

Harassment on Assignment:
Gendered emotional labour in Canadian newsrooms

by

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Abstract

The harassment of women and gender non-binary journalists is pervasive. In recent years, many scholars and practitioners have collected evidence to suggest it is getting worse. To assess the effects of such harassment in Canada, I interviewed 16 current or former female journalists and one gender non-binary journalist, and conducted a survey of more than 130 journalists to understand the scope of this harassment and its impact, including whether it motivated participants to consider leaving their job. The results of this survey revealed that female and gender non-binary journalists in Canada experience ongoing verbal and physical abuse rooted in misogyny, sexism, racism, Islamophobia and homophobia. Participants detailed cyber-violence, assault, sexual harassment, threats of violence and death threats connected to their work. Racialized journalists, members of 2SLGBTQ+ communities and those covering politics reported some of the most aggressive harassment or violence directed towards them. As a result of these findings, this thesis adds concrete recommendations to growing calls for news organizations and all levels of government to protect women and gender non-binary journalists from the emotional labour and abuse connected to the job.

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Disclaimer

I am a Canadian journalist who has dealt with harassment on the job. While I will not include any personal information in my thesis, I acknowledge that part of my desire to research this topic stems from personal experiences and the experiences of those around me. My goal is to create awareness for future journalists of the harassment connected to the job, and to push those in the industry, or who oversee the industry, to create safer spaces for current and upcoming journalists and prioritize the mental health of those in this industry. This thesis is from my position as a student at Carleton University, and it is in no way associated with my personal employment.

Table of Contents

Introduction: Harassment of Women and Gender Non-Binary Journalists.....	1
Methodology.....	19
Limitations.....	24
Chapter One: Exploring the Findings.....	27
Overview of Survey Results.....	30
Overall Findings Explored.....	34
Harassment Explored Through Interviews.....	36
B’s Story	37
Ins’ Story.....	39
Isabelle’s Story.....	41
Alex Brown’s Story.....	44
Maddy Eisenberg’s Story.....	47
Kori’s Story.....	48
Summary of the Findings.....	50
Chapter Two: Racialized and LGBTQ2S+ Journalists.....	52
Racialized Women Journalists.....	53
Harassment Shared on Twitter.....	56
Fatima Syed.....	60

Nana aba Duncan.....	63
Priya Sam.....	64
Saba Eitizaz.....	66
Indigenous Journalists: Karyn Pugliese’s Report.....	69
2SLGBTQ+ Journalists	72
Amanda Jetté Knox.....	72
Summary of Findings.....	76
Chapter Three: Political Implications.....	78
Harassment Mimics Abuse Faced by Female Politicians	80
Speaking with Women who Cover Politics.....	84
Vassy Kapelos.....	85
Supriya Dwivedi.....	88
Elisha Dacey	92
Summary of Findings.....	96
Chapter Four: Emotional Labour and Trauma	97
Loss of Perspectives.....	108
Summary of Findings.....	115
Chapter Five: Conclusions & Recommendations.....	116
Removing/Filtering Access.....	119
Social Media.....	120
Online Safety Training.....	121
Online Safety Audits.....	122

Mental Health Support.....	124
Robust Counterspeech.....	125
Public Education/Media Literacy.....	126
Journalists and Coverage.....	127
Governing Bodies.....	128
Consider Legal Action/Formal Complaints.....	130
Summary of Recommendations.....	131
Appendix A: List of Survey Questions.....	133
Appendix B: List of Interview Questions.....	135
Appendix C: List of Interview Subjects.....	136
Work Cited.....	139
Tweets Used.....	159

List of Figures

Figure 1. Survey results: Job Descriptions.....	22
Figure 2. Survey results: Harassment faced.....	30
Figure 3. Survey results: Nature of the harassment.....	31
Figure 4. Survey results: Feelings on safety.....	31
Figure 5. Survey results: Considerations for leaving the journalism industry.....	32
Figure 6. Survey results: Increase in harassment.....	33
Figure 7. Twitter image 2021.....	57
Figure 8. Twitter image 2021.....	58
Figure 9. Twitter image 2021.....	59
Figure 10. Twitter image 2021.....	60
Figure 11. Twitter image 2021.....	61
Figure 12. Twitter image 2021.....	67

List of Appendices

Appendix A: List of Survey Questions

Appendix B: List of Interview Questions

Appendix C: List of Interview Subjects

Appendix D: List of Abbreviations

Acronyms Used

2SLGBTQ+: Two-Spirit, lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender, queer (or questioning) and

other sexual identities

BIPOC: Black, Indigenous, and People of Colour

CFWIJ: Coalition For Women in Journalism

CPJ: Committee to Protect Journalists

FHRITP: F*** her right in the p****

GBV: Gender-based violence

IFJ: International Federation of Journalists

IMS: International Media Support

OSCE PA: Organization for Security and Co-operation in Europe Parliamentary

Assembly

UK: United Kingdom

UNESCO: United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization

Introduction:

Harassment of Women and Gender Non-Binary Journalists

Content Warning: This paper has details connected to harassment and abuse.

The harassment of women and gender non-binary journalists is a crisis.¹ Newsrooms and press-freedom organizations can no longer ignore the calls for better protection of journalists or pass the abuse off as a normal part of the job (Chen, Pain, Chen, Mekelburg, Springer, & Troger, 2018). Emerging research in online violence and threats towards certain journalists demonstrates how this harassment is ongoing – and getting more frequent or aggressive in some cases (Westcott, 2019; Posetti, Shabbir, Maynard, Bontcheva, Aboulez, 2021; Vogels, 2021). Indeed, no journalist is above criticism (McChesney & Scott, 2004). Yet, studies on recent trends, ranging from 2016 to current, show rising levels of targeted harassment and violence (Ireton & Posetti, 2018; Westcott, 2019; Smyth,

¹ The chilling violence and online abuse against women and gender non-binary journalists is a current crisis in journalism (Posetti et al., 2021; Oukhiar, 2021).

2020; Posetti, 2021).² Digital transformations³ in combination with social upheaval have had implications for journalists' safety (Smyth, 2020). A recent report by the United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization (UNESCO) indicates that hostility against news and media organizations and their members is at an all-time high, citing political rhetoric against the press as one factor (Smyth, 2020).⁴ Another recent report by UNESCO on online violence shows a key difference for women and gender non-binary journalists is that they are disadvantaged by multiple forms of discrimination that intersect with sexism and misogyny (Posetti et al., 2021). In the landmark report called *The Chilling: Global trends in online violence against women journalists*, researchers found female journalists remain at the epicentre of risk, revealing (Posetti et al., 2021):

Networked misogyny and gaslighting intersect with racism, religious bigotry, homophobia and other forms of discrimination to threaten women journalists - severely and disproportionately.

Threats of sexual violence and murder are frequent and sometimes

² A report on the issues of safety for journalists worldwide found harassment and violence against journalists overall has increased in recent years (Smyth, 2020).

³ Digital transformation describes using digital technologies to create or modify social and business processes, i.e. social media.

⁴ A UNESCO report called "Safety of journalists covering protests" looks at preserving freedom in times of turmoil in media (Smyth, 2020).

extended to their families. This phenomenon is also bound up with the rise of viral disinformation,⁵ digital conspiracy networks and political polarisation. The psychological, physical, professional, and digital safety and security impacts associated with this escalating freedom of expression and gender equality crisis are overlapping, converging and frequently inseparable. They are also increasingly spilling offline, sometimes with devastating consequences. (p.5)

The report investigates the scale of online violence targeting women journalists worldwide. In total, the study includes 900 participants from 125 countries. Researchers found the harassment can consist of digital privacy and security breaches that can expose identifying information and exacerbate offline safety threats facing women journalists. The report further reveals that disinformation tactics were common, namely the intentional misrepresentation of facts using artificial intelligence technologies (Posetti et al., 2021).⁶ In a separate

⁵ Disinformation is the opposite of quality and fact-checked journalism. It can include errors, poor verification, exaggerations and/or hyper-partisan selection of facts (Ireton & Posetti, 2018, p. 8).

⁶ In *Journalism, 'Fake News' & Disinformation* (Ireton & Posetti, 2018) the authors explore how computer programs using artificial intelligence are being used “to create simulations of people in phoney video and/or audio reports that have no basis in truth” (p. 76).

article on this report, called “Online Violence: The New Front Line for Women Journalists,” lead researcher Julie Posetti (2020) writes:

These combined threats can be termed ‘gendered online violence.’ The perpetrators range from individual misogynists and networked mobs seeking to shut women up, through to State-linked disinformation agents aiming to undercut press freedom and chill critical journalism through orchestrated attacks. (para. 2)

Where gender intersects with race or sexuality, studies show women journalists of colour and members of Two-Spirit, lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender, queer (or questioning) and other sexual identities (2SLGBTQ+) communities are disproportionately impacted (Amnesty International, 2018; Chen et al., 2018; Posetti et al., 2021). Research for *The Chilling* looked at who was most impacted by the harassment and revealed, “Black, Indigenous, Jewish, Arab and lesbian women journalists participating in [the] survey and interviews experienced both the highest rates and most severe impacts of online violence” (2021, p.12). The findings mimic research on the overall experiences of women of colour and members of 2SLGBTQ+ communities online in the global north, with research showing members of these communities are more likely to be attacked in the digital realm (Shanahan, 2017; Amnesty International, 2018; Powell, Scott & Henry, 2018; Navarro, Lachowsky, Hammond, Burchell, Arps, Davis, Brasseur, Islam, Fosbrook, Jacobsen, Walker, Lopez, Scheim, & Bauer, 2021; Nguyen, 2021). In her article “Participation Inequality: Women and Online Comments,”

American journalist and digital discourse researcher Marie Shanahan (2017) reveals, "Women, ethnic and religious minorities and those who identify as LGBT experience a disproportionate amount of abuse in the comments" (p. 64). Another recent report by Amnesty International (2018) regarding online abuse of women journalists and politicians came to similar conclusions.⁷ In this case, the study found that women of colour were 34 per cent more likely to be mentioned in 'abusive or problematic' tweets than white women (para. 4). Further, it determined that Black women are disproportionately targeted and 84 per cent more likely to be mentioned in harassing tweets than white women (para. 4). Amnesty's study, which focused on harassment against women journalists and politicians, determined that 1.1 million messages were problematic or abusive, or once every 30 seconds on average (2018, para. 1). A different poll conducted in Canada by Abacus Data for the Canadian Race Relations Foundation (2021) concerning online hate found that racialized individuals are roughly three times more likely to have experienced hate speech than non-racialized people.⁸

⁷ Amnesty's study analyzed 288,000 tweets directed towards 778 women politicians and journalists in the United Kingdom and the United States in 2017 (Amnesty International, 2018).

⁸ The survey for Canadian Race Relations Foundation (2021) was conducted with 2,000 Canadian residents from January 15 to 18, 2021. The data was weighted according to census data to match Canada's population.

Focusing on the risks female and gender non-binary journalists face overall on the job, Lucy Wescott (2019) surveyed American and Canadian participants on harassment and safety as part of her research with the Committee to Protect Journalists (CPJ). Wescott's work determined that "Responses back up findings by CPJ and other press freedom organizations about how female journalists face the brunt of harassment" (2019, para. 6).⁹ Wescott's survey also found 85 per cent of respondents believed journalists had become less safe in the past five years, and less than half (44 per cent) indicated that they had not received safety training that would better prepare them for harassment online or in-person (2019, para. 5). Westcott also concluded that more than 70 per cent of respondents had experienced safety issues/threats in the United States or Canada, with verbal harassment followed by online harassment as the most common types (para. 5). Additionally, the survey revealed most respondents, including 90 per cent of the American journalists surveyed and 71 per cent from Canada, listed online harassment as their "biggest safety concern" (2019, para. 5 & 10). Other researchers who studied harassment of female journalists using a wider

⁹ Westcott (2019) surveyed 115 female and gender non-binary journalists in the United States and Canada to highlight the industry's leading issues and create a safety kit for journalists.

participation pool found similar results (Chen et al., 2018).¹⁰ The Center for Media Engagement in Texas research includes participants from the United States, Germany, India, Taiwan and the United Kingdom to assess the scope of harassment of women journalists (Chen et al., 2018). In this case, the survey revealed that the women journalists who took part experienced negative audience feedback in the form of harassment, targeting them personally with a focus on their gender or sexuality (Chen et al., 2018, para. 3). The Center for Media Engagement results also found online abuse had become a *normal* part of the job for these journalists. Researchers determined the harassment, including “vitriolic sexist attacks or inappropriately sexual barbs,” is reflective of the overall experiences many women face online (Chen et al., 2018, para, 4).¹¹ Amnesty International (2018) reports the abuse against women and girls can include direct or indirect threats of physical or sexual violence, discriminatory abuse targeting a woman’s identity, as well as privacy violations (para. 6).

