to do a mental health day?" and he was very accommodating. So that was cool. Although I do know some anchors who felt they had to work, and then they didn't feel like they could switch it out because they would have had someone come in to sub their shift. So they just didn't take a mental health day. And then the other thing that they've done at our work - and my direct boss in particular is really good about this - we have daily editorial meetings on Zoom or on Teams, and he is always like, 'It's nice outside, make sure you take a walk or...'

0:26:17.7 *Liz*: He's like, he has this big thing about soap operas... I don't know if he's serious or not. I don't know if he watches them, but he was just like, 'Make sure you watch a soap opera,' (laughs) And he doesn't perpetuate like a culture of news, news, news, get it done, get it done. He really does remind us to take breaks and get outside. He also has shared a couple of webinars that have been on burnout. So yeah, I think at least my direct boss has been really good. I think actually kind of even the station overall has a culture of reminding us to try and be balanced when possible.

0:27:15.6 *KM*: That's great. And I feel like this is the part of the interview where I have to disclose that I also am a (university) employee, and I didn't realize (radio station) staff were technically employees, too. So I work with the media relations team, in addition to being a student here. I didn't realize that mental health day extended to (radio station), I love that.

0:27:30.3 *Liz*: Yes!

0:27:32.2 *KM*: And I love that your team was supportive of it. You mentioned the soap opera joke with your boss - my boss will ask us, 'what nonsense television have you watched this week?'

0:27:42.2 *Liz*: Nice, I love that.

0:27:43.6 *KM*: We make time, and we hadn't really done that before the pandemic. It almost feels like these extra efforts are management recognizing everything that's going on right now. But prior to the remote environment and the pandemic, we were very much a straight-to-business kind of team, but I find that we spend a lot more time kind of... we're still getting the work done, but we spend a good amount of time having those kind of one-off, almost distraction-type conversations.

0:28:17.9 *Liz*: That's cool, I love that.

0:28:20.6 KM: Yeah, me too. And I'm glad to hear that those mental health days extended to (radio station). I didn't know that.

0:28:27.6 Liz: Yeah.

0:28:28.0 KM: I love it. Okay, so can you tell me a little bit about how you personally manage feelings of stress and anxiety? What does that look like for you?

0:28:45.8 Liz: I try and do yoga breathing, which does help me. I've started going... I don't do this every day, but I am impressed by the amount I've done this...I go outside and I work out for just like 15 minutes in the morning when possible, while listening to the radio. I literally listen to our station while I do it. But I did it on the coldest days of the winter, and I go out there with this giant coat on and I always wonder if the neighbors are looking at me 'cause I'm sure it looks hilarious, but that really helped, just getting... hearing the outside, actually hearing the birds chirp, it's one thing to sit by a window and have the sunlight come in, but I noticed that going outside and hearing the outside sounds really helps me. At one point in the pandemic, I was like, 'I'm gonna go for a walk every day.' Definitely that has not happened at all! But on the weekends, I really do try and go on a hike when possible, that really helps me. I also unwind with reality TV, I am a big *Bachelor* watcher, and I watch with friends.

0:30:13.8 Liz: We have a group text, and we do this whole thing where we've coordinated it so we can watch together. I also just love a good rom-com to watch by myself. That really, really helps me relax. Yeah, those are the main things I would say.

0:30:44.7 KM: So, I have a follow-up on that. It starts with a disclosure here: I also am a fan of *The Bachelor*, and I'm telling you this for a reason. I think it's Michelle personally, that's where I'm at.

0:31:02.3 Liz: Oh, really?

0:31:03.8 KM: I'm rooting for Michelle.

0:31:05.2 Liz: I'm rooting for her, but I don't think it's gonna be her.

0:31:06.0 KM: I know. If I could choose, it's Michelle.

0:31:09.8 Liz:: Yeah. Okay, yeah.

0:31:13.6 KM: But either way, and I only mention this because that's a new habit for me, I had somehow avoided *Bachelor* Nation for however many years.

0:31:21.9 Liz: Well... (laughs)

0:31:22.0 KM: That's a pandemic change for me. (laughs) So I'm wondering, Are any of those kind of de-stress tactics that you've described, is any of that new to you in the last year? Have you added anything to your repertoire?

