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By: **Gregory Perreault** and Kaitlin Miller

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Gregory Perreault & Kaitlin Miller (2022): When Journalists are Voiceless: How Lifestyle Journalists Cover Hate and Mitigate Harassment, *Journalism Studies*, DOI:10.1080/1461670X.2022.2135583. Publisher version of record available at: <https://www.tandfonline.com/doi/full/10.1080/1461670X.2022.2135583>

When Journalists are Voiceless: How Lifestyle Journalists Cover Hate and Mitigate Harassment

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ABSTRACT

Often trivialized within the broader journalistic field, lifestyle journalists would seem to have the dream job: the opportunity to get paid to do what they love. The present study explores an under-discussed but material aspect of the job; namely, how lifestyle journalists undertake issues of hostility. Through the lens of the theory of hostility towards the press and in-depth interviews with lifestyle journalists (n = 24), this study argues that journalists tend to cover issues of hate against their audience members but seek to ignore harassment when directed at them.

KEYWORDS

Lifestyle journalism; harassment; hate; emotional labor; interviews; hostility

Introduction

In August 2015, Chicago Blackhawks star Patrick Kane was accused of sexual assault, and while Julie DiCaro was still new to Chicago's robust sports journalism scene, she was in a unique position to cover the topic. A former criminal defense attorney, DiCaro had worked with victims of sexual assault and domestic violence; hence, she was uniquely qualified to walk her radio listeners through the investigation. DiCaro moved to sports journalism in 2006 through her Chicago Cubs blog *A League of Her Own*, which was picked up by the Chicago Tribune.

It was during the Kane reporting that the first mass trolling event happened.

The trolls descended on me like a nuclear bomb. More than one man threatened to come to Chicago to kill me. Another suggested the only just punishment for me was to be raped with a hockey stick. Another said he hoped I would be raped "again." Someone else sent me the worst message I have ever received. It was an image of a naked woman, bound and blind-folded and bleeding. I still haven't recovered from that one. (DiCaro 2021, March 16)

Even more troubling were the very specific messages that made her blood run cold: images of the exact entrance she walked through to get to her office and explicit threats to her life.

Lifestyle journalism, often described broadly as *soft news*, reflects "the journalistic coverage of the expressive values and practices that help create and signify a specific identity within the realm of consumption and everyday life" (Hanusch and Hanitzsch 2013, 947). The beats of lifestyle journalism—fashion, beauty, food and wine, travel, sports, gaming—

reflect an aspirational lifestyle; that journalists can avoid the harsh realities of political or crime journalism in order to focus on aspects of life that bring readers, listeners, and viewers joy. Unfortunately, as DiCaro's story illustrates, lifestyle journalists can still confront issues of hate through their reporting; both through what they find in their coverage as well as what they receive from their audience; and hate that disproportionately tends to be aimed at women (Miller 2021b) who tend to make up the majority of lifestyle journalists (Hanusch 2019).

The present study explores the lifestyle of lifestyle journalism through interviews with US. lifestyle journalists ($n = 24$) on how they respond and construct their work in regards to hate. Prior research has reflected a degree of boundary blurring between lifestyle journalism and hard news specialties—largely in terms of content (Hanusch 2018; Maares and Hanusch 2020). Lifestyle journalism has been argued to perform functions associated with hard news journalism (Duffy and Ashley 2012) and this study seeks to explore the degree to which that is reflected in some of the darker experiences of journalism: namely those of managing hostility. Through the lens of hostility towards the press (Miller 2021a), this study argues that lifestyle journalists see hate as an arena that they would prefer to avoid or ignore if it is directed at them, but that journalists feel a responsibility to respond to issues of hate toward their audience.

A Theory of Hostility Toward the Press

Attacks on journalists and press abuse cases are rising around the world; a scholarly concern not only in regard to the emotional well-being of journalists but also in that such attacks can lead journalists to self-censor (Miller 2021a; Obermaier, Hofbauer, and Reinemann 2018). The experience of this hostility differs widely according to the cultural standing of the journalists, with journalists distanced from systems of power having the most at stake and facing the most acute hostility (de Bustamante and Relly 2021). And while there are of course clear exceptions, as a line of inquiry hostility is essential in that journalists tend to hold less autonomy in circumstances where they experience more abuse and feel less safe (Hamada 2021). de Bustamante and Relly (2021) point out that the journalists in their interviews experienced more exacerbated abuse and hate given their position at the *periphery*. As the authors articulate the concept, the *periphery* is not solely physical location—although this was also true of the journalists in de Bustamante and Relly (2021)—but also reflective of the overall ability to leverage power by the individual journalist (see Perreault et al. 2022). Hence, this would be a sensible framework for application to lifestyle journalism given that as a subfield it is a specialty often deemed to lack power within the overall field (Hanusch 2019).