Looking more closely at cyber-violence and online trends, it has become clear that internet access and social media allow people to speak freely to a

¹⁰ Researchers interviewed 75 female professional journalists to determine what participants were dealing with in the field and how they responded (Chen et al., 2018).

¹¹ According to organizations like the Canadian Women’s Foundation (2019), women and girls are more likely to be victims of harassment overall.

broader group (Ash, 2016; Hackworth, 2018). Yet, the digital space has also changed how many communicate, with the freedom to spew vitriol across social platforms - often anonymously (Shaw, 2014; Shanahan, 2017; MacKinnon, 2018; Vogels, 2021). As news becomes more accessible online, the push for journalists to be similarly accessible is ever-present (Chen & Pain, 2017). A global study (International Federation of Journalists [IFJ], 2018) on online violence determined almost two-thirds of women journalists have faced online abuse (para. 1). This abuse includes insults, the devaluation of women's work, sexist comments, cyberbullying, cyberstalking and death or sexual assault threats (IFJ, 2018). Online abuse can make its way into real life, with the majority of abused respondents, 63 per cent, saying the attacks they faced brought on psychological effects such as anxiety or stress (para. 4). At the same time, 38 per cent admitted to self-censorship, and 8 per cent said they had lost their job (IFJ, 2018, para 6). IFJ also researched gender-based violence at work (2017). That study revealed that almost one in two women journalists had suffered sexual harassment, psychological abuse, online trolling and other forms of gender-based violence while working (2017, para. 1). In response to these findings IFJ's Gender Council co-chair Mindy Ran (IFJ, 2018) writes,

This survey highlights one of the fastest growing forms of gender-based violence (GBV) against women journalists as digital platforms encourage ease, impunity and anonymity of aggression – the bastion of the coward and the bully – hiding in plain sight. This

survey, and the previous one published last year also highlights the huge disconnect between experience and action, the lack of support mechanisms, laws and failure to fully implement those international treaties and labour standards that do exist. It is clear, we are failing to protect our sisters and the lack of recognition of the serious harm that online violence can cause – both psychological and in its sinister silencing impact - must be addressed at every level now. (para. 5)

Shanahan (2017) supports Ran’s take on anonymity online, adding that online harassment is often connected to the courage some gain from obscurity. Shanahan states, “The ability for anyone to broadcast abusive and offensive remarks—often anonymously, on an ongoing basis and essentially free of consequences—has had a pernicious influence on civic behaviour and a corrosive effect on deliberative debate” (Shanahan, 2017, p. 60).

From online violence to discrimination within newsrooms, journalists in the global north have reported ongoing misogyny, racism and harassment within the office (Chocarro, 2019; Mattar, 2020; Merrefield, 2020). When it comes to overt sexism in newsrooms, Wallace and Gilger (2019) suggest things are progressing towards gender equity in newsrooms. Still, there is more to be done as online violence represents a form of discrimination. In 2014, author and journalist Vivian Smith explored the barriers preventing female Canadian

journalists from entering the field and attaining top newsroom positions.¹² In 2021 there is still a ‘glass ceiling,’¹³ according to many women and gender non-binary journalists (El Azrak, 2018). Much work is also required to achieve racial equity in journalism and ensure news coverage reflects the country’s vast multi-cultural diversity (Fenlon, 2021; Lau, 2021).

In the book *Reckoning: Journalism’s Limits and Possibilities* (Callison & Young, 2020), the authors challenge the current newsroom make-up in the global north, calling for further inclusion of Indigenous, Black and 2SLGBTQ+ voices within predominantly white masculine newsrooms (Callison & Young, 2020).¹⁴ Since the 1920s, objective and impartial coverage has been the favoured

¹² In *Outsiders Still: Why Women Journalists Love – and Leave – their Newspaper Careers*, Smith (2014) explored the underrepresentation of female journalists in top positions within print journalism in Canadian newsrooms and obstacles that have historically created additional barriers for women in the newspaper industry, including sexism.

¹³ Glass ceiling refers to “an intangible barrier within a hierarchy that prevents women or minorities from obtaining upper-level positions” (Merriam-Webster, n.d).

¹⁴ *Reckoning: Journalism’s Limits and Possibilities* by Candis Callison and Mary Lynn Young (2020), is about who is represented in journalism - and the harms caused by who journalism is leaving out, using a systemic look at media.

professional ideal among journalists to avoid biased coverage (Pressman, 2018).¹⁵ Callison and Young (2020) push back against this current view on objectivity as a view from nowhere, arguing that impartiality can at times be harmful (pp. 1 - 19). The authors contend that pushing for both sides of a story to be included in coverage can contribute to the status quo within society by repeating dominant points of view, despite evidence of racism, gendered media coverage, and bias (2020). The authors explain that “legitimizing the ‘view from nowhere’ impacts power relations” (Callison and Young, 2020, p. 4). Further, the authors also explore *who* makes the calls on what coverage looks like within newsrooms and how it impacts newsroom dynamics. Pushing to end racism and promote diversity, Callison and Young (2020) question objectivity and who exactly objective coverage is serving. In the authors’ view, journalists should report using their expertise instead of relying on objective reporting guidelines (Callison & Young, 2020, pp. 1-19).

Callison and Young’s work was published around the same time that Egyptian-Canadian journalist Pacinthe Mattar (2020) wrote a piece exposing a lack of trust toward Black, Indigenous, and other racialized people from within newsrooms titled “Objectivity Is a Privilege Afforded to White Journalists.” In

¹⁵ Objectivity and impartiality were cornerstones of journalistic principles in which journalists were told to report the facts free of bias (Pressman, 2018).

this article, Mattar states, “Our professionalism is questioned when we report on the communities we’re from, and the spectre of advocacy follows us in a way that it does not follow many of our white colleagues” (2020, para. 9). Mattar explains how news managers attempt to control topics and stories by claiming they must be objective (2020). The calls to increase diversity and inclusion in newsrooms are not new - but have grown louder following the killing of George Floyd and other racialized people at the hands of police, which sparked protests around the world against racism and police brutality (Childers, 2020).¹⁶ These calls for increased diversity in newsrooms were explored in Canada’s capital city by Dayanti Karunaratne (2020) before leaving a position as editor of *Ottawa Magazine*. Writing on the issue of race representation, Karunaratne interviewed several journalists of colour regarding diversity in Canadian media. She interviewed journalist Erica Ifill who had this to say about inclusion: “It’s not just about having people of colour; how are you promoting them? Are you stripping them of their identity in order for them to be included? Because that’s not inclusion, that’s window dressing” (Karunaratne, 2020). Previously interviewed for research on the treatment of racialized journalists in Canadian media, Nana

¹⁶ The killing of a George Floyd, a Black man, during an arrest by a white Minneapolis police officer sparked global reckoning with anti-Black racism, furthering calls for Canadian newsrooms to improve diversity and inclusivity (Childers, 2020; Fenlon, 2020).

aba Duncan, the Carty Chair in Journalism, Diversity and Inclusion Studies at Carleton University's School of Journalism and Communication, adds that Black, Indigenous, and People of Colour (BIPOC) mid-career women face additional challenges while attempting to get ahead in their careers (Pulfer, 2020). As Duncan put it (2020), "They're derided as 'activists' if they bring stories from their communities, and then they're pigeonholed into covering those communities" (p. 5). Further, she adds that BIPOC journalists tend to be treated worse, the more successful they become (Pulfer, 2020).

The Coalition For Women in Journalism (CFWIJ) reported a particularly egregious case of gendered and racial abuse of journalists in Canada near the end of 2021, following vile online attacks against journalists, most of whom identified as women or journalists of colour (CFWIJ, 2021).¹⁷ It started when Maxime Bernier, a politician running in the 2021 federal election, shared three reporters' emails in a now-deleted tweet that called them "idiots" and told his followers to "play dirty" (Reynolds, 2021, para. 2). After posting excerpts of their requests for comment, Bernier, who was running as leader of the People's Party of Canada,¹⁸

¹⁷ The Coalition for Women in Journalism is an international advocacy group that "fosters and supports camaraderie between women journalists around the globe." <https://www.womeninjournalism.org/our-philosophy>

¹⁸ The People's Party of Canada was formed by Maxime Bernier in September 2018, shortly after his resignation from the Conservative Party of Canada. It is considered right-wing to far-right.

encouraged his 160,000 followers on Twitter to contact the reporters to "(T)ell them what you think of their disgusting smear jobs" (Reynolds, 2021, para 4). This tweet initiated a violent harassment campaign with three Canadian journalists, followed by recurring racist and deeply gendered emails to other Canadian journalists (CFWIJ, 2021). The three journalists initially targeted included a female journalist and two male journalists, one of colour. The female journalist, Christy Somos, shared a tweet that included a screenshot of one of the threatening emails she received following Bernier's tweet (Somos, 2021). In that email, the anonymous author wrote that they hope Somos is sexually assaulted and murdered - encouraging her to kill herself (2021). Many journalists came to Somos' defence, which seemed to exacerbate the situation. Soon, some 15 female journalists in Canada had shared similar harassing emails, many of them women of colour (CFWIJ, 2021). On this matter, CFWIJ writes, "It does not go unnoticed that Bernier's since-deleted tweet exclusively mentioned women journalists and journalists of colour, and it is precisely these two groups that have been disproportionately targeted" (2021, para 2). At this time, the CFWIJ was monitoring the online hate of women journalists around the world and recorded 61 cases of violations, with at least 19 Canadian female journalists speaking out about being a target in organized troll campaigns' (CFWIJ, 2021). Based on these observations, the CFWIJ determined that Canada proved to be the most hostile digital space for female journalists in September of 2021.

Within Canada, there are additional ongoing concerns about the country's shrinking media ecosystem (Thomson, 2020). When it comes to ownership, the

majority of Canadian media is owned and operated by five main corporations: Bell Media, Rogers Media, Corus, Torstar and Postmedia, most of which have had recent layoffs or restructuring (McCullough, n.d., Sharp, 2016; Trinh, 2021). In the case of Postmedia, it was assumed by an American hedge fund in 2016 (Lee, 2020). After Chatham Asset Management acquired two-thirds of the company, hundreds of employees were laid off and numerous papers were shut down (Lee, 2020). Layoffs are not uncommon within the industry (Sharp, 2016; Thomson, 2020). Coping with the fear of job loss can impact a journalist's mental wellbeing as well as office morale, with the situation again differing if that journalist is non-unionized or a freelance journalist, for various reasons including considerations for job security/seniority as well as severance packages (Reinardy, 2010; Trinh, 2021). Additionally, as more people turn to freelance journalism work in Canada, different avenues may be required to offer protections, such as support groups or assistance from Canadian press freedom organizations.

The anxiety connected to potential layoffs, as well as the stress from dealing with the hate and harassment above and beyond what female and gender non-binary journalists manage as daily workflow can be labelled emotional labour (Miller & Lewis, 2020).¹⁹ Research into the implications of online harassment for

¹⁹ Miller and Lewis (2020) explore how negative or harassing remarks can be stressful or difficult to manage for many journalists. This process of containing or controlling one's emotions based on work is an example of emotional labour.