0:31:35.7 Liz: The working out outside thing is definitely new to me. I am not good at working out, so that was a new thing. But I'm a long-time *Bachelor* watcher.

0:31:47.6 KM: Okay.

0:31:48.5 Liz: So that is not new. One thing I normally would do (before the pandemic) to de-stress and escape – I love going to the movie theater to watch a rom-com by myself, like a little solo date. I haven't been able to do that, and I've been very sad. But I obviously can still stream one at home, but I do feel a void because I... I haven't been able to do that.

0:32:26.5 KM: It's not the same.

0:32:28.0 Liz: It's not the same.

0:32:28.7 KM: It's not the same! So, you added exercise, I added reality television. [chuckle]

0:32:35.7 Liz: Yeah. You're not alone. A lot of people... I have friends who have joined *Bachelor* Nation during the pandemic, for sure.

0:32:43.4 KM: I'll stay there after the pandemic. It's been... It's been fun.

0:32:47.3 *Liz*: I feel bad 'cause you guys have gotten bad seasons. Did you watch Tayshia's?

0:32:52.8 *KM*: I watched the tail end of Tayshia's season.

0:32:55.3 *Liz*: 'Cause that one...

0:32:56.0 *KM*: I came in when she was down to I think four, maybe five guys left.

0:33:00.6 *Liz*: That was so disappointing. I'm a Tayshia fan, it had nothing to do with her. It just... It was so sad them being stuck at the La Quinta, and it was weird how they started with one bachelorette and then switched. That was such a bum season to watch, and then this one it's been so much drama. I watched for the love, not for the drama. It's been... And just given 2020 and all the stress, it's like, 'Oh my God, I don't need you to be adding Victoria to my life.' I just want to watch a love story. (laughs)

0:33:36.8 *KM*: But even our reality television in 2020 has been more stressful than it ought to be. I'll tell you, I haven't noticed the difference because I'm new to it, but I think that that fits the interview subject, really. It's just been... It's been a year, even our reality television has been kinda morphed.

What else, what else? How do you think reporting on pandemic-related news... I know you mentioned you were dealing with a lot of information, service-based content. How do you think that that has impacted your mental health?

0:34:16.8 *Liz*: Good question. Some of it helps me. I did a story on where to get tested, and I think part of the reason I did it was 'cause I was like, "I need to know where to get tested, and I don't know. I can't just look..." I was trying to look it up, and there were some resources, but they were not user-friendly. And now whenever I get tested, I go to one of the places I identified in that reporting. That has helped me. But I also think about one of the stories I did that was on the people who called for unemployment and couldn't get through. And I can hear this man's

voice in my head. He told me, he would just call constantly on repeat and he would say...He would hear it in his sleep, because all he did all day long was try and call unemployment. I think he... Yeah, he just was haunted by it, and he had so much anxiety, because he didn't have an income because of it. I can just hear the despair in his voice.

There are moments like that that are sad, but in general, a lot of the reporting I did kind of made my life a little easier. Especially the election reporting. It was like, "Oh okay." If I don't get my absentee ballot, then this is where I can go. Yeah, I think just because I had a lot of the same questions that... I had a lot of the questions... A lot of the questions I was asking myself were ones that I ended up doing stories on. Yeah, it kind of made things go a little smoother for me, I would say.

0:36:24.4 KM: Okay. What I'm hearing is that your work and kind of that need to be in-the-know has helped you feel more in control of the information, more aware of the information, and it also sounds like you're very much aware of the impact that you can potentially have on your audience. Is that accurate?

0:36:47.3 Liz: Yeah, I don't know if it made me feel more in control. That's interesting. But yeah, maybe in a sense, yeah. Mostly just being able to... better manage the pandemic with the information.

0:37:04.0 KM: Because the information has been fast and furious, and rapidly changing... Yeah, okay. You've been able to better manage that through your own job.

A lot of the current public dialogue around mental health is focused on healthcare workers, on police officers on the front line - however folks wanna define that. What do you wish that more people knew about the experiences of journalists during the pandemic?