In examining hostility toward the press, Miller (2021a) notes that harassment is frequently normalized among journalists given that it is received from viewers, readers, and strangers. The ubiquity of this normalization must be considered when studying how journalists do—or do not—respond to abuse (Miller 2021a). For example, Miller and Lewis (2020) note that harassment is normalized among women broadcast journalists, “occurring monthly, weekly, and even daily” (86). In fact, in online settings specifically women see harassment as an inevitable part of existing online (Duggan 2017); women journalists in some cases closed social media groups as a place to safely discuss their workplace experiences and provide support to one another (Mesmer and Jahng 2021).

And normalization can have effects. Adams (2018) notes that normalization of harassment where “trying to behave as if nothing is wrong while coping with regular insults in itself is an exhausting business” and, hence, “is bound to cause harm either to the journalist or the publication, in terms of the rate of work and content of output” (861).

This normalization stems frequently from an industry that both applauds abuse as a sign of success, as well as an expected work hazard requiring management. In addressing the latter, Holton et al. (2021) note that journalists are frequently left to address harassment—particularly online—alone, with little to no support from newsroom managers. While managers view harassment as a part of the job, they leave it to the journalists themselves to cope with and prevent the abuse (Holton et al. 2021). Moreover, even when journalists do speak out, they are left feeling as if they were ignored and nothing occurred (Miller 2021b). In relation to the former, “journalists might interpret publicly visible audience hostility as a professional success” because hostile comments have been shown to increase traffic and make journalists feel recognized for their fearlessness (Post and Kepplinger 2019, 2426). Indeed, this normalization of abuse can impact how journalists think about, and even respond to hate—in some cases, even struggling to find the words to describe their experiences (Perreault et al. 2022), making it a vital component to understanding when exploring concepts of harassment in journalistic work. Indeed, while journalists will often take action to cope with hate and prevent abuse (Henrichsen and Shelton 2022; Holton et al. 2021; Post and Kepplinger 2019), it is less common to see larger movements to respond to the abusers, opting instead to minimize attacks (Koliska, Chadha, and Burns 2020).

In some cases, encountering hate is unavoidable, as when journalists end up covering hate groups. In such cases, journalists often feel there is no roadmap for effective coverage: struggling to determine the effective ways in which to label hate groups (Perreault and Meltzer 2022), make use of press law (Perreault et al. 2021), and cover protests without playing into the hands of hate groups—particularly white nationalists—who perceive journalism as a way in which to propagate their message (Mourão 2021; Perreault, Johnson, and Klein 2022). Journalists believe they should “try to approach the subject dispassionately” (Perreault, Johnson, and Klein 2022, 1130), yet they simultaneously have a “fear of walking into an ‘objectivity trap’ ... when covering white nationalist rallies, whereby they might grant undue legitimacy to these groups simply by fulfilling their disseminator role” (13). This places journalists in impossible situations, caught between the normative expectations of the field and fears for their own physical safety and emotional well-being (Perreault et al. 2021; Perreault, Johnson, and Klein 2022). In theory, lifestyle journalism should be a haven from encountering hate of this kind, but nevertheless research indicates that similar tendencies toward xenophobia, orientalism, and harassment occur in numerous forms of journalism; sports journalists in particular tend to experience substantial harassment (Everbach 2018; Hardin, Shain, and Shultz-Poniatowski 2008).

The aforementioned normalization of harassment of journalists has therefore become an intrinsic part of journalistic work in what Miller (2021a) refers to as anglo-democratic countries like the United States. Within this context harassment has been sewn into the routines of journalistic work as they work to prevent it (Chen et al. 2020; Perreault, Johnson, and Klein 2022), cope with it (Holton et al. 2021) and respond to it (Miller and Lewis 2020). Indeed, Miller (2021a) argues the very identity of being a journalist is

therefore an identity of oppression. Within this context, “a theory of hostility toward the press must assert that harassment affects journalists in both general and specific ways depending highly on the form of harassment, and various systems of oppression experienced by the individual journalist” (Miller 2021a, 12). Within this context, this research explores how one’s identity as a lifestyle journalist specifically alters their experiences with—and responses to—harassment via hate.