<https://journals.sagepub.com/doi/abs/10.1177/1464884919899016>

American journalists found the negative and harassing remarks these journalists receive are stressful and difficult for many to manage (2020). In the “The Cost of Reporting While Female,” author Anne Helen Petersen (2018) found that the abuse women journalists receive can manifest as muzzling, in “the stories that have gone untold or unexplored by women because the risks of telling them, psychologically or physically, require too damn much” (para 3). The non-profit group International Media Support (IMS) also supports these findings (Chocarro, 2019).²⁰ The report by author Silvia Chocarro for IMS titled *The safety of women journalists: Breaking the cycle of silence and violence* (2019) studied the treatment of female journalists in nine countries. The report found that the harassment of women journalists overall resulted in them leaving the industry, self-censoring, and/or experiencing psychological or physical harm (Chocarro, 2019). The report also concluded, “sexual harassment and gender inequality in the workplace are additional stresses women must contend with to do their jobs as journalists” (Chocarro, 2019, p. 9).

The exploration of the harassment of women and gender non-binary journalists globally shows this violence is not a new or emerging trend. This type of harassment is ongoing, with evidence to support an increase in the global north

²⁰ International Media Support (2021) is an international non-profit organization working in various countries, with a focus on enabling women and members of marginalised groups to participate equally and freely in the media as an integral part of democratic development.

in the last five years (Westcott, 2019). Despite this, many women and gender non-binary journalists do not feel they are receiving adequate safety training online (Wescott, 2019). In Canada, some companies do possess staff social media policies, such as Corus Entertainment, which explores how “receiving and responding to negative feedback is part of the job too” (2021, p.6). Yet, many of these policies do not go far enough if outlining how to stay safe online or protect one’s privacy.

Further, within Canada, there has been only a little research on the topic of harassment of women and gender non-binary journalists taking place online or in-person, with some of the most meaningful discussions emerging in late 2021(CFWIJ, 2021).²¹ These discussions followed those targeted threats of Canadian journalists online, where the publicity of these specific online attacks sparked calls for action (CFWIJ, 2021). Shortly after Canada was named the most hostile digital space for women journalists in September of 2021, with women of colour most at-risk, journalists and press-freedom groups demanded action from newsrooms, social media companies as well as the police to target hate and harassment directed towards journalists (Canadian Association of Journalists, 2021; CFWIJ, 2021). In response, the Canadian Association of

²¹ Following several targeted threats made online against multiple Canadian journalists, the Canadian Association of Journalists launched the Online Harm in Journalism Survey. It created safety tips for journalists and calls for action to end the harassment of journalists (Canadian Association of Journalists, 2021).

Journalists and the Carleton University School of Journalism and Communication held a private online roundtable for journalists and industry experts to discuss this ongoing problem, and how to make change – posting results in a report called *Poisoned Well* (Canadian Association of Journalists & Canadian Journalism Foundation, 2022). The calls for action demonstrate the need for newsrooms to pay heed.

To offer a more complete understanding of the harassment of Canadian journalists, this thesis investigates the lived experience of women and gender non-binary journalists in Canada and explores if and how abuse impacts them personally and professionally. Chapter One will explore harassment overall using results from a survey and individual interviews on the topic of this thesis. As multiple studies suggest, BIPOC and 2SLGBTQ+ journalists are increasingly at risk of being harassed (Shanahan, 2017; Chen et al., 2018; Iyamah, 2018; Vilks, 2020). Chapter Two explores the lived experiences of racialized and non-binary journalists to see how multiple social categorizations overlap and impact an individual or group. Given increased hate and harassment against those reporting on government, Chapter Three will explore the treatment of political reporters or those covering politics (Smyth, 2020). As will be shown in Chapter Four, combatting abuse and maintaining an online presence given this abuse adds emotional labour to the already challenging requirements of many journalism jobs. Writ large, this research questions the subsequent risk of losing female, gender non-binary and racialized voices in Canadian media due to the abuse they experience; thus, Chapter Five will bring forth recommendations to improve

Canadian media's situation. It will also provide tips for journalists navigating harassment in-person or online. The ultimate consequence of ignoring this crisis of harassment is that Canadian media may lose individuals who have the ability to represent Canada's diverse communities accurately. In its entirety, this research contributes to the existing literature on harassment of female journalists and further explores the experiences of non-binary journalists.

Methodology

This research project employed several methodologies to complete this research, with two main concepts based on qualitative and quantitative approaches. These approaches include personal (individual) interviews with those who identify as women and gender non-binary journalists in Canada and several personal interviews with experts on matters relating to the subject of this thesis. The selection for interview participants was targeted to journalists and experts who have been outspoken about their own experiences with harassment, or their desire to end harassment within the journalism industry, respectively. The goal was to have a diverse sample regarding age, race, job type, and geographic location. Current and former journalists were asked a series of open-ended questions about their experiences as journalists, particularly moments of harassment they had faced. They were prompted to provide examples of their experiences and how these situations impacted them personally and professionally. Some participants were also asked how to improve the situation. With these interviews, there is a level of narrative analysis. Interviews were then

transcribed and analyzed for similarities and differences. Ethical approval was achieved prior to conducting any interviews.

In addition, to reach and include a more comprehensive number of Canadian women or gender non-binary journalists in this analysis, an online survey was developed and disseminated individually to current journalists and a small number of journalists who recently left the industry. In this case, the method adopted was purposive sampling, intending to generate responses from as many female and gender non-binary journalists as possible from across the country. Participants were located at random through social media or a news organizations biography section. Effort was made to ensure representation from various provinces and job titles. The survey was distributed using SurveyMonkey and ran from August 2021 to October 2021 and received 136 responses. The survey included 22 questions, including polar interrogative questions, free-form survey questions and multiple-choice questions. All sections and fields were optional for ethical considerations, resulting in various respondents for each question. Some questions also offered 'other' as an option to allow for a multiplicity of experiences. Findings were analyzed and categorized into groups based on similarities and differences. Open-ended responses were also used to allow long form answers about individual experiences with harassment.

As the appendix will show, the first seven questions of this survey were description-based queries, including confirmation of their status as a current or former journalist and their employment title as well as the type of work they do

(or did). These were followed by questions regarding their locations within Canada and descriptions such as what gender they identify as and their racial identity. Of the 136 participants, 133 answers came from journalists who identified as female, with three from journalists who identified as non-binary. Additionally, 97 respondents identified as white, 36 as women of colour, while three did not reveal their racial identity. This research asked participants if they identify as members of 2SLGBTQ+ communities, with a total of 14 respondents who responded 'yes.' These descriptors were used to investigate experiences of harassment connected to race, sexual identity and sexual orientation. Questions eight to 22 were specific to harassment related to the participants' status as journalists or former journalists. These specific questions were a mix of multiple-choice and open-response fields, where participants could expand on their answers. Respondents indicated they were also from various provinces and networks and a mix of print, television, radio and digital journalism backgrounds. They identified differing job titles, including reporters, video journalists, freelancers, writers, editors, producers, anchors and (other) meteorologists and hosts, and they indicated they are at different stages in their careers.

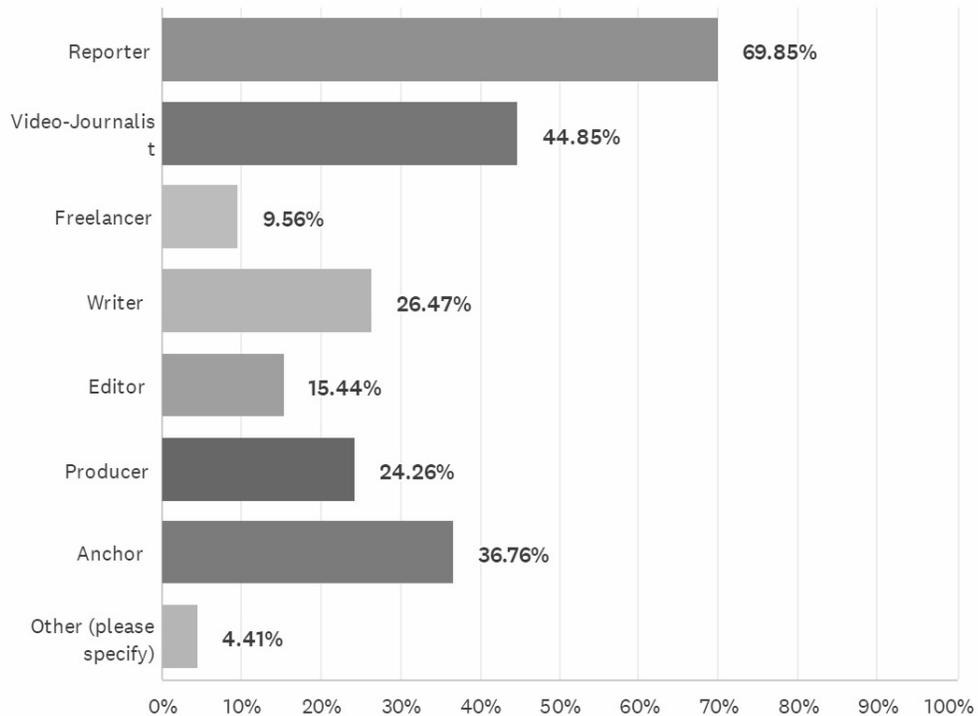


Figure 1. Survey results: Job Descriptions

The survey did not investigate geographical-related factors concerning harassment but survey respondents were asked to provide this information as a gauge to ensure representation from across the country and across different types of news media. While this research included journalists of various social classes and different age groups, it did not ask or study these specific intersections compared to the harassment of women and gender non-binary journalists. The survey did not collect identifying information such as name or employer. Participation in both the survey and interviews for this paper was voluntary and took place in 2021.

Through the individual interviews with current and former journalists, this research explores the general trends that have arisen in online harassment in Canada that was initially supported by anecdotal evidence and peer-reviewed articles. I used analysis of existing research for this thesis to contextualize the issue of harassment against women and non-binary journalists and examine how harassment impacts them. This research includes secondary sources in connection to topics including, but not limited to, harassment of women journalists, harassment online, online abuse and cyber-violence, emotional labour, stress management, intersectionality, diversity in media, discrimination in media, physical labour and mental health and safety. This thesis includes publicly shared examples of harassment towards female-identifying and gender non-binary journalists in Canada retrieved from Tweets, news reports and websites.

This thesis argues that today's discrimination is an additional barrier for women and gender non-binary journalists to stay in the industry and their day-to-day ability to do their job. With labour in mind, this piece touches on the emotional toll harassment can take on women and gender non-binary journalists in the field and at home, as they must also work to manage these stresses. This research also expands discussions around the risk to the media industry and to democracy if and when female or gender non-binary journalists leave to pursue other careers due to the emotional labour connected to journalism (Smith, 2014; Miller & Lewis, 2020).

This research uses a gendered lens. This research uses the term ‘gender’ in reference to socially and culturally constructed attributes associated with being ‘male’ or ‘female’ or ‘non-binary.’ In addition to studies that reveal that women are at greater risk of being harassed (Amnesty International, 2018; Chen et al., 2018; Westcott, 2019), research also shows women of colour and members of 2SLGBTQ+ communities are especially vulnerable to these attacks (Shanahan, 2017; Amnesty International, 2018; Posetti et al., 2021). With this in mind, this thesis further considers an intersectional approach, as defined by Kimberlé Crenshaw (1989), in seeking to understand how aspects of a person's individual characteristics such as race, gender, and other characteristics intersect with one another or overlap to create different modes of discrimination and privilege. This thesis considers an intersectional lens to investigate if the harassment changes based on a person’s multiple identities and if a wide array of solutions are required. As well, it assists in determining whether certain journalists are more at risk of having their voices silenced. This method is considered to assist in investigating the compounding stigma of other identity factors in connection to discrimination against journalists. This approach is also used in Chapter Three to explore inequalities and additional risks for journalists who identify as members of the 2SLGBTQ+ communities and female journalists of colour.

Limitations

This research involves purposive sampling methods. The results will not be generalizable to entire populations but may provide legitimate patterns to the

field of journalism, specific to women and gender non-binary journalists. Among those who took part in the survey, the majority ended up being current or former television journalists, at nearly 60 per cent, followed by journalists who work in digital media or print media, at 32 per cent, and a small group of journalists working in radio media. There was not enough evidence to support an increase in harassment based on job title. This research also did not study connections/differences based on full-time, part-time or freelance status, as well as whether the individuals were unionized or not, including if harassment increases for non-unionized members. Further research should be done to offer a clearer picture on the impact of harassment on freelance journalists. This research was able to pinpoint more aggressive harassment directed towards female journalists of colour and those who cover politics or are connected to political coverage. Still, the small sample size made it difficult to draw substantial conclusions that these groups are targeted most frequently. Further research specific to harassment faced by racialized and 2SLGBTQ+ journalists in Canada should be conducted.