0:37:38.0 *Liz*: That we've been working the entire time. And while there have been ways to work completely safely, many of us have also been out there on the front lines. And in order to tell some of the most important stories, we have put our lives at risk. And at least from where I'm sitting, we haven't... we're not eligible for the vaccine yet. I'm sure there are some reporters who've been able to get it, but nobody at my work has been able to get it for being a reporter. Although some have gotten it because of their age, but... Which I don't think it's necessarily bad.

0:38:35.8 *Liz*: I guess I wouldn't say that I feel like we deserve it more than other people who've gotten the vaccine, but I just know a lot of my friends... I have friends who work in a museum and other friends who work in the food service industry, and they're like, "You haven't gotten it yet!?" They're just kind of shocked. I'm okay with waiting my turn, so it's not something I'm like, 'Oh, that's an injustice,' but I think some people might be surprised to know that we have... we have been out there, but we definitely are not prioritized on the same level as some of the other front line workers. I don't know if that's necessarily bad.

0:39:23.0 *KM*: Okay. I'm surprised to know that you guys didn't get a note that said, "It's your turn, come on down." But if you've been able to work from home, it sounds like you're managing, and you're comfortable waiting your turn. I'm comfortable waiting my turn. I'll stay in line. That's fine.

0:39:40.6 *Liz*: Yeah, and I am because I'm young, but I feel bad... I know one of my co-workers, he's older and he also takes care of his elderly mom, and he's been out reporting. I would love for him to be able to get a vaccine. But he's not quite old enough. I think he's probably like... He might be able to get it. You know what? We actually just found out, 'cause I think he's over 50, and they said, people who work in Detroit who are over 50 can get the vaccine. But then one of my co-workers called the city and they said because we work at (university), we can't get it at

(vaccination clinic site), or the other place they opened up in the city. We have to wait to get it from (university). So we fall in this weird donut hole. [chuckle]

0:40:38.1 KM: I wish I had some kind of information I could share with you for him. I don't. I just know that it's liquid gold and we just can't seem to keep it.

0:40:47.0 Liz: Yeah, and we report on it, so I know that there are plenty of people who qualify and can't get an appointment. So I get it.

0:40:56.8 KM: Yeah, I hope that with the addition of this third one that maybe supply's gonna catch up, and we'll all be okay. We've made it a year. We'll just keep plugging along.

I wanna circle back for a minute to something you said earlier in our conversation. You talked about how you kind of felt a sense of duty to share this need-to-know information with people. Is that something that you've felt before in your career as a journalist? Is that something perhaps that drew you to the profession even?

0:41:29.4 Liz: That's a good question. I think mostly, no. What drew me is I like telling stories. I really liked creating sound-rich audio scenes, and introducing people to characters and stories that they didn't know were out there, or that they found surprising and interesting. That's really what drew me to being a radio storyteller. But even though that's what drew me, I was hired on as a community reporter under a news umbrella. So certainly in my role, even prior to the pandemic, there were times when things came up and I was like, "Okay, people need to know about this." But yeah, that's definitely not what drew me to the job, and it's definitely become more of a priority... I would say it's become a priority during the pandemic, rather than an after-thought or something that I would just occasionally prioritize before.

0:42:52.6 *KM*: Okay, do you think... Let's look ahead for just a bit... Do you think that that's something, perhaps, that you'll carry forward when we're... I don't wanna say post-pandemic, I don't even know if we can use that phrase...But when the dust has settled, and perhaps we get to go back to some semblance of what the world used to look like, when you're back field reporting and you're covering those community stories, do you think that priority will carry over?

0:43:22.8 *Liz*: I think it only will when a need-to-know issue arises. Obviously, I look forward to a time when there's less information that people need to know to get by and survive. I look forward to a time when I can transition back to telling more like entertaining or stories of escape. I look forward to being able to do that again.

0:43:58.7 *KM*: I look forward to the parts of my job that... Yeah, 'cause a large part of my work is telling student stories, and so I feel I can relate to you on that regard. That's the fun part of my job - that's why I do what I do. (pause) The last couple of questions I have are just kind of the... Well, one of them is the boring one, where I ask you just demographic information, your age, your highest level of education, marital status, kids, that kind of stuff. So you are what age?