Journalism and Hate/Harassment

Scholarship on hostility toward the press is growing within journalism studies, as researchers work to examine journalistic well-being in a time of mounting press criticism (Carlson, Robinson, and Lewis 2021; Gutsche 2022), hate speech (Obermaier, Hofbauer, and Reinemann 2018), and populism (Miller 2021a; Waisbord 2020). In fact, harassment of journalists—and subsequent encounters with hate—have been explored globally (e.g., Chen et al. 2020; Posetti et al. 2021; Shin, Kim, and Joo 2021), illustrating the severe trend of hostility toward the press is not limited to one country or region. For example, while journalists in the United States experience name-calling such as *fake news* (Egelhofer and Lecheler 2019) and, in more extreme cases, death threats (Miller and Lewis 2020), in Korea, Shin, Kim, and Joo (2021) note that journalists have faced disgust, hate and shame—earning the name *giraegi* which is a mixture of the Korean words for *Journalist* and *Trash*. As evidenced above, such abuse exists in both countries with known authoritarian regimes, and ones considered to have robust liberal democracies in which the press is considered “free” (Miller 2021a).

Within a global context, hostility can take many forms, and be encountered in both digital and online spaces (Cheruiyot 2022; Miller and Lewis 2020; Posetti and Storm 2018). Most notably, harassment has increased drastically with the rise and ubiquity of social media (Waisbord 2020). Because social media platforms like Facebook, Twitter, and Instagram (to name a few) are integrated into the daily routines of most journalists (Molyneux, Holton, and Lewis 2018), journalists are more accessible than ever before (Tandoc, Sagun, and Alvarez 2021). And within these digital spaces, journalists encounter sexual harassment, threats, hate speech, and verbal abuse (Chen et al. 2020). Similarly, online abuse is rarely isolated to digital spaces alone (Eckert 2018). Journalists have also noted experiencing offline harassment in the form of threats, intimidations, assault, verbal abuse, and interruptions (Miller 2021b).

Moreover, this hostility has notable consequences for journalists’ emotional labor, or “managing emotions at work” (Miller and Lewis 2020, 83). One way that journalists engage in this is through strategic disconnection from work (e.g., turning off their phone, media-free vacations with family) in order to prevent burn out (Bélair-Gagnon et al. 2022). For example, a study of Indian journalists noted that many women journalists would downplay the harassment they experience so as to not harm their careers by being removed from desirable beats (Sreedharan, Thorsen, and Gouthi 2020). In Sweden, Löfgren Nilsson and Örnebring (2016) found journalists often received threats and offensive comments—leading many journalists to self-censor as a means to prevent future abuse. In the United States, Miller (2021b) notes that “because of harassment, 25% of women journalists and 24% of men journalists have considered leaving journalism altogether” (17). This creates what Miller (2021a) argues is a democratic problem as

harassment not only pushes journalists to self-censor but in some cases to even consider leaving the industry altogether. In Taiwan, one study found online harassment affects women journalists' ability to be "impartial conveyors of information" (Pain and Chen 2019, 140). These findings lead to harassment—while normalized—that has pervasive effects on journalists and the work they produce, leaving some to avoid covering certain topics, interviewing certain sources, and even being less active on social media (Mesmer 2022; Miller 2021b). Furthermore, these effects are especially pressing for women journalists—who make up a larger portion of lifestyle reporters compared to men (Hanusch 2019)—and journalists of color (Miller 2021b).

Lifestyle Journalism

Lifestyle journalism is conceptualized as a "labor of love," reflecting journalists' passion for *soft news* topics and the people behind those topics (Perreault and Bélair-Gagnon 2022, 5; Perreault and Hanusch 2022); topics such as travel (Hanusch 2010), gaming (Perreault and Vos 2018), and sports (Perreault and Nölleke 2022). Research in lifestyle journalism has focused on four themes: commercial and consumerist aspects, representations and notions of identity, democratizing elements of lifestyle journalism, and the political and critical dimensions of the subfield (Hanusch 2018). The present study undertakes the final area, but all of these themes tend to be evident in lifestyle journalists' role perceptions, in that studies demonstrating that lifestyle journalists aim to entertain, inspire, provide advice, be service providers, community advocates, friends, or connectors (Hanitzsch and Vos 2018; Hanusch 2019; Hanusch and Hanitzsch 2013). Lifestyle journalism tends to be perceived as trivial compared with *hard news* specialties (Fürsich 2012) such as political journalism. Given its connection to commercial interests, lifestyle journalism has been conceptualized as a specialty with a "soft boundary," which would at once raise questions regarding journalistic independence but simultaneously allows for adaptability that "ensure[s] the ability of lifestyle journalism to navigate a digital turn that has had debilitating effects in many arenas of the field" (Perreault and Hanusch 2022, 15).