Due to the ongoing COVID-19 pandemic and my current occupation in Ottawa, Ontario, the distribution of surveys to current or former journalists took place through either email or social media. There is always a risk of falsified surveys or a survey ending up in the wrong place with technology. I sent a link to each person to ensure the surveys were received and conducted by the women or non-binary journalists who agreed to participate.

Those who publically identify as female or non-binary received a survey, with an option to specify a person's profession and preferred gender on the survey. Survey respondents were randomly selected based on their status as a journalist, with responses submitted anonymously. The majority of responses were provided by journalists in Ontario, followed by Saskatchewan. The province with the lowest response rate was Prince Edward Island, followed by the territories. Thus, while it included participants across this country, this research has more responses from more populated provinces. However, it only contains a handful of answers from journalists in Quebec. The most successful way to reach a journalist was through a social media request, with many Quebec journalists having closed inboxes. The survey was only available in English.

In researching harassment of women and gender non-binary journalists, I understand that harassment is evolving and changing with new technologies (Amnesty International, 2018; Rego, 2018). The type of harassment can also vary depending on social movements and other media factors (The Committee to Protect Journalists, 2020; Posetti et al., 2021). Thus, I have aimed to seek timely answers, understanding that harassment of female and gender non-binary journalists is a much larger societal issue and one that continues to change (Canadian Women's Foundation, 2019). This research is also specific to women and gender non-binary people in this study. It would likely differ if applied to a broader population or a different industry.

Chapter One:

Exploring the Findings

Content warning: This chapter includes graphic content to depict the severity of cyber-violence and harassment against women and gender non-binary journalists, including references to offensive language and sexual violence.

The majority of female and gender non-binary journalists in Canada who took part in this research have been on the receiving end of harassment or violence connected to their employment. This harassment includes but is not limited to misogynistic, sexist, racist and homophobic comments, discrimination, hateful and hurtful rhetoric, threats of violence, threats of sexual assault, sexual harassment, derogatory statements, sexist slurs and comments intended to shame, discredit, intimidate, or in some cases incite violence. Despite increased attention to the harassment of female or gender non-binary journalists overall, much research shows these issues persist (Chen et al., 2018; Chocarro, 2019; Westcott 2019, Posetti, Aboulez, Bontcheva, Harrison, Waisbord, 2020; Posetti et al., 2021; Pulfer, 2020). Additionally, the survey results gathered for this project – including 136 female and gender non-binary journalists in Canada – combined with in-depth interviews revealed that harassment and discrimination is still regularly occurring both in-person and online.

This research revealed that 92 per cent of the female-identifying or gender non-binary journalists surveyed reported experiencing harassment connected to their employment. Nearly 53 per cent of respondents described the nature of the

harassment they received as threatening, with 23 per cent describing the harassment as violent. The majority of participants reported their harassment is connected to physical appearance (61 per cent), with 57 per cent of the respondents saying the harassment was politically motivated or related to politics in some way. Many of the journalists surveyed or interviewed also noted an escalation of this harassment in 2020 and 2021 compared to years prior, while many veteran journalists found online abuse has been escalating for at least the last five years.

The survey included an open-ended forum, asking journalists to describe some of the harassment they had received. Participants provided some of the following responses as examples of this harassment:

- receiving hate-filled messages on social media platforms;
- death and rape threats;
- deeply racist remarks, as well as racist comments about being a ‘diversity hire’ or demanding the reporter ‘return to their country;’
- comments about physical appearance;
- being stalked or followed home;
- shouted at (with nearly half of the respondents saying they have heard the vulgar f*** her right in the p**** line [FHRITP]);
- touched without permission;
- physically assaulted, subject to sexual advances, sexual harassment and sexual assault;

- threatened with fabricated illicit photos;
- being sworn at, name-called (including B****, idiot, c***, and more);
- receiving threats of violence, threats towards family members (including their children), with many reporting being threatened in-person by far-right extremists;
- called fake news or flawed or biased reporters.²²

These responses anecdotally support global findings that female and gender non-binary journalists face the brunt of harassment in journalism (Adams, 2017; Westcott, 2019; Posetti et al., 2021). Alarming, 41 per cent of respondents said they had considered leaving the industry due to harassment – and a few indicated they had already left. Many reported that their employers did not assist with dealing with these online attacks, with minimal support offered from upper management. For these reasons, many of the participants for this research call for more support from news corporations, press freedom organizations, social media companies and various levels of government.

²² 'Fake news' can refer to the fabrication of information, including photo manipulation, as well as news satire or parody created to mock or mimic mainstream news, advertising materials designed to appear as news as well as propaganda (Tandoc, Lim and Ling, 2017, pp. 5-11).

Overview of Survey Results

- 92 per cent of Canadian women and gender non-binary journalists reported experiencing harassment in connection to their employment.

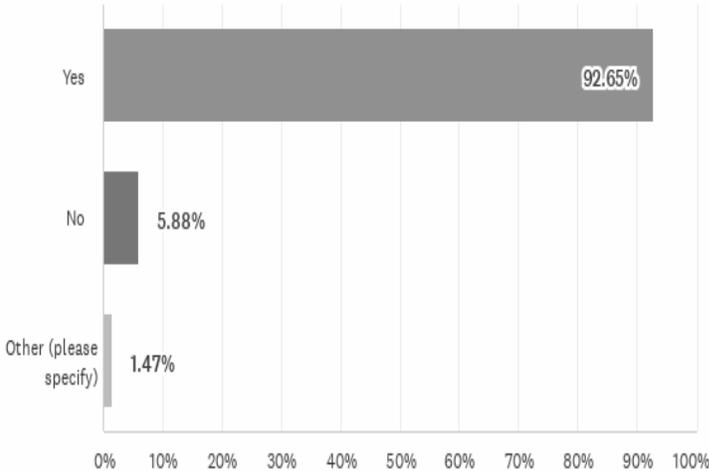


Figure 2. Survey results: Harassment faced

- The majority of respondents found the harassment relates to physical appearance, is politically motivated and is threatening.

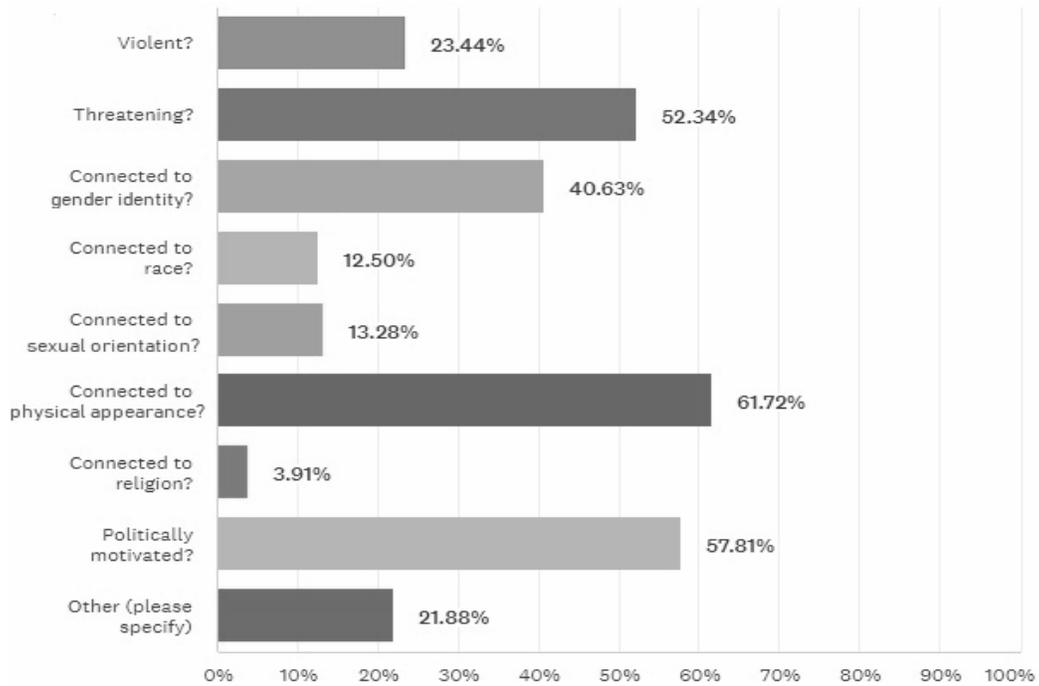


Figure 3. Survey results: Nature of the harassment.

- 58 per cent of respondents said the harassment had escalated to the point where they felt unsafe.

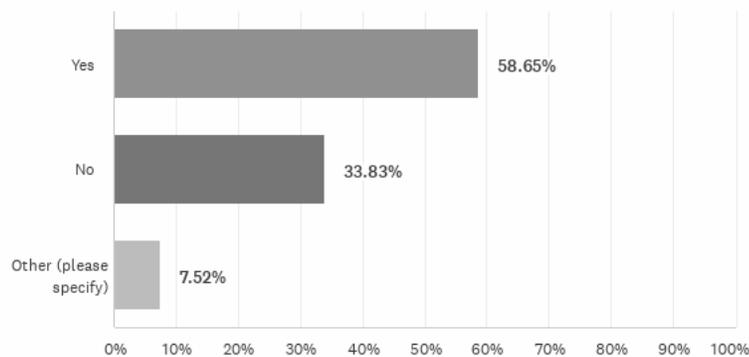


Figure 4: Survey results: Feelings on safety.

- 41 per cent of respondents indicated they had considered leaving the industry based on the harassment they experienced.

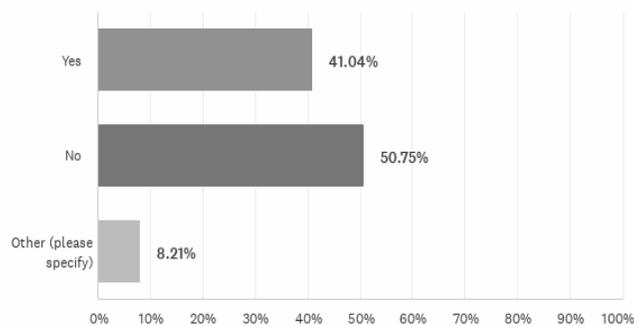


Figure 5: Survey results: Considerations for leaving the journalism industry.

- 89 respondents (68 per cent) said the harassment was both online and or in-person.
- 97 respondents (75 per cent) found the harassment was occurring more online than in-person, while 93 respondents (72 per cent) also found it was more aggressive online.
- Of the 36 journalists who identified as women of colour, the vast majority (32) indicated they had dealt with harassment connected to their status as a journalist.
- While most respondents reported that the harassment was external (by members of the public), nearly 24 per cent said it was both external and internal (by co-workers or management).
- More than half of the respondents, or nearly 58 per cent, noticed an increase in harassment in 2020-2021.

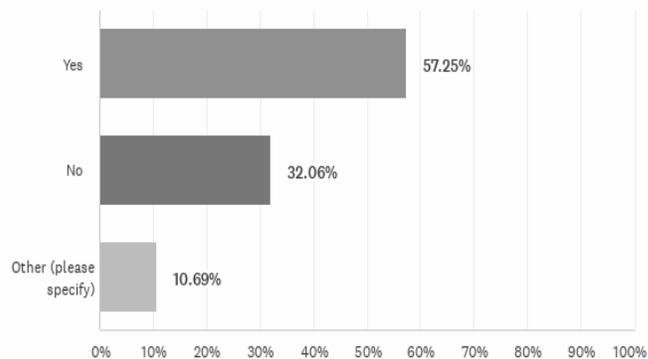


Figure 6: Survey results: Increase in harassment.