0:44:38.7 *Liz*: I am... Let's see. It's my birthday tomorrow.

0:44:41.9 *KM*: Happy early birthday!

0:44:44.3 *Liz*: Thank you. But right now, oh my God, it's a real thing. I forget my age. I think I'm 36. I was born in 1984, so if I do math, yes, I'm 36. Tomorrow I will be 37.

0:44:57.4 *KM*: Okay. And I knew that, not because I know math, but because my husband was born in '85 and he's about to be 36.

0:45:04.6 *Liz*: When's your husband's birthday?

0:45:06.0 *KM*: March 16th.

0:45:06.5 *Liz*: Oh wow fun!

0:45:08.8 KM: Happy early birthday to you.

0:45:10.2 Liz: Thank you.

0:45:11.7 KM: And are you married?

0:45:13.3 Liz: I'm not married.

0:45:14.3 KM: Yeah, okay. I hate that question - I should have asked that differently, I'm sorry.

0:45:18.5 Liz: Oh, no, that's okay. I'm happily partnered. So, yeah, no complaints.

0:45:25.3 KM: Relationship status would have been a better question.

0:45:27.8 Liz: Oh, yeah, no worries. (laughs)

0:45:29.6 KM: I apologize for that. So is there anything that you'd like to add that I just didn't get to? Is there anything you're just dying to tell me?

0:45:42.4 Liz: Well, first of all, I'm happy to answer the other demographic info. I don't know if we can go back to that.

0:45:46.8 KM: Yeah. Oh, yeah, go ahead. I skipped over it, frankly, because I felt awkward about how I did that last question.

0:45:52.2 Liz: Oh, no.

0:45:52.4 KM: I'm just like I'm not gonna...

0:45:52.9 Liz: It's fine. I think it's important to track that kind of stuff in research, so, yeah, I just couldn't keep track of all of them. So race, was that one?

0:46:01.2 KM: Okay. Yep, race.

0:46:03.0 Liz: I identify as white.

0:46:05.3 KM: Okay.

0:46:06.4 Liz: What were the other ones?

0:46:07.9 KM: I guess level of education.

0:46:09.9 *Liz*: I have completed my bachelor's. I am getting my master's right now, but I have not completed it.

0:46:16.7 *KM*: Okay, and then do you have children?

0:46:20.9 *Liz*: No children.

0:46:21.9 *KM*: Okay, thank you for coming back to that, and, again, apologies for my misphrasing there.

So is there anything else, anything that you wanna mention, anything that I didn't get to, anything that you thought would come up that didn't?

0:46:42.1 *Liz*: Anything related to mental health and my job... I will say that my job causes me a lot of stress even outside of the pandemic in many different ways. I have anxiety about... a lot of times reporting is scary. Just yesterday, I had to go to (Detroit neighborhood) and knock on strangers' doors and ask them about the trees in their front yard, and that's... Sure, there's a pandemic level stress about that. But I was alone in a sketchy area outside, and even prior to the pandemic, that's stressful to me. I don't enjoy... Some people are really outgoing. I don't enjoy just knocking on strangers' doors and asking them questions uninvited. There are certain places where I'll go to report, and I feel like people aren't gonna want me there. And I feel awkward being there and interrupting their fun or whatever, by asking questions - which probably seems weird for a reporter, [chuckle] but I enjoy...

0:48:07.5 *Liz*: All the other things I said, I enjoy about being a reporter. And also, I will say it is difficult for me being... working in a city where I am a minority and where I have a lot of privilege and trying to tell the stories... I try to tell the stories of a majority black city, and especially in... Luckily in 2020, there has been a racial reckoning - that is so good - but that makes it even harder for me to grapple with my role as a reporter, as a white reporter in this city.

So that's something that has stressed me out for as long as I've been reporting. But it's just even more something that I grapple with now, and that I don't know what... I don't know how to reconcile it. I don't know what the solution is. So, yeah, that's just to say that while the pandemic has contributed to some stresses in my job, also there's a lot of pre-existing stresses that I've just continued to deal with, I would say.

0:49:33.9 KM: Okay, thank you for sharing that. So what I'm hearing is that that was just... That tension almost was just something that is part of your day-to-day reporting in the city, and it's an underlying current.