Lifestyle journalists historically have still connected with the ethical value of *independence*, however, it can manifest differently given that lifestyle tends to display a higher emphasis on audience orientation than other forms of journalism: a result—in part—of the subfields' consumerist ideals (Hanusch 2018; Perreault and Vos 2018) and in part because of the field's emphasis on providing the "voice of the voiceless" (Hanusch 2012; Maares and Hanusch 2020). Lifestyle journalism attempt redress critiques of independence through transparency: explaining the sources of their free content (Hanusch 2012; Hanusch, Banjac, and Maares 2020). Lifestyle journalists often receive free content and experiences, and "while drawn to the idea they would never actually work—since they were embedded in their passion—in reality what many journalists reflected that they had difficulty leaving work, given that even their passion had become work" (Perreault and Bélair-Gagnon 2022, 14).

Lifestyle journalists "prefer a direct connection to their audiences by taking on the recipients' perspective and by giving clear value judgments" (Fürsich 2013, 14), which is in part how they conceptualize giving "voice to the voiceless." Journalists perceive audiences not just as citizens and consumers but also as clients who participate in the reporting process (Kananovich and Perreault 2021; Skovsgaard and Bro 2016). Recent research

on lifestyle magazines and blogging has identified journalists embracing digitalization logics at least to some extent—this tends to provide more participatory opportunities to bloggers within their content (Cheng and Tandoc Jr. 2022). That said, the lifestyle journalist's openness suggests a "culture of radical sharing," which has its dangers: regular engagement with audiences can have consequences for sources and can "challenge perceptions of journalistic authority over editorial judgment" (Usher 2016, 191). Finally, despite lifestyle journalists' strong commitment to the audience, research suggests that journalists don't actually know who their audience is (Nelson 2021). Hence, journalists might be committed to an audience without completely identifying the potential for hate and harassment in that audience (Perreault and Vos 2018).

All of this together suggests that the boundary around harassment of journalists has shifted as harassment has increased with the rise of populism globally (Miller 2021a; Waisbord 2020), and the ubiquity of social media in journalistic work. This leads us to pose the following research questions:

RQ 1: How do lifestyle journalists discursively articulate how they respond to issues of hate?

RQ 2: How do lifestyle journalists discursively construct their work in regards to hate?

Method

In order to address the research questions, semi-structured, depth interviews were conducted with US lifestyle journalists ($n = 24$). For recruitment purposes, lifestyle journalists were identified based on reporting on lifestyle topics such as beauty and fashion, gaming, health, cuisine and cooking, sports, family, technology, travel and celebrity (Hanusch 2012; Perreault and Hanusch 2022)—beats which would seem to reflect a sort of *aspirational labor* (Duffy 2017). An initial list of 267 potential participants was developed through a process of theoretical sampling (Koerber and McMichael 2008) to represent a range of niches, states, and locations across the United States. The resulting participant sample included journalists who worked for specific lifestyle publications as well as journalists who conducted lifestyle reporting for general-interest publications. Journalists were contacted through a process of theoretical sampling (Koerber and McMichael 2008) in a range of locations across the United States. Participants were recruited via email and interviews were conducted via online video (e.g., Zoom). In total, 30 interviews were completed, but six interviews were removed given that, despite journalists self-identification in lifestyle journalism, their current work did not seem to conform to the Hanusch and Hanitzsch (2013) lifestyle journalism definition.

The interview questionnaire probed numerous aspects of the news production experience of lifestyle journalism (Hanusch and Maeres 2020), including their motivations, their practices, their use of digital tools and their experiences with hate. This was guided by similar interview-based research on journalists' experiences with hate (e.g., Perreault, Johnson, and Klein 2022) and journalists' news production (e.g., Ferrucci and Perreault 2021). The interviews resulted in a significant corpus of qualitative data, and for this study, we are analyzing data from two areas: (1) questions about journalist's approach in reporting, and (2) specific questions about their experiences with hate in their reporting. Specific questions included, "How does hate appear in XXX reporting? Have you personally encountered hate groups or hate speech in your reporting? If so,

please tell me about it" (here, and in many questions, XXX was replaced with the specific lifestyle journalism niche), "How would you define 'hate speech?,'" and "How would your audience define 'hate speech?'" These semi-structured interviews lasted about 45 min to an hour and a half each. All interviews were conducted between September 2021 and November 2021. Deidentification was granted to all participants in part because we were only interested in generating themes regarding lifestyle journalists' experiences with hate.