- The likelihood of receiving a harassing or abusive comment ranges from ‘daily’ to ‘not very likely,’ with most respondents indicating they receive a few comments a week. Many respondents also stated increased harassment related to specific stories or topics they covered.
- While 70 per cent of respondents have felt supported by someone following these acts, 21 per cent did not.
- Asked if they felt supported by their employer, just 43 per cent agreed, with 37 per cent saying they sometimes felt supported by their employer, under 7 per cent did not feel supported at all. Another 12 per cent selected the ‘other’ option, where they indicated some employers had supported them, but not all, or they did not tell their employer about the abuse.

Overall Findings Explored

Survey participants provided the following examples as insight into the harassment women and gender non-binary journalists face. The following comments detail deeply racist, sexist, misogynistic, violent comments, many of which intersect with several forms of discrimination. Many respondents described experiences of sexual threats and harassment. The survey results show online violence is one of the significant threats and challenges for Canadian women and gender non-binary journalists. All of the responses are anonymous.

(Warning, the following comments contain graphic language and violent details).

- “A lot of people telling me to kill myself, telling me I should be fired, threatening violence or sexual assault.”
- “N-word, homely, comments about my wardrobe, comments about my hair being gross and always looks like bed hair, comments about the way that I talk, etc.”
- “‘Do the world a favour and hang yourself’ is an email I’ll never forget.”
- “Yelling ‘f*** her right in p’ while I’m performing live on television, being called a b**** and a c***, general catcalling, emailed critiquing my clothes (“No woman with self-respect would wear a cardigan on TV”) and my hair (“You should get extensions”). Once, someone tried to run me and my camera operator over with a car.”

- “Anti media comments, rude comments about my face or hair, comments that I am biased and touting party lines. I’ve also been told I should quit, I’m stupid, look like a horse, even had one letter from a man who wrote in detail about how he wanted to rape and then kill me.”
- “FHRIP (F*** her right in the p****), sexual comments about my appearance similar to 'look what you made me do' followed by inappropriate photographs. I've had to call the police [four] times for stalkers, some being quite aggressive.”
- “Rape threats, insinuations that sexual favours are exchanged for favourable reporting.”
- “Unsolicited comments about my appearance. Unsolicited photos of male genitalia. Being repeatedly asked out or to engage in conversation.”
- “I've been called b**** and wh***, idiot, said that I was only good for delivering blow jobs, threatened with being ‘slapped out of the room.’”
- “One man sent me a tweet saying he wanted to split my clitoris and ejaculate all over my face. Others have been sexual and disturbing in nature as well.”
- “I’ve had some difficult conversations and mentally taxing conversations with coworkers who don’t respect women and who make comments that I find incredibly inappropriate. I am also finding an increase in online harassment. Emails, direct message and online comments on social media can be vile.”

Harassment Explored Through Interviews

Canadian research participants indicated it is common to hear that the job requires ‘thick skin’ and that ‘online trolls’ come with the job.²³ While increasing violence against journalists writ large is a worrying trend, the results from this survey are consistent with global conclusions that women journalists face threats that are twofold, that are not only targeted to their identity as a journalist but also for being a woman or gender non-binary person (Chocarro, 2019; IFJ 2019; Westcott 2019). The conclusions from this research highlight the emotional trauma and labour connected with the job and the immediate need for further assistance for female and gender non-binary journalists in Canadian newsrooms. To provide context to the survey findings, here are the stories of five women journalists who work in television media across Canada and one journalist who works in radio. These female journalists detail moments of sexual harassment, assault, discrimination, racism, sexism and threats of violence they face connected to their employment. Many participants have chosen to use an alias for protection from further harassment and abuse.

²³ The term ‘online troll’ refers to those who hide behind a computer or phone, usually using an alias, and direct harmful messages or messages intended to cause drama at various individuals (Stein, 2018).

B's Story

A female anchor in Canada with nearly five years within the industry, who chose to go by 'B' for this research, faced escalating sexual harassment that ultimately ended with charges against one man who created and threatened to spread fabricated nude images designed to appear like her (personal communications, 2021). B explained that harassment is something she is familiar with on the job, but this was different. She described how she regularly faces scrutiny for her physical appearance and is accused of wearing too much make-up or even showing 'too much shoulder.' She also noted she has been on the receiving end of hate-filled messages relating to her voice. Some viewers take the time to write about how they do not like how she sounds, which is a common theme for many female journalists, subject to bias favouring 'traditional male' voices (Tallon, 2019). As B puts it, she can usually ignore derogatory or hate-filled messages, but things escalated when one man started to blackmail her using fabricated illicit photos. In an individual interview, B described a haunting scenario that began when this man started harassing several female employees within the same newsroom. The harassment started with inappropriate messages. As B moved to block the individual on one social media platform, she added that he soon popped up on another. His messages turned from inappropriate to sexual harassment, with the man sending unwanted sexual images of himself. He eventually retrieved B's email address and began sending threats, at which point B described how she started to become overwhelmed:

It was never-ending, and I kind of, it put a lot of fear in me because I started to get scared that I do live a very open life on social media, that maybe now he's going to find out where I live or things like that.

At this point, B explained that the man escalated his behaviour and started to fabricate photos of her, altering images of unknown women and editing her face onto anonymous nude pictures before threatening to release them to the public. B described going through a spiral of panic before going to her newsroom management and then to the police. B added, in her case, the police were quick to respond. She said the police informed her the next step would be laying charges. According to B, that is when she learned this man had allegedly conducted this kind of behaviour prior with other women:

I thought it wasn't okay that he continues to do this, so I did place charges along with a couple of my other co-workers and then thankfully, things went through the court system pretty fast.

The man is serving a one-year prison sentence, according to B, with a no-contact order in place upon his release. She is thankful for the outcome but explained that the scenario "messed with [her]."

As B moves forward from this negative interaction, the remaining challenge, in her view, is dealing with continued derogatory or aggressive comments from members of the public, stating:

I would say that especially being a female, people are way harsher on everything, even when it comes to the way you speak, the way you sound, the way you look, what you wear, what you don't wear, if you're showing too much, if you're not.

B explained that she now leans on coworkers and friends and tries not to take the comments to heart. However, she will garner management's attention, or the police, if and when necessary. She chose to speak out to let other journalists, especially new journalists, know about the harassment that comes with the job, saying:

A little warning maybe would be better, even just in university. I had no idea going in the heat you would receive, and like I said, the really awful comments. And it wasn't until I did receive my first one that I was shocked, and I remember being hurt about it.

B is hopeful to see increased support for upcoming journalists faced with abuse online or in-person.

Ins' Story

Many women of colour interviewed for this project describe harassment connected to their gender that intersects with their race and, in some cases, their religion. Ins, a Muslim female journalist with more than a decade of experience, indicated she has faced discrimination from past colleagues, in addition to online

harassment (personal communications, 2021). Interviewed for this research, Ins explained that early on in her career, she was hoping to apply for a position relating to sports when she detailed how a classmate told her, “Well, of course, you're gonna get it; you're a girl and a minority.” Ins explained that those kinds of remarks followed her to her first job, where she says she dealt with toxic behaviours from her co-workers, this time relating to her gender, stating:

I found it interesting. Some of the comments I would hear from my male co-workers that were highly inappropriate. They were rude. They basically second-guessed my talents... And then I remember we were out one time at an event – it was a sports event – and one of my co-workers was in front of all the other media folks and was like, ‘You don't know anything about sports,’ just rude.

Ins described how overall most community members are seemingly supportive. In her view, it was the harassment she faced within the office when she first entered the industry that caught her by surprise. Ins makes it clear, those comments by colleagues were isolated incidents; However, as she excels in the industry, she explains that racist comments have made their way into her email or social media inbox. Ins recalled a recent message that said she could not speak English. Another suggested she “can't do a good job anchoring” because she is “not-white.” In addition to comments targeting her race, Ins detailed additional statements concerning her body. One email, in particular, was sent to her entire newsroom through the ‘news tips’ community inbox, she explains, “It said I was a

horrible anchor, that I dressed highly inappropriate, my sweaters are too tight...I needed to lose weight, all that sort of stuff.” Ins described an increase in these comments at the intersection of race and appearance, explaining how people take issue with “someone on their TV screen who's not smaller,” in addition to some who take offence that she’s “not white.” Ins explained how most times she ignores these messages but has prepared and chosen to engage in counter-speeches depending on the scenario or comment, explaining:

Just because you're on TV, some people, viewers, think that they can critique your body just because you are putting yourself out there, but it's like a reminder, you can't comment on my body. I read you the news. That doesn't mean that you can talk about my body or what I wear.

Ins attempts to ignore most messages but has turned to social media to expose these hateful messages in an effort to show what women of colour regularly experience within the realm of journalism.

Isabelle’s Story

Many survey respondents indicated the harassment they received was threatening in nature, while others described the emotional labour and stress connected to the job. For Isabelle, a Canadian television anchor and reporter with more than five years of experience within the industry, her time working in media

has included many moments involving both (personal communication, 2021). One situation that she remembers vividly took place in the summer of 2020, in which Isabelle was awaiting a camera operator at a local park to conduct a live report on the weather. She said that two men who appeared to be in their twenties approached her and began to engage her with small talk, asking what she did for work. There was an escalation in the conversation when the men started guessing what Isabelle did for work, guessing a variety of jobs, getting more uncomfortable with each one. Alone and intimidated, Isabelle described how she tried to brush off the conversation with small-talk, informing the men she was a journalist. She immediately followed up by making it clear that her male coworker would soon be joining her. Isabelle hoped both of these efforts would deter any further escalation. At the time, Isabelle was holding a thermometer, planning to use it as a prop for her report. She detailed how one of the men had then moved much closer and reached for the item in her hand. She repeatedly tried pulling it away, with the thermometer ultimately breaking in the process. Isabelle, who was wearing a dress at the time, explained how the man took a broken piece of glass and placed it upon her bare thigh, telling her that she was ‘very hot.’ “I felt very uncomfortable,” she said while describing the situation. Isabelle tried to de-escalate by laughing it off and proceeding to her vehicle, where she locked the car doors and awaited her colleague. Isabelle described that live report as one of her poorer performances - full of nervous stumbles. The situation would replay in her mind for days. She explained the emotional toll it had taken:

I was just kind of shaken and shaking driving home, and then as the days went by, I was really mad at the situation, and I was actually mad at myself because I was mad that, I was thinking back to the situation like how could I have done it better, and the only thing that came to mind was I shouldn't have been so nice. And that even bothered me in itself because I didn't do anything inappropriate, I didn't cross a line; I wasn't in any way deserving of the treatment.

Isabelle and many other participants described this added layer of perceived threat while alone on the job. She observed how similar incidents have also occurred while she has been alone out in the field. As she reflects on the scenario months later, she still has plenty of emotions relating to the incident. She explains in the following way:

I don't feel as angry about it anymore; it's just an annoying thing that now I just feel like it is part of the job, sadly. And you know, I've been doing this now six or seven years in the industry, and you just kind of get used to it, and this is not an uncommon feeling like so rattled, so upset, think about it for a long time and then just kind of get over it. I feel like I'm somewhat over it, just because it wasn't the first time, and I know it won't be the last time.

While this situation has remained a trigger for Isabelle, it is just one moment among a long list of experiences with harassment connected to her job. In

her view, while the online comments sting, she finds the bulk of random comments easier to manage, stating:

I think it hurts less when it's online because there are so many trolls and so many comments that are sometimes so extreme that it's easy to remove them from reality and take them as what it is. It's just like someone on the internet.

However, Isabelle is quick to dismiss the notion that every online comment can be simply shrugged-off. She described receiving racist comments, where viewers have written on her stories to 'get the Egyptian off the news,' and has faced accusations of biased reporting. She adds that she has "gotten terrible emails that have made [her] cry" and disclosed that she nearly missed work after struggling to sleep following one of the harassing emails. In this case, she says a man sent the newsroom a message shortly after she had just taken over a new role as an anchor. The statement, which went to the entire newsroom, told management to fire her from the position for being 'awful' and suggested they should be 'embarrassed for hiring her.' It went as far as questioning her credentials. "I was stunned and so heartbroken because I had just started anchoring, and I was so upset," she said. As Isabelle puts it, there is a level of shame attached to these comments. She is hopeful to see safer spaces to discuss harassment and threats on the job.