0:49:51.9 Liz: Yeah, yeah.

0:49:52.8 KM: Okay. I'm taking notes here. And then you had mentioned too, the election. I think it's interesting that both of those things kinda came up in our conversation because when I was initially putting together this project, I had tried to think about what a year it's been – it was not just the global pandemic and COVID, COVID, COVID. It's been a heck of a year in politics and it's been a heck of a year in social justice, too. And I think it's telling that you mentioned both of those things in our conversation. I tried to limit my project just for the sake of being able to manage it. Would you... I don't wanna ask you to rate the stressor factor, but it sounds almost like those tensions were more... (pause) overlapping. That's something that has caused you more stress, perhaps, than just the pandemic news alone.

0:51:02.6 Liz: Yeah, it is hard to rate. Because I do feel like they all did contribute to stress at different moments, depending on what I'm reporting, so it would be really hard for me to rank them.

0:51:22.1 KM: Well, they don't exist in silos. It's kind of you're dealing with all of them at the same time. That's probably more compounded things that you used to dealing with in the news.

0:51:33.8 *Liz*: Yeah.

0:51:34.5 *KM*: Yeah.

0:51:34.8 *Liz*: Yeah, I would say they're compounded, for sure.

0:51:39.0 *KM*: Okay. Is there... Do you have any questions for me?

0:51:49.0 *Liz*: I guess just curious, how many journalists are you planning to talk to?

0:51:53.0 *KM*: Just you.

0:51:54.1 *Liz*: Oh my God!

0:51:55.0 *KM*: Just you!

0:51:55.7 *Liz*: Oh my God. I'm glad I didn't ask that first.

0:52:00.8 *KM*: Why?

0:52:01.0 *Liz*: Oh, because I would have felt all this pressure to be representative or something.

0:52:05.7 *KM*: No, no. So I'm in a qualitative methods class, and so the whole purpose of this project, as I understand it, and the professor is drilling home, is that qualitative research is about someone's lived personal experiences and how they themselves describe it. So as long as you are representative of yourself and of your experiences, you nailed it! And you gave really great answers. I so appreciate your time. And like I said, I work in media relations, and it's one of those questions that I'd like to ask some of the reporters that I feel more comfortable with. I've kind of just been having these casual conversations, "Hey, how are you doing?" because... And here's a moment of reflexivity: I've been having just added stress to my job, and my job is to communicate with the (university) community. So, I feel like that's what spawned this project is that curiosity, like, 'If this is how I'm feeling, it must be different from a reporter's perspective.' I feel like you guys are doing it on a much, much broader scale and I was interested in exploring that. And I've heard a lot, just in casual conversation, I've heard people express some of the same

things that you did that, “This is my job, my job is to keep the people informed, and that's my job and I'm continuing to do it.”

0:53:40.6 KM: I don't love having to be unmasked, doing X, Y, Z, it's not my favorite thing in the world, to have those conversations with people, but you guys are pushing through and getting it done. So no pressure, but just you!. But like I said, as long as you were honest about your own experiences and yourself, that's exactly what I needed, and I so appreciate it. Yeah, that's the end... That's the end of my list.

0:54:12.2 Liz: Cool. Alright. I guess one other question before I let you go is, what is your... So you're already doing media relations, but you said you're getting your master's in organizational psychology. Was that what it was?

0:54:28.0 KM: No, no - not psychology. In organizational communications and public relations.

0:54:33.4 Liz: Oh, okay, cool. So yeah, what's your end goal then? I'm just curious.

0:54:37.6 KM: I really like where I'm at, professionally. I would just like to perhaps maybe move up the ladder a bit. I like working in public relations, because I get to tell stories, I think we have that in common. I like to tell stories, but I like to tell good stories, which is I think, how I ended up... My undergrad is in journalism, and I think I ended up in a PR role, because boy, do I like good news, I like the fluff! And so that's kind of where I'm geared, and I'm happy to stay there. I'm about halfway through my master's program and I'm viewing it as a professional development kind of opportunity.

0:55:15.0 Liz: Cool, that's awesome.

0:55:17.6 KM: Yeah, thank you.