All 24 participants were located in the United States. Reflecting a robust presence of women in lifestyle journalism (Hanusch 2019), the sample consisted of 14 women and 10 men. Interviews were conducted by trained research students from a mid-sized US university and were conducted until the researchers felt they achieved the appropriate information power in regards to the study participants (Malterud, Siersma, and Guassora 2016). Information power is "determined by items such as study aim, sample specificity, use of established theory, quality of dialogue, and analysis strategy" (Malterud, Siersma, and Guassora 2016, 1757). The research team applied four criteria in assessing the number of interviews: (1) the high quality of dialogue in interviews, (2) the relatively narrow aim of the study (lifestyle journalists' boundary work on issues of hate), and (3) specificity of the sample (US-based lifestyle journalists). Interviews were then transcribed for discourse analysis and analyzed by the authors.

The research team employed a constant comparative approach in order to address the research questions (Glaser, Strauss, and Strutzel 1968) which, Fram (2013) argues, is well suited for both emic coding—driven by themes that emerge from the data analysis—as well as etic coding—driven by theory and literature. The research team read the data as a corpus, considering responses that alluded to hate and harassment. Through a series of meetings via zoom, the research team compared the themes that emerged in order to establish resonance and find associations, differences, and similarities among them. This study was done in accordance with the Appalachian State University Review Board (approval #22-0035). Participants were verbally consented for participation—and informed their participation was voluntary—and all participants were deidentified. Hence, in the findings, participants are quoted with a participant letter but additional context will be given—niche—where it is valuable and doesn't jeopardize the journalist's identity.

Findings

In regards to RQ 1, lifestyle journalists overwhelmingly constructed response to hate—often overlapping it with *harassment*—as the individual responsibility of the journalists. And in regards to RQ 2, lifestyle journalists did see reporting on that hate as an essential part of their work; if their role, was to report on *lifestyles* then they saw hate as being an important, albeit dark, aspect to some lifestyles.

Responding to Hate as Individual Responsibility

In response to issues of hostility among lifestyle journalists, issues of hate arose as a real and semi-frequent occurrence faced by many. As one journalist noted:

I wrote a story a few months ago [...] My Instagram DMS that day were real fun. I've never been called the n-word more in my entire life ... if anyone tells you it's not it absolutely is. Like, they are trying to downplay it to make it not so cruel. But people are cruel. (Participant Q)

This reflects our first theme, which was the normalization of hate in the experience of lifestyle journalism work. As prior research reflects, harassment has become a regular occurrence for many journalists (Miller and Lewis 2020) resulting in normalization of the abuse as part of journalistic work (Miller 2021a). As a result, dealing with harassment has become a part of journalistic work and routines—essentially expanding the boundary of work for journalists who find themselves having to deal with the abuse, often with little support from their organizations (Holton et al. 2021). This study finds that journalists have developed frequent ways of addressing this expanded boundary—namely avoiding or ignoring it.

Our second theme in regards to this reflected how journalists engaged in strategic disconnection (Bélair-Gagnon et al. 2022) to avoid reader/viewer comments online. These systematic non-responses are indeed an act of self-preservation. For example, many journalists noted they avoid reading comments on their stories and on social media as a way to avoid abusive and hateful remarks. As one journalist noted, "I don't really read the comments anymore because you'll drive yourself nuts" (Participant R). In many respects avoiding comments comes from an expectation on the part of journalists that there will be content within them that is hurtful, hateful, and not constructive. Participants tended to encourage disengagement from these sorts of comments. But at times this hate would be aimed more directly: through social media tags, direct messages, emails. This pushed journalists in these cases to go further than simply not engaging but would also block the harasser entirely. As Participant Q noted, "Block and pretend it didn't happen. I have, like so many, so many. There's no reason to engage with these people. You know?" Similarly, Participant P noted:

My philosophy on that is to block it and try to move on. I try not to let the messages sit there so I don't go back to them and worry about them. I'm pretty liberal with the block, to be honest with you, just because there's no higher up in a newsroom for me to report something to.

A sports journalist made a similar assertion, noting that hate is inherently part of the job:

I read an email and I delete it. People have their opinion, but it's there every day. If you write something about somebody's team, whether it's negative or somebody made a bonehead play, or if you write something, even if it appears negative, you're going to get it. It comes back to the thing of having a thick skin and you just have to deal with it. (Participant E)

A near universal occurrence among those who experience hate was the idea that this is a reality the journalists must address themselves. As Participant P noted, "there's no higher up in a newsroom for me to report something to."

Consistent with prior findings women respondents in this sample were more likely than men to receive hate from their audience (Mesmer and Jahng 2021; Miller and Lewis 2020). Noteworthy is that sports journalists were also more likely than other forms of lifestyle journalism to report hate from their audience, but the least likely to urge disconnection as a result (Hardin, Shain, and Shultz-Poniatowski 2008). Given that

lifestyle journalism is responsive to individual *lifestyles* it maybe that this is reflective of sports culture in the United States; given that are indications that practices of harassment and hate have been granted oxygen within this culture (Antunovic 2019; Everbach 2018). Hence, disconnection might not be an option for sports journalists as a result.