Alex Brown's Story

In addition to their gender identity, most participants included in this study said that the harassment they receive also relates to their physical appearance (62

per cent). Alex Brown, an anchor of a Canadian morning show, who has spent eight years in the industry, said viewers often write in or comment on her weight (personal communications, 2021). Brown explained how most of the comments directed towards her are appearance-based, with what she calls fatphobic comments directed at her as a plus-sized woman in media:

There has been so much unsolicited commentary on my fluctuating weight. There has been unsolicited health and fitness and wellness advice. There have been obviously very, extremely mean comments.

Brown explained how hurtful and harmful comments will flood into her social media accounts, as well as the newsroom inbox. She describes receiving messages such as: “I don't wanna see you on my news,” “You're ugly,” and “Get off my news, you fugly b****.” Brown added that she is also often attacked with demonizing comments that her lifestyle is unhealthy and accusations that she is perpetuating a ‘bad’ example for youth.

In her interview, Brown described one email in particular that brought her to tears under the subject line “Healthy?” Brown read the opening lines, which go as follows:

Hey there. I know society pushes body positivity, but I feel like one of your hosts is over 100 pounds overweight and obviously harming her health and setting a bad example for young and old women alike. How come there is no 350- pound obese men on

your show? I see the harm obesity does firsthand. My mom is over 50 pounds overweight and always complaining how tired she is. Is it any wonder? Who wouldn't be tired carrying around a 50 -pound sack all day?

The email continued with more misinformed commentary and unrelenting body-shaming. Brown found this email especially triggering – more so than other harassment – even bringing her to tears recalling the incident. “There's such bigger, more heartbreaking things happening in the world, and you're worried about a plus-sized woman anchoring the news?” she poses. Like Isabelle, Brown says that for the most part, she tries to ignore nasty messages, but overall they can and do impact her mental health. Referencing the email mentioned above, Brown said she ‘cried [her] eyes out’ upon receiving it. As a morning show anchor, Brown wants to be accessible to members of the public and potential news tips or information on community events, calling the hate mail a ‘double-edged sword.’ While she enjoys the community connection aspect, she is never certain what she will find in the inbox. Rarely, if ever, will Brown respond to hate mail. In her experience, she has noticed that her male colleagues are more likely to challenge the perpetrators of harassment than their female and gender non-binary counterparts. Brown says as a woman, she fears what may follow if she responds, stating:

The majority of the really mean [messages] are from men, and I feel like I'm socially conditioned as a woman. You don't want to

upset a strange man; you don't know what's going to happen. Like I don't want them coming to my workplace, I don't want them following me.

Brown shares the positive and negative messages on social media to provide a complete picture of her experiences as a morning show host, adding:

As fun as it all is, and I love the community I've built on social media, and I have some really great people on there, this is also the darker side of being someone in the media and being a woman in the media. And so I post these things as more of an education moment to show people.

As Brown puts it, she will continue to spread body-inclusivity and positivity regardless of some viewers' negative and often harmful pushback.

Maddy Eisenberg's Story

Employed as a radio traffic reporter in Canada with six years experience, Maddy Eisenberg is another example of how harassment and discrimination can increase where multiple facets of identity intersect (personal communications, 2021). In Eisenberg's case, the harassment often includes gender, sexual and religious-based attacks, or some combination of the three. Additionally, Eisenberg describes increased hate and harassment connected to her status as vaccinated against COVID-19. On her public Twitter account, Eisenberg is open about all three facts. She mentions these descriptors in her biography or tweets about being

a member of the 2SLGBTQ+ community, a proud member of the Jewish community and fully immunized against COVID-19. When asked about the harassment she faces, Eisenberg stated, “Throughout my work life in media, I’ve gotten everything from catcalling to just generalized inappropriate comments, to misogyny, to anti-Semitism.” At times, Eisenberg will share the messages publicly, hoping to raise awareness about online abuse. In one case, she says she was tweeting about establishments requiring patrons to be fully vaccinated, only to receive anti-Semitic hate mail in response. Someone sent Eisenberg the following message from an anonymous account, “F*** you. I would stomp your face into a curb then stick a vaccine up your arse hole, you wh***. And you’re a Jew too. Go back to the showers.” Eisenberg shared the message with her followers, adding, “I’m fine, but I’d be lying if I said it didn’t affect me.” Eisenberg feels that harmful and harassing tweets are on the rise. She explained how she speaks out using robust counterspeech to discourage and circumvent harassment online.²⁴

Kori’s Story

Many respondents describe instances of sexual harassment connected to everything from how they look - to what they wear. Kori, a former television

²⁴ American journalist and digital discourse researcher Marie Shanahan (2017) refers to “robust counterspeech,” in exploring how journalists use nuanced approaches to address hateful dialogue (p. 69).

anchor with more than three years of experience within the industry, recalls a specific example of sexual harassment related to her clothing that she found especially triggering (personal communications, 2021). Kori went viral across Canada and the United States after her response to an email that attempted to shame her about her cleavage (Abrahamson, 2020). She had just finished anchoring a weekend newscast when she said an email captioned “Breaking news” came into the newsroom’s shared inbox. Signed “The Vancouver Island Cleavage Patrol,” the email warned that “Too much cleavage can break your news story” (Anonymous, 2020). The anonymous viewer took issue with Kori’s V-neck shirt and included an image of a different woman in a much lower shirt that showed more of the random woman’s breasts, writing “What we see” (Anonymous, 2020).

Interviewed for this piece, Kori described initially feeling embarrassed by the email and even ashamed (personal communications, August 2021). She described a sleepless night, wondering what her colleagues thought, who this person was and why someone would try to shame her? After thinking it over, she decided to share the email on Twitter to bring awareness to the harassment of women journalists, stating:

As someone new to the industry and new to my first anchoring role, the response was shocking to me taking up that space... I was just so over it. I just didn't want people to think that that was okay.

Kori detailed how most responses to her tweet were supportive, but going public with the harassment, also drew further scrutiny, adding:

It went viral, and I was not ready for that. So support started streaming in, but it invited a lot of further harassment. People were telling me to show them my boobs and to do porn, asking me what my OnlyFans site was... It increased the level of people writing in about my clothing and writing in about my body. So, it almost invited further harassment. At that point, I was so raw. So, to have those further punches, it was just a lot... I felt like I had no recourse because I'm like, I said my bit, these people clearly want to instigate or make me feel awful. It was very obviously increased after that. So, I think people were angry at me for speaking out about this, therefore punishing me. Ultimately, I felt like I had no power in that situation.

Kori's continued stress highlights the emotional toll that women journalists face in connection to their employment. It also addresses the ongoing and increasing harassment online, with a snowball effect of hate mail adding up in this scenario.

Summary of the Findings

The survey results explored in this chapter highlight the online abuse, hate and harassment women and gender non-binary journalists face. As shown, the harassment can range from unsolicited sexual messages online, including various social media platforms, to threats of assault, sexual assault and even death. By

sharing their stories, these journalists provide additional context to the multiple ways in which these threats reach them. It shines a light on the extreme anxiety and other psychological impacts these incidents can induce. Many respondents detail concern for their mental and physical well-being due to encounters of abuse and discrimination in-person and online. These stories support the overall findings from this thesis' survey results, suggesting that women and gender non-binary journalists in Canadian newsrooms deal with a spectrum of alarming harassment and abuse. The respondents share numerous reactions to the harassment, including losing job satisfaction, questioning their professional abilities and losing sleep. There is also a wide range of feelings expressed, including stress, sadness, shock, worry, disappointment, fear and judgment, to name a few. There should be no scenario in which experiences such as these are acceptable.

Chapter Two:

Racialized and 2SLGBTQ+ Journalists

Female journalists of colour and those who identify as members of 2SLGBTQ+ communities are increasingly at risk of severe forms of harassment and vicious online vitriol (Shannahan, 2017; Amnesty International, 2019; Westcott, 2019). Canadian female-identifying and gender non-binary journalists interviewed for this research support these global findings. This chapter will explore how a person's multiple social identities or 'categorizations' connect to an escalation in the amount and severity of harassment they receive. In Canada, a 2021 survey on online violence against all journalists found "an undercurrent of misogyny, racism and homophobia appears to permeate many of the online attacks" (Bundale, 2021, para. 7).²⁵ Results from interviews and surveys conducted for this research are consistent with these conclusions. Publicly shared examples of harassment also substantiate research that sees an increase in attacks against racialized journalists and members of 2SLGBTQ+ communities. This chapter will explore how specific journalists are disproportionately targeted in Canadian media, facing some of the most severe effects of the abuse.

²⁵ The 2021 findings, conducted on behalf of a dozen media organizations, are based on a survey of more than 1,000 journalists and media workers (Bundale, 2021).

Racialized Women Journalists

The targeted harassment of racialized female journalists in Canada who participated in this survey revealed a ruthless trend of aggressive, threatening and violent abuse. Of the 36 journalists who identify with a racialized community, 89 per cent of people surveyed (32 respondents) indicated they had faced harassment related to their employment. Racialized women journalists who took part in interviews for this research describe a scenario where misogyny and sexism intersect with racism and Islamophobia, as well as other discriminations. Many participants described being targeted both online and in person. One journalist of colour said she received a gruesome email detailing how the abuser planned to kill her. Others said they were told to ‘burn-in hell’ or ‘commit suicide.’ Another journalist, who identifies as Chinese, said she received derogatory comments in the field targeting her race, writing, “At the start of the pandemic, I received comments about how ‘my people’ created the COVID-19 virus”.

Other examples of the violence and harassment shared by the women journalists of colour who participated in this survey include the following remarks and situations:

- “Death threats. Threats to ‘expose’ so-called bias or affiliations that don’t exist, comments on looks. Comments on posts about my culture and religion.

- “Watch and see what happens if you keep reporting = Racial slur. Name-calling - c***, b***.”
- “Allegations around biased for politicians who are the same race/religion as me.”
- “Anti-media sentiments. ‘Burn in hell,’ people telling me to stop being a ‘[social justice warrior,]’ people saying I’m biased, people calling me racial slurs, SO MANY microaggressions, sexual comments about my appearance.”
- “I’ve been told/asked: - To commit suicide because I’m a reporter - They wish I didn’t have a job - When a new party is elected, I won’t have a job - How do I sleep at night? - That I’m a liar.”
- “‘Why would they let a woman do this?’ (Referring to my camera work). ‘Guess they’re really cutting budgets now’ (referring to me working solo). ‘I don’t like seeing Indians on my TV’ (after doing a live hit). ‘Not sure what you are’ (referring to my ethnicity).”
- “‘You were a diversity hire. You didn’t deserve to be hired’ from external people or internal criticism on my journalistic work in-person from colleagues.”
- “‘Go back to where you came from,’ ‘FHRITP [F*** her right in the p*****] while reporting live.”
- “I also often get ignorant comments and questions about ‘where I’m from’ and if I know that one other person they know with the same last name. It becomes increasingly exhausting.”

- “My inability to tell the truth; fear-mongering; where am I from; why do I pronounce certain words the way I do; why is my hair short; I am an anchor who is trying to brainwash the viewer; some sexual comments; some comments connected to my religion; I am biased because of my so-called background.”
- “Most of the comments are currently attacking my professionalism - being called Fake News etc. In the past, it was more threatening - rape and death threats, or comments suggesting I was giving or receiving sexual favours.”

These comments show how journalists from diverse backgrounds are often attacked based on their ethnicity, race, religion and many other facets of identity. Racialized community members are also often accused of being ‘biased’ reporters. Publicly shared examples of harassment on Twitter reveal similar hateful comments, with journalists of colour sharing the aggressive threats sent to them, some of which include death and sexual assault threats (CFWIJ, 2021). These aggressive and threatening attacks were shared publicly on Twitter near the end of 2021 (CFWIJ, 2021). As explored in the Introduction, between September and October of that year, several journalists went public exposing the online hate and intimidating messages they were receiving at that time. The journalists who supported the people who had received hate-filled messages then became the targets themselves. Women journalists and racialized journalists were overwhelmingly targeted, with women of colour receiving emails depicting hatred that intersects with racism and Islamophobia, sexism and misogyny.