0:55:19.1 Liz: Cool.

0:55:21.1 *KM*: Alright, I think I'm good. And if you don't have any additional questions, I'm gonna let you go on with your day. And thank you again, so much, for your time and for being open to this. I know it's kind of a weird thing; “Hey, can I record an interview with you for a school project?” I recognize the awkwardness that that was. So thank you for being open to it.

0:55:41.0 *Liz*: No worries. Like I said, I just had to do it for my school too, I had to interview an economic development planner. So, I fully understand.

0:55:49.2 *KM*: I so appreciate your time and also your patience with my three or four-minute technical difficulty this morning. So let's hope that was the hiccup of the day, and we'll both have a good Friday moving forward. And happy early birthday!

0:56:02.0 *Liz*: Thank you, I appreciate it. Alright, Katie. Yeah, it's been fun. Take care. Have a good one.

0:56:06.0 *KM*: Thanks, Liz. You too!

0:56:09.3 *Liz*: Bye.

0:56:09.6 *KM*: Bye.

Coding Scheme and Theme Summaries

Coding Scheme

- **Work-Life Balance:** Tactics used to maintain a balance between work and personal time. This code is applied to data related to the participant’s ability to separate work and home, her employer’s culture of balance, and the ability to control and limit her own after-hours news consumption.
- **Escape:** Tactics used to as a distraction from the pandemic and work to de-stress and disconnect, including physical and mental activities.

This code is applied to data related to the participant's yoga, hiking, and outdoor exercise, as well as her reality television consumption.

- **Technology:** Captures instances of technology being used as a tool to manage professional tasks, or as a toy for socialization and fun.

This code is applied to data in which the participant described using technology for work, including audio recordings and Zoom meetings, and also as a source of fun and social connection, including her use of text-messaging to chat with friends while watching reality television.

- **Professional Responsibility:** Participant's perceptions about her professional role and her own access to need-to-know information and her role in disseminating it broadly.

This code is applied to instances in which the participant described a sense of duty and responsibility to educate, inform, and help others because of her role as a reporter.

- **Storytelling:** Participant's descriptions of a journalists' role as a community storyteller.

This code is applied to instances in which the participant draws connections between her role as a reporter and the lives and experiences of her audience and the overall public.

- **Pressure:** Instances in which the participant described situations where she felt that her work was more important during the pandemic, and that the stakes were higher.

This code is applied to data related to an increase in "need-to-know" information during the pandemic, and the workplace changes related to the pandemic.

- **Physical Health:** Captures statements about the participant's physical health and the pandemic.

This code is applied to descriptions of the participant's physical health – including her exercise habits, and physical symptoms of stress, such as changes in sleep or increased heart rate.

- **Mental Health:** Captures statements about the participant's mental health and the pandemic.

This code is applied to descriptions of the participant's mental health in the data – including her mindfulness, fears and anxieties, a behavioral obsession with cleanliness, and dreams.

- **Audience:** Participant's experiences with and perceptions of her radio audience and the community on which she reports during the pandemic.

This code includes specific anecdotes about experiences with audience members, as well as references to a more general, ambiguous audience.

- **Coworkers:** Participant's experiences with and perceptions of her coworkers during the pandemic.

This code includes the participant's interactions with her colleagues, boss, and the overall workplace culture at her radio station.

- **Friends:** Participant's experiences with and perceptions of her friends during the pandemic.

This code includes the participant's interactions with her friends, including their shared experiences adapting social interactions virtually.

- **Pandemic-Related Stress:** Descriptions of stressors related to the pandemic.

This code is applied to pandemic-related stressors mentioned in the data, including an increased attention to cleanliness, masks and social distancing, concerns about vaccine

availability, and a sense of loss about former habits that are no longer possible because of the pandemic.

- Non Pandemic-Related Stress: Descriptions of stressors un-related to the pandemic.

This code is applied to stressors mentioned in the data, including issues of race and privilege, social unrest, the 2020 election, and general vulnerabilities and risks that result from working with the public.

Theme Summaries

- Stress: This theme encompasses the participant's sources of stress during the pandemic, and includes pre-existing and continued stressors, as well as new stressors directly related to the pandemic. Data in this theme indicate that the participant experiences stresses as a result of the pandemic, but most of her stress is attributable to the overall nature of her job and proximity to other troubling news subjects.