The final theme noted was that the hate received by journalists was almost entirely discussed as being online. This would seem to suggest that—unlike other specialties—lifestyle journalism may find receive instances of harassment online *but not* see that translate into physical, in-person encounters. Yet, on the other hand, that does not mean the threat of it doesn't exist.

Indeed, while experiencing harassment and hate at work has notable consequences for journalists, it is also illustrative of the ever-shifting boundaries taking place in a field in which harassment is pervasive and increasing.

Lifestyle Journalism as Practice Including Issues of Hate

In regards to RQ 2, journalists argued that while (1) lifestyle doesn't inherently lend itself to facing issues of hate—if anything, it trends toward humanization—that nevertheless (2) journalists have a responsibility to report on hate in order to provide the human context that they feel is essential to their work.

While lifestyle journalism can be light-hearted at times, the emphasis of lifestyle journalism is nevertheless “lifestyles” and hence, can include topics reflecting politics and business (Duffy and Ashley 2012; McGaurr 2012). One sports journalist noted that the “human” emphasis in lifestyle is what has kept him rooted in the field to tell “the stories behind the games” and those “unique stories of being human and of triumph” (Participant V).

A food journalist noted that one of the reasons hate can still come up in issues of lifestyle is in part a result of “really dealing with human beings, you know, and a lot of these stories can be sensitive” (Participant M).

I think a lot of people think about lifestyle journalism as super like ‘fluffy’ or whatever. It can be ... But that's not always the case, like for example ... you're literally writing about things like race and, you know, like, violence and like all these things happening, but you're just doing it through a more human lens so I think there's that aspect of it. (Participant U)

Simply put, hate finds itself reflected within lifestyle journalism because it's a part of life. Journalists most frequently identified hate as forced on them—as through harassment—that they had to respond to. That said, in other cases, it came up in the content they covered.

In sports journalism, for example, one participant notes that hate emerged just from his reporting on a prominent athlete Colin Kaepernick (Participant E). He described an experience where he had reported on the athlete and posted to Twitter and immediately began receiving harassing feedback—in that case, others in his audience responded before he even had a chance to respond.

It's the reporter's responsibility, even if they were to say that I'm here to report on the X's and O's and the final score, and you're in the stands, or you're in the press box, and you hear people below you in the press box, chanting out things or holding up signs, I think is the reporter's responsibility, regardless of what story they're there to cover. (Participant T)

Furthermore, as one journalist noted, even if a journalist's primary reporting lies in a lifestyle subject, that doesn't preclude them from being assigned topics outside of it. Although Participant W is primarily a food journalist, she was assigned to cover a women's march in her city on a weekend shift. She went through training in her newsroom with the expectation that there would be counterprotesters and the potential for violence at the event.

Lifestyle journalists also saw reporting on hate as fitting within their boundaries in the sense that they can provide context—even if they felt the impulse to “try to focus on the positives” (Participant G). Prior research has found this to be a common thread among journalists on news beats reporting on issues of hate (Perreault, Johnson, and Klein 2022). These journalists feared “relying too heavily on the watchdog role” (10) in that, while this might be easily leveraged; rather journalists in the study saw the *storyteller* role as a preferred means for reporting on hate—the primary role lifestyle journalists often self-conceive (Hanitzsch and Vos 2018; Hanusch and Hanitzsch 2013).

Conversant, with these findings, lifestyle journalists in this study argued that in some ways, they were ideally placed. As lifestyle journalists, their human-oriented emphasis allowed them to best place the hate in context.

You do not want to necessarily emphasize it in your reporting, but you also don't want to ignore it. Context is important. I think getting outside voices is important. When things like that occur, you don't want to feel like you're celebrating or spotlighting them at all, it's newsworthy and it happened. (Participant D)

Similarly, a music journalist likened it to conducting an interview with US country music artist Morgan Cole Wallen. Wallen has been the center of a number of controversies—notably in using racist epithets.

If you're interviewing somebody that's said racist things, you need to often times confront them about it. Nobody likes a puff piece in the sense that if somebody's interviewing Morgan Wallen after that scandal, your job as a journalist is not to suck up to whoever you are interviewing. It's to find out the truth and it's to paint a full picture of them, so the good and the bad. (Participant J)

That said, participants noted that providing such context can—cyclically—lead to more hateful messages (Participant D; Participant L).

Taken together, this data reflects that hate is an issue both faced personally and professionally among lifestyle journalists; furthermore, it represents an arena that lifestyle journalists do feel they have a responsibility to respond to given their emphasis on providing context.