Harassment Shared on Twitter

Many women journalists of colour have publicly shared the racially and politically charged hateful emails they had received online, including Omayra Issa. She posted a racist and hate-filled email she had received onto her Twitter account. In the email, someone used the cloak of anonymity offered by the digital realm to write in part: “Recently I’ve been hearing that Africans or whatever Oogo-booga country you come from, I heard they’ve been spreading Ebola and Zika virus at the fastest growing rates ever recorded in the prairies” (Anonymous, 2021). It inquired if any other “anti-American anti-White c****” had Ebola. The email ended with a threatening and equally vile closing remark that the journalists should have ‘kept their mouth shut,’ seemingly responding to journalists defending each other from similar intimidation and harassment. Attached to the initial message, Issa sub-tweeted²⁶ it, writing the following, “This level of racist violence is shocking. I try not to let it affect me, but no one deserves this level of vitriol” (Issa, 2021).

²⁶ A subtweet refers to someone who is commenting about a post or person on social platform Twitter without the inclusion of the poster’s handle.

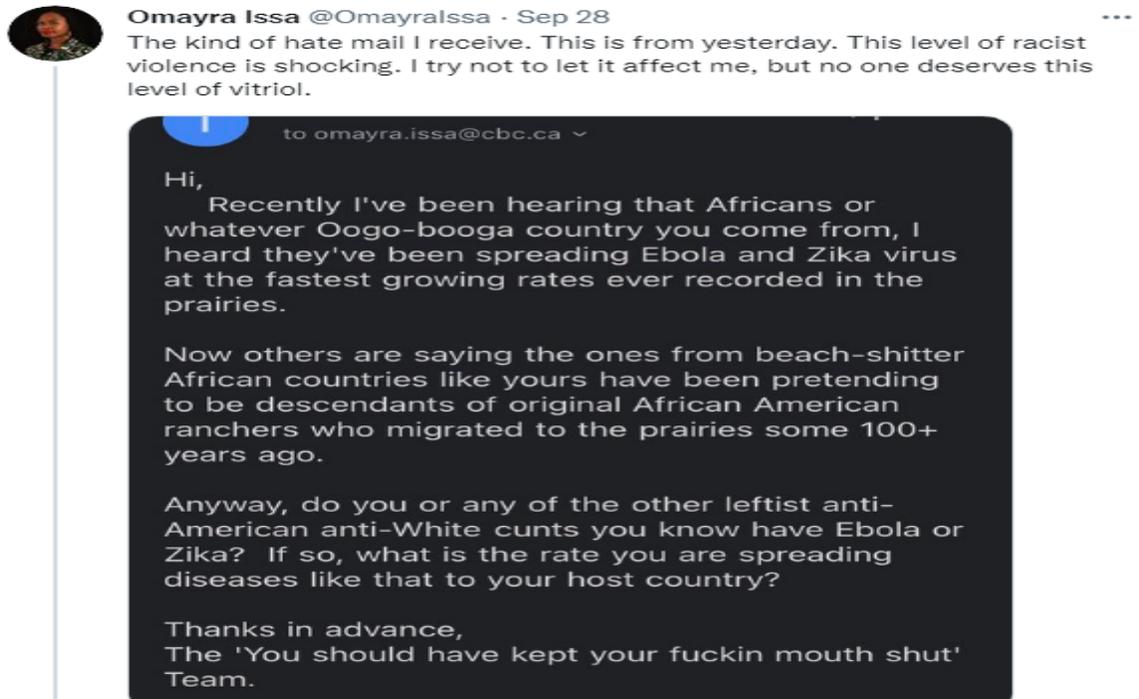


Figure 7: An image of a tweet @OmayraIssa on September 28, 2021.

Evy Kwong shared a similar racist email on Twitter on September 29, sub-tweeting the message and adding the following: “New game! take a shot for every slur” (Kwong, 2021). The email included vicious and racist name-calling, including ‘slanty-eyed,’ ‘pan-faced,’ and ‘pig-nosed.’ The email told Kwong she did not belong in Canada and was ‘stealing’ other cultures. It included graphic racist and sexually harassing remarks, including references to the Wuhan Flu.



Evy Kwong ✓
@EYVSTADIUM



new game! take a shot for every slur

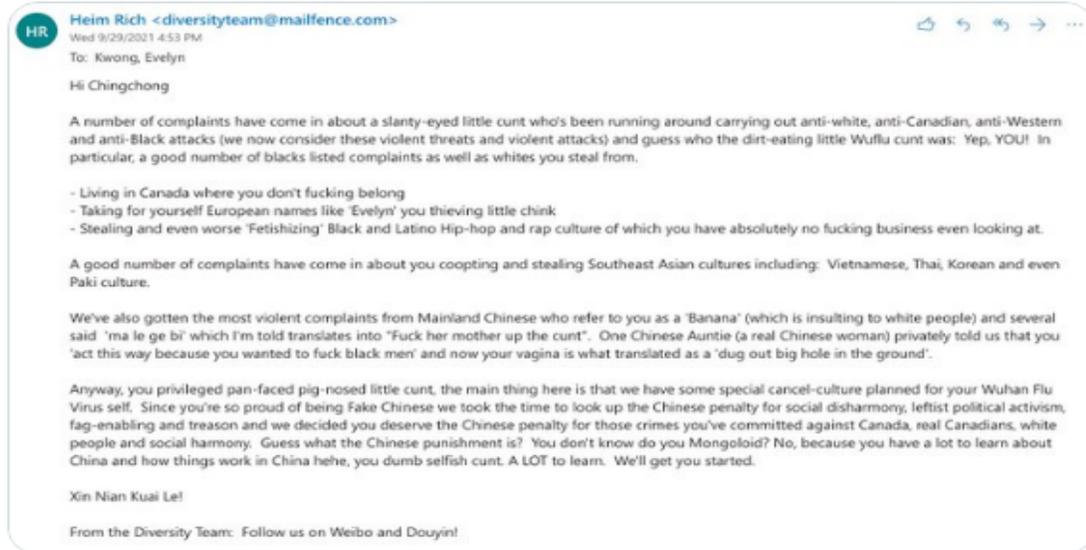


Figure 8: An image of a tweet from @EYVSTADIUM on September 29, 2021.

Ladna Mohamed also came forward on Twitter, sharing the message she had received, writing facetiously: “What a lovely email,” attached to a message that referred to “Muslima c****” (Mohamed, 2021). Among the racist, sexist and Islamophobic remarks, the second paragraph went so far as to accuse her of being a traitor, stating:

Now, some mentioned you as an example of an ungrateful Anti-Western bigot c*** who doesn’t deserve to live in a 1st world country and yet tries to undermine it, poison it and treason in general.

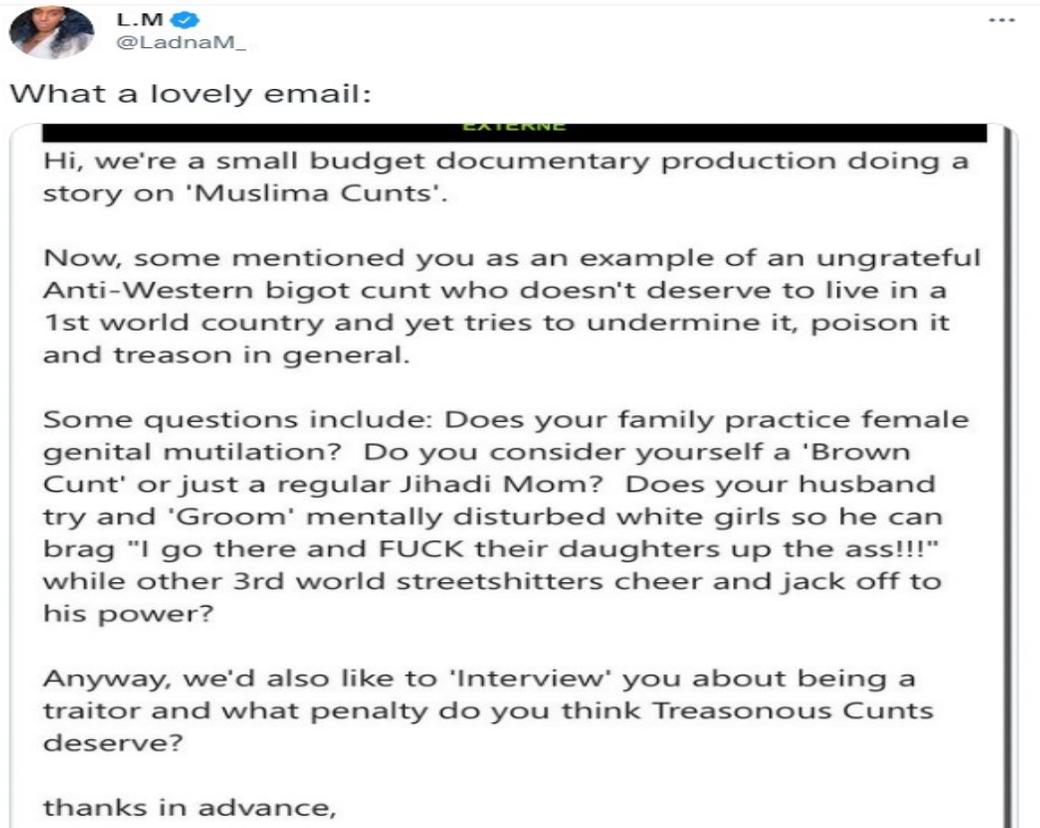


Figure 9: An image of a tweet from @LadnaM_ on September 27, 2021.

Journalist Runmeek Johal also posted on Twitter a deeply racist email she received, sarcastically adding: “I love fan mail!” (Johal, 2021). In Johal’s case, the message also referred to her as the c-word and called her a traitor.



Figure 10: An image of a tweet from @rumneek on September 27, 2021.

Fatima Syed

A few days after the above mentioned posts, Journalist Fatima Syed was also subject to a harassing email by an anonymous sender. On Twitter, she posted the following note addressing the hate mail she received on a Friday afternoon (Syed, 2021):

It's Friday. I'm off the clock. I'm out for a walk by the lake. And yet, this piece of hate mail -- sent to my personal email, my Narwhal email AND my previous Logic email -- made me have a nervous breakdown. Happy weekend to this "leftist activist fat f***ing brown cow."

Syed's tweet ended with a quote of some of the horrible language used in the anonymous email that spanned roughly two pages.



Figure 11: An image of a tweet from @fatimabsyed on October 1, 2021.

Interviewed for this thesis, Syed reflects on that email two months later, stating (personal communications, 2021):

I don't even know how to describe it. It was just, you know, the string of words that were used to describe me and my work by this person, was very creative and just unimaginable, that someone could just paint a picture with such a disgusting brush. I still struggle to describe it because it still blows my mind that someone could put that series of words together in that way.

As Syed puts it, this type of harassment is not new; in her case, she has dealt with intimidating and harassing messages from the public as early as her second year in her master's program. At that time, roughly six years ago, Syed said a columnist took issue with a blog post on diversity, written by her classmate for the school magazine. That story discussed the whiteness of Canada's columnists overall. Syed did not write the story. However, she believes she became the target of this person's trolling in retaliation to the report:

I was a sole non-white columnist; he picked on me. It made no sense, the entire saga made no sense, but he screenshotted my Twitter bio page, which at the time included, you know, the cities I had lived in, and it was very visible that I was a Muslim, Pakistani Canadian, and sort of screenshotted that and said, 'Oh, look at this,' I forget his exact words now, I could probably pull it up, but it was like, 'Oh, look at this terrorist journalist that the school has accepted to work on their magazine,' they probably have biases or something.

Syed remembers questioning if this would be a one-off occurrence. Upon reaching out to other journalists of colour, she said they revealed "a flood of stories about how common harassment is online and offline." Syed said that this exchange was her first experience learning to protect herself from online harassment. Still, the online hate disseminated in 2021 targeting journalists for identity categories like gender, race and religion remained shocking for Syed. She

adds, “What happened this year was just really extreme. Like it was a whole other level that I've never experienced before.”

As Canadian journalists increasingly go public with the harassment they were receiving, Syed observes that racialized female journalists are seemingly receiving a disproportionately increased amount of hate mail while compared to their white counterparts, stating:

I wish I knew why that is. My theory is that I think most of the people who write hate mail are men and are probably white men. And that their worldview is probably... Plays a factor into who they target, or who they get confused by or rattled by, or whatever adjective is right to use in this regard. But I know the studies, it's hard to do a study on this, but even just colloquially, the people who reach out for help or for support - They're always female, and they're always racialized.