The stress theme includes the codes of pandemic-related stress and non-pandemic-related stress.

Example: *“I will say it is difficult for me being... working in a city where I am a minority and where I have a lot of privilege and trying to tell the stories... I try to tell the stories of a majority black city, and especially in... Luckily in 2020, there has been a racial reckoning - that is so good - but that makes it even harder for me to grapple with my role as a reporter, as a white reporter in this city. So that's something that has stressed me out for as long as I've been reporting. But it's just even more something that I grapple with now, and that I don't know what... I don't know how to reconcile it. I don't know what the solution is. So, yeah, that's just to say that while the pandemic has contributed to some stresses in my job, also there's a lot of pre-existing stresses that I've just continued to deal with, I would say”.* (transcript, p. 13)

- Health: This theme encompasses the participant's assessment of her overall health, including both physical and mental health. Data in this theme indicate that the pandemic overall resulted in positive changes in the participant's physical health and increased challenges to her mental health.

The health theme includes the codes of physical health and mental health.

Example: *"I woke up this morning at 4:00 a.m. because I was thinking about a story. And I started writing it in my head and I couldn't go back to sleep, and I got up and came down here to work. And so I've been up since 4:00. And I have done that at least one other time during the pandemic. I am not a morning person, and there have been many times during the pandemic where I have woken up crazy early and just not been able to fall back asleep. I've also had, and I think this is very common for a lot of people, the pandemic dreams where you're in a crowded place and nobody else is wearing a mask."* (transcript, p. 5)

"I couldn't get past it, it was like the dominant thought, and I think my heart was probably beating faster and this whole... I felt like I was going into a contaminated place to work, and it was terrifying." (transcript, p. 6)

- Coping (Personal): This theme encompasses the participant's ability to manage her own stress during the pandemic, and the related behavioral and cognitive tactics. Data in this theme show that the participant is adept at both recognizing and managing stress.

The coping theme includes the codes of work-life balance, escape, and technology, used both as a professional tool and as a social toy.

Example: *"Like when I'm off the clock, I... Actually I'm really good at not working."* (transcript, p. 2)

“I don't have a lot of alerts on my phone, and I don't get email alerts, or Twitter alerts. That's a big thing. So mostly for me, I would have to decide to seek those things out, and I don't want to because I like when I'm not at work to be able to focus on other things, so it's really not a priority to me unless there's a big thing happening. I'm totally a fair-weather news fan, where if there's debates or a State of the Union (speech), I'm always, I gotta tune into those. And then, I got my Twitter open, and I have my little hashtags, and I'm looking at what everybody's tweeting - but other than that, it's not hard for me because it's not how I wanna spend my free time.”(transcript, p. 2)

- Relationships (Interpersonal): This theme encompasses the participant's descriptions of her relationships and interactions with her audience, her coworkers, and friends. Data in this theme suggest that the participant feels an empathetic connection with her audience, and relies on support from her coworkers and friends to help her manage stress.

The relationships theme includes the codes of audience, coworkers, and friends.

Example: *“But I also think about one of the stories I did that was on the people who called for unemployment and couldn't get through. And I can hear this man's voice in my head. He told me, he would just call constantly on repeat and he would say...He would hear it in his sleep, because all he did all day long was try and call unemployment. I think he... Yeah, he just was haunted by it, and he had so much anxiety, because he didn't have an income because of it. I can just hear the despair in his voice.”*(transcript, p. 9)

“And he (boss) doesn't perpetuate like a culture of news, news, news, get it done, get it done. He really does remind us to take breaks and get outside. He also has shared a couple of webinars that have been on burnout. So yeah, I think at least my direct boss has been really

good. I think actually kind of even the station overall has a culture of reminding us to try and be balanced when possible.” (transcript, p. 7)

- **Sense of Service (Professional):** This theme encompasses descriptions of the participant’s role as a journalist, along with the related sense of professional duty to share information. Data in this theme suggest that the heightened importance of pandemic-related news resulted in an increased sense of pressure, but also at times a sense of pride and power in her ability to report.