Discussion and Conclusions

Julie DiCaro's experience covering sports is, sadly, not an uncommon one. Lifestyle topics such as those reflected by this study's participants would seem to be quintessential of the best case scenarios in journalism: where journalists would be unlikely to be sent to cover hateful actors (Perreault, Johnson, and Klein 2022). The appeal of such journalistic niches is that the work would seem to be a *labor of love* (Perreault and Bélair-Gagnon 2022)—the topics bring joy and allow journalists to experience such joy in their reporting. A

noteworthy part of DiCaro's story? Despite finding sports journalism as her second career, her experience in sports journalism drove her from the field.

As this study reflects, DiCaro's not alone in her experiences. In regards to RQ 1, journalists primarily discussed *hate* as something that happened *to them* as opposed to something that they found in their reporting. Journalists argued that they responded to issues of hate primarily through disconnection: avoiding harassing direct messages on social media and not reading the comment threads on their news stories. What the frequent discussion of harassment—and subsequent disengagement from it—illustrates is the clear normalization of abuse and hate that journalists experience. Specifically, it illustrates that harassment is such a routine part of doing journalistic work that they must set boundaries in which they do engage with hateful comments, or even read the comments at all, illustrating that the nature of abuse is intrinsic to the journalistic endeavor. Moreover, they note many ways in which they self-regulate personal “policies” to help control the emotional toll such frequent hate can cause. Indeed, this signifies that not only are organizations playing little to no role in combating and managing the hate their journalists experience, but that journalists are subsequently building their own rules, routines, and policies to manage what they deem a normalized occurrence.

As previously mentioned, Participant P stated that, “there’s no higher up in a newsroom for me to report something to.” Meanwhile, Participant U noted, “you just have to deal with it.” Indeed, in light of a lack of policies and support from managers, journalists have normalized the abuse and addressed it—or not—in their own way. This illustrates that the emotional labor associated with receiving hate when covering more controversial topics is not limited to those stories or beats alone, but is prominent in lifestyle journalism as well. This reality of normalization and disengagement is in deep contrast with how journalist’s view their role in illuminating hate experienced by *their audience*. In regards to RQ 2, journalists noted that when they did see issues of hate that affected their audience, they felt the normative responsibility to inform their audience and give them the context they needed to understand that hate.

This reflects an interesting contrast: while journalists disengaged when hate was aimed at them, they doubled down in reporting when the hate was aimed at their audience, invested in reporting on the topic. This certainly reflects a commitment to the audience that is well reflected in lifestyle journalism literature (Hanusch 2019). If lifestyle journalism at times reflects a sort of *paternalism* (Perreault and Vos 2018), then it would be only natural that this responsibility to advise and guide would be reflected in journalists trying to help their audience navigate issues of hate. However, this also reflects a bit of the hidden emotional labor undertaken by lifestyle journalists. While lifestyle journalists are often drawn to the field given their interest in engaging in this sort *labor of love* (Perreault and Bélair-Gagnon 2022)—and the lifestyle journalists in this sample certainly did just that—there is additional, less publicized, labor journalists must undertake in mitigating hate. While perhaps not as acute as the threats posed in war or crime coverage, journalists undertaking even lifestyle journalism face threats to their well-being—and threats to the well-being of their audience—that are consistent with the dangers in *hard news* subfields (Perreault, Johnson, and Klein 2022). Given their commitment to the audience and their distance from the cultural power of the field (de Bustamante and Relly 2021), lifestyle journalists may face a more acute situation with hate than traditional journalists. This is in part given that lifestyle journalists covering hate in their content may have less

experience than journalists who cover crime, politics, or war. It also reflects that lifestyle journalists, by virtue of the topics they cover, may feel a need to repress or hide issues of harassment to match the expectations their audience has that they are loving what they do (Hanusch 2019).

This reality presented in this study constitutes an ethical issue. While most journalism ethical codes are thorough in their assertion of how journalists should report on others and treat others, little information is provided on how journalists should treat themselves—both when covering themselves and minimizing their own potential to face harm. To be specific, the United States Society for Professional Journalists code of ethics suggests journalists should “give voice to the voiceless” but also “avoid conflicts of interest”—ethical codes with which lifestyle journalists tend to broadly identify (Hanusch 2012; Mares and Hanusch 2020). However, in instances where journalists are facing abuse but cannot share it, they would seem to have become the voiceless population themselves. Hence, this puts journalists in a difficult ethical situation: how do they go about covering those issues without having conflicting interests? As this data illuminates, there is a preference for protecting sources and providing context around hate for audiences, but a cultural norm of ignoring hate faced by journalists. Ellen Meny—a local TV news reporter—wrote in a *Vox* article that local news has a harassment problem that receives little attention (Meny 2017). While she notes many women journalists discuss the issue privately in closed Facebook groups or through private messages, the issue rarely gets news coverage on traditional platforms—reinforcing a journalistic norm that journalists themselves must remain independent by staying out of the story (Mesmer and Jahng 2021). It is worth considering that while lifestyle journalists may be voiceless in responding to the hate they receive in public forums, it may be that—conversant with Mesmer and Jahng (2021)—there are closed forums where journalists do feel the safety to share their experiences.