Nana aba Duncan

Nana aba Duncan (personal communications, 2021), Associate Professor at Carleton University and the Carty Chair in Journalism, Diversity and Inclusion Studies, explained a tendency to denigrate Black, Indigenous, and other women of colour in Canadian media. As Duncan put it, “There's more to pick at, for sure, especially, particularly because also, we're not common, right. So it's a few Black people, a few Brown women, a few women who wear hijabs.” A new diversity survey confirms a lack of representation in most Canadian newsrooms (Canadian

Association of Journalists, 2021). The Canadian Association of Journalists launched the study in November 2020, looking at newsroom demographics (Canadian Association of Journalists, 2021). The survey collected data on 3,873 journalists that work in 209 newsrooms and found that almost half of all Canadian newsrooms “exclusively employ white journalists” (Canadian Association of Journalists, 2021, p. 5). Many are challenging the whiteness of Canadian newsrooms and how it promotes racial bias (Abdel-Nabim 2020; Mattar, 2020; Rice, 2020). Duncan explains that racialized women journalists deal with discrimination within the office and from the public. As one example, she discusses how racialized journalists face accusations of biased reporting if their coverage involves a Black guest. She adds that racialized journalists are often derided as activists for reporting on the community they are from.

Priya Sam

For Priya Sam (personal communications, 2021), who left the industry in 2019, in addition to what she calls easily identifiable harassment, she explains the subtle incidents of harassment and discrimination were at times more challenging to deal with, stating:

For example, I would be out in the field reporting, and maybe somebody would yell something at me, let's say since I'm a woman of colour, I've heard, 'Go back to where you came from,' that kind of stuff. And to me, as awful as that is, at least if I was with a white camera person, for example, they could also acknowledge that was

harassment, that was discriminatory, that that was racist. What I found a lot harder to deal with was the more subtle forms of harassment or discrimination. For example, always having a white male boss and often being treated differently than my male counterparts... I definitely felt like I wasn't valued. I was treated like I wasn't as smart as the men who were in the room. It made me feel less confident in my abilities and more hesitant to speak up and share my thoughts.

Where racism meets misogyny, Sam can recall moments out in the field where her identity as a woman, and person of colour, were targeted, adding:

I was actually at the Raptors parade; I had a few people yell things at me that were racist, along the lines of, 'Go back to where you came from,' or I guess this would have been more of targeting me as a woman, 'Why are you even here? Do you even know anything about basketball?' I'm not even sure what - Harassment either way.

Despite her passion for the industry, what she calls a 'toxic work environment' while working as a journalist, led her to a new career in the technology industry. She still operates a podcast called: "Turning Point with Priya Sam," where she interviews people on the 'turning points' in their careers, including big life decisions or unexpected obstacles. Though she finds her podcast can still attract nasty comments to her social media accounts, she prefers the freedom of covering topics she is passionate about. As for traditional media, Sam

cites both racism and discrimination within the journalism industry as reasons for leaving:

I think for me, it was the right thing to do. I certainly have a lot of respect for people who decide to stay despite what they're going through and who work for change within the industry and who kind of power through some of the racism and discrimination they might, and harassment they might deal with, so absolutely, I have so much respect for people who do that, but I think, for me, for my own mental health and for what I needed for in terms of what was best for me, I feel like I made the right decision in leaving, for sure.

With her podcast, Sam can promote diversity and inclusion, which she describes as passions. Though she will sometimes face harassing messages connected to her show, she can control which guests she speaks with and the topics she covers. Her episodes include stories involving individuals overcoming racism and generational trauma, among other topics (Sam, 2020-present). She explains her work is about sharing inspiring stories, which she finds rewarding.

Saba Eitizaz

If threats against women journalists of colour go unchecked, the online violence risks may translate to 'real-life' or physical violence. For journalist Saba Eitizaz (personal communications, 2021), who reported for the BBC in Pakistan, Afghanistan, and the United Kingdom before moving to Canada, as she puts it,

this country's aggressive trolling, racism, and violent systematic online harassment was a shock. Eitizaz explained that she came to Canada "expecting more safety, in terms of that, and expecting a better standard of journalism and journalism received by people." Instead, Eitizaz revealed how she continues to face gruesome and detailed death threats. Eitizaz also went public with some of the harassing emails she received during the online trolling campaign of Canadian journalists and tweeted the following (Eitizaz, 2021):

I would offer a trigger warning but I think Canada deserves to be a little uncomfortable right now. As @CFWIJ reported, Canada has rated highest for online abuse of women journalists in Sept. I got this for doing an episode on Annamie Paul yesterday. We're on nicknames now. @caj



Figure 12: An image of a tweet from @sabaeitizaz on October 1, 2021.

The email is deeply racist, misogynistic and viciously threatening. It includes threats, racist remarks, and name-calling. It also uses dangerous language, including the referral of Eitizaz as a 'traitor,' detailing how she would be killed:

The death threats in it surprised me, the specific graphic violence was quite horrific, and the fact that this person seemed to know details about my personal life was surprising because it suggested that now this trolling or hate campaign is getting organized, people are actually surveilling you to be able to know all of the details about your life and when that starts happening, that's not something I associate with Canada, where there's democratic values and its image of multiculturalism and harmony, like globally.

Eitizaz reveals the email she posted on social media on October 1st was the second she received that week, believing both messages came from the same anonymous writer. Elaborating on the second email, Eitizaz considered the explicit death threat to be related to her work in other countries:

They called me a traitor to my host country, and they talked about men in purple cheering on in the stadium. I think that was the second one as well, as somebody shot me in the back of my head, and it was hard for me to explain to my manager because obviously, he thought it was horrific, but they didn't understand why I thought this was such a danger. I said, this person knows or

has done enough research to know that I was persecuted by being labelled traitor in my own country as well, like an anti--nationalist or a traitor, for doing the work. This person has used the same kind of language. I've also been threatened with being killed, shot in the back of the head, like very military-style killings.

Violent remarks that take place online should be taken very seriously. In UNESCO's global survey of 1,200 media workers (Posetti et al., 2021), about 20 percent reported facing offline abuse, which they believe was related to the online violence they had experienced. This finding reveals the alarming correlation between abuse in the digital realm and real-world violence.

Indigenous Journalists: Karyn Pugliese's Report

Indigenous journalists who detailed their experiences with harassment in a report titled *Silent no more* (Pugliese, 2020) indicated a trend of racism, sexism and misogyny connecting with colonial attitudes. Karyn Pugliese, an Algonquin from Pikwàkanagàn First Nation and visiting professor at Ryerson University, lead the initiative. Pugliese, who also goes by Pabàmàdiz, did a case study involving 15 Indigenous journalists who identified as female and worked in Canadian media. Based on that research, Pugliese wrote on issues that threaten the advancement of women Indigenous journalists in Canadian media (Pugliese, 2020). In connection to that report, Pugliese (personal communications, 2021) participated in an interview for this research paper, detailing the disproportionate amount of violence and harassment Indigenous journalists face on the job. While

Pugliese notes her research involved purposive or selective sampling, reaching out to journalists she knew had been harassed, the information assists in providing a closer look at the treatment of some Indigenous women journalists.

Pugliese notes the women who participated in her research provided details on various types of harassment they have experienced, including sexualized harassment, racism, offensive remarks, intimidation and physical or violent harassment and abuse. Detailing some of the experiences revealed to her, Pugliese shared how one journalist reported having a gun pointed at her, as someone demanded that she hand over her camera in an effort to get ahold of the news footage it possessed. Another journalist told Pugliese that an Indigenous official had shot a gun in her direction, while a third journalist detailed a situation in which many people were shaking the van she was in, attempting to intimidate her. Pugliese described the anger directed towards female Indigenous reporters, connecting it to colonial fallout and colonized attitudes towards Indigenous women. As she puts it, “you’ve got the devaluation of Indigenous lives.” Pugliese adds that Indigenous women continue to be devalued, “So that a lot of the violence towards indigenous women becomes normalized.” At the end of her research, Pugliese determines that Indigenous women are subject to more violence, aggressive attitudes, and sexualized violence than other women, stating:

All of that violence and the attitude just goes to show you that it's a different scenario for Indigenous women than I think it is, for white women anyways, in Canada. I'm sure there's other groups

that have their own, other religious, ethnic groups might have variance as well, but there's definitely something that's unaddressed in colonialism in Indigenous culture... The Missing and Murdered Inquiry and also the statistics bear this out. That Inquiry draws a very direct line between how Indigenous women are portrayed historically in the media; how they've been undervalued. Our lives as Indigenous women have not traditionally been fully celebrated.

Pugliese also discussed the implicit bias in Canadian newsrooms. She challenges how mainstream media focused their coverage involving Indigenous women on negative storylines. She also discussed harassment within newsrooms. She said one reporter who took part in her research had expressed that she had experienced sexual harassment on the job. That same reporter had also told her about offensive remarks within newsrooms, from being made fun of for the pronunciation of a word or having an accent, to being told they had only won an award because they were Indigenous. Asked if things had progressed since her 2020 research, Pugliese credited the Black Lives Matter movement for opening the discussions on equity and inclusion.

I think it's getting better. I think with the Black Lives Matter movement that really opened and re-energized the discussion in newsrooms, and Black Lives Matter made space. I mean, really, it was a Black Lives Matter movement, but it opened up and made

space for other voices, and it was inclusive of Indigenous people, and it was inclusive of people of colour. So in that way, I know that newsrooms are trying to balance that.

Pugliese acknowledges there is much work to be done to achieve equity in Canadian newsrooms, advising that the continuation of systemic racism and discrimination against Indigenous journalists persists.

2SLGBTQ+ Journalists

According to the Committee to Protect Journalists, covering 2SLGBTQ+ issues can create a risk of threats and retaliation for both journalists and those who participate in the story (Iyamah, 2018). Of the 14 participants for this research who identified as members of 2SLGBTQ+ communities, all indicated they had faced harassment on the job. However, some suggested that their sexuality was unknown to the public and felt it did not contribute to their harassment. Of the three participants who identified as non-binary, all three indicated they had dealt with harassment connected to their employment. This section consists of an interview with one journalist, who described intense abuse online and in-person based on how they identify and their sexual orientation.

Amanda Jetté Knox

Content Warning (C.W.): This section contains details relating to suicidal ideation.

As Amanda Jetté Knox (personal communications, 2021), author, speaker, journalist, human rights activist, and member of the 2SLGBTQ+ community puts it, death threats, hate speech, and insults are common occurrences. She specifies that death threats are the most difficult to handle, adding, “I have had several. I've had to file police reports for three of them, I believe.” Jetté Knox identifies as non-binary and uses the pronouns she/they. A member of the 2SLGBTQ+ community, Jetté Knox writes on gender identity and is a transgender rights activist. She has also publicly shared her family’s journey through varied transitions. In 2014, one of her children came out as transgender (later identifying as non-binary). About 18-months after their child came out, Jetté Knox said her partner would also come out as transgender. Years later, through what she called personal exploration, Jetté Knox identified as non-binary. She adds, “We're a family, we consist of three trans and non--binary people and three people who are cisgender, and otherwise, honestly, we're just a very typical, if you wanna call it that, average family, kind of boring” (Jetté Knox, 2021). Jetté Knox said she writes about her family and her story to help normalize all forms of family and gender identity, adding:

We have found a lot of support in our community, but there are a lot of people who just don't have that support, who get disowned, who are abused by their parents. These things happen all the time. That’s why we talk about it because the more people who see that there's nothing to fear and there's nothing to hate, the more that they can... I think more people will find acceptance.

This openness, however, has led to vile attacks, according to Jetté Knox, who discussed how her focus on transgender and non-binary rights is linked to harassment. Over the years, she has noticed comments becoming consistently more negative, hateful and vile, ranging from online abuse to threats that extend to family members, stating:

My children have been threatened. At one point, they needed extra supervision and security at school to make sure that they were not targeted. And outside of that, it's a lot