The sense of service theme includes the codes of professional responsibility, storytelling, and pressure.

Example: *“I feel like I’m providing a service and I feel like maybe I have a little bit more skills than the average person, or maybe the average person could maybe find the same answer, but they’re like... It’s not their day job, they’re busy trying to get by, and so yeah, I just feel... I also feel like it just felt like more important than... I mean, I think it’s really important to tell a good story, but I felt like... And I think even in the pandemic, there were a lot of good stories that were really impactful and important to be told, but it just... To me, it felt like less of a priority when there were so many unanswered questions, and like you said, sometimes life and death questions, sometimes just really helpful or important questions that needed to be answered.”* (transcript, p. 4)

“...we’ve been working the entire time. And while there have been ways to work completely safely, many of us have also been out there on the front lines. And in order to tell some of the most important stories, we have put our lives at risk.” (transcript, p. 10)

Consent Form

Title of Study: ‘Unprecedented’: A Project Examining Journalists’ Experience Reporting in 2020

Principal Investigator (PI): Katie McMillan

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Supervising Instructor: Dr. Jessica D. Moorman

Department of
Communication
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Purpose

You are being asked to be in an interview as part of a class project for Com 7360: Introduction to Qualitative Methods taught by Dr. Jessica D. Moorman. The purpose of this interview is to explore the impact of the coronavirus pandemic on journalists’ work and mental health. You have been invited to participate because of your professional experiences as a journalist working in 2020. This study is being conducted virtually on Zoom. **Please read this form and ask any questions you may have before agreeing to be in the study.**

In this research study, the effects of the coronavirus pandemic on the work and mental health of reporters will be explored through open-ended questions focusing on participants’ personal experiences.

Study Procedures

If you agree to take part in this research study, you will be asked to complete a semi-structured interview that will take up to an hour of your time. You will be asked questions related to your work and your mental health during the pandemic:

1. Questions will focus on the participant’s professional journey, changes to their work during the pandemic, and their overall self-assessment of mental health-related topics, including behavioral changes and stress management. Participants have the option of not answering some of the questions, and will be able to remain in the study if they choose not to answer all questions.
2. The participant’s identity will be concealed to every possible extent, including the redaction of their name and personal identifiers in audio transcripts and written reports. The audio recording of the interview will be used for educational purposes

only and will be directly shared only with the supervising instructor. Observations from the audio recording will be summarized in a report to be presented in class, in which the participant will be referred to using a code name (example: Jane Doe).

Benefits

As a participant in this research study, there will be no direct benefit for you; however, information from this study may benefit other people now or in the future.

Risks

There are no known risks at this time to participation in this study.

Study Costs

There is no cost to participate in this study.

Confidentiality

All information collected about you during the course of this study will be kept confidential to the extent permitted by law. You will be identified in the research records by a code name or number. Information that identifies you personally will not be released. Results of this research will only be used as part of a class project and no information will be included that would reveal your identity. Audiotape recordings of you will be used for research or educational purposes, your identity will be protected or disguised.

Voluntary Participation/Withdrawal

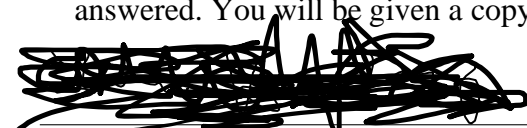
Taking part in this study is voluntary. You have the right to choose not to take part in this study. If you decide to take part in the study you can later change your mind and withdraw from the study. You are free to only answer questions that you want to answer. You are free to withdraw from participation in this study at any time. Your decisions will not change any present or future relationship with Wayne State University or its affiliates, or other services you are entitled to receive.

Questions

If you have any questions about this study now or in the future, you may contact Dr. Jessica D. Moorman at jdmoorman@wayne.edu.

Consent to Participate in a Research Study

To voluntarily agree to take part in this study, you must sign on the line below. If you choose to take part in this study you may withdraw at any time. You are not giving up any of your legal rights by signing this form. Your signature below indicates that you have read, or had read to you, this entire consent form, including the risks and benefits, and have had all of your questions answered. You will be given a copy of this consent form.



Signature of participant

3/1/21

Date