Some scholars argue even when attacks by politicians are overt, such as those undertaken by former US President Donald Trump, journalists tend to downplay and even ignore criticisms publicly (Carlson, Robinson, and Lewis 2021). What’s more, as lifestyle journalists fail to address and even defend themselves from allegations of fake news—or other abuse—they are ultimately inhibiting their perceived legitimacy (Egelhofer and Lecheler 2019). Therefore, questions arise as to what journalists should do when facing these situations where they must be a voice for the voiceless—themselves—but also act independently. Furthermore, when responding to abuse and harassment takes an emotional toll (Miller and Lewis 2020), how do they balance the need for self-preservation with also defending their reputations and legitimacy in a democratic society?

Limitations

All papers suffer from limitations and this paper is no different. First, we know that what journalists say they do is not always what they actually do. Second, lifestyle journalists’ interpretations of questions regarding “hate” as overlapping with “harassment” reflects an important aspect of this study and a valuable literature synthesis. However, future research should consider exploring the unique ways lifestyle journalists may face issues of harassment through a line of questioning dedicated explicitly to questions of harassment. Third, it is noteworthy that, compared with other prior research (Miller and Lewis

2020; Waisbord 2020), lifestyle journalists did not appear to see online hate translating into physical encounters. However, this may be in part a result of the time frame of the study—the second year of the coronavirus—which affected the work experiences of journalists in many ways.

Lifestyle journalism literature has often made the claim that, while regarded as trivial in terms of content, it is anything but trivial given the economic impact of lifestyle journalism (Hanusch, Hanitzsch, and Lauerer 2017) and the essential topics they cover in relation to the lives of their audience (Duffy and Ashley 2012). This study contributes in reflecting on the experiences of journalists themselves—experiences that, too often, lifestyle journalists don't feel comfortable voicing with their audience.

Acknowledgements

The authors would like to thank the Appalachian State University Mobile Journalism class from fall 2021 for helping collect this data: Ansley Puckett, Abi Peppin, Jake Markland, Megan Petty, Hunter Grubbs, Jenna Hatcher, Charles Pace, Tyler Bradbandt, Makaelah Walters, Haley Canal, Marlen Cardenas, Char Street, Cameron Stuart, Casey Brown, Candace Little, and Holly Hodges. The authors would also like to thank fantastic undergrad RAs Ella Hackett and Alexis Handler for organizing the data.

Disclosure Statement

No potential conflict of interest was reported by the author(s).

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Appendix. Participant table

Participant Letter	Lifestyle specialty	Type of publication	Gender	Race	Experience
A	Travel	National, Magazine	Man	White	10 years
B	Health & Wellness	International, Newspaper	Woman	White	30 years
C	Food	National, Magazine	Woman	Hispanic	13 years
D	Sports	Digital	Woman	White	Less than a year
E	Sports	International, Newspaper	Man	Black	10 years
F	Sports	International, Newspaper	Man	White	24 years
G	Community Culture	Regional, Broadcaster	Man	White	12 years
H	Diverse communities	National, Newspaper	Woman	Hispanic	5 years
I	Sports	National, Newspaper	Woman	White	3 years
J	Entertainment	National, Magazine	Man	White	Less than a year
K	Art	National, Magazine	Woman	Black	6 years
L	Community Culture	National, Newspaper	Woman	White	15 years
M	Sports	Digital	Man	White	14 years
N	Travel	Digital	Woman	White	2 years
O	Entertainment	National, Newspaper	Woman	Black	5 years
P	Youth Culture	National, Magazine	Woman	White	5 years
Q	Beauty	National, magazine	Woman	Black	3 years
R	Sports	National, newspaper	Man	White	10 years
S	Sports	Digital	Man	Black	14 years
T	Sports	Digital	Man	White	18 years
U	Arts & Entertainment	National, newspaper	Woman	Multi	4 years
V	Sports	International, newspaper	Man	Black	4 years
W	Food	Regional, newspaper	Woman	White	19 years
X	Arts & Entertainment	International, newspaper	Woman	Black	5 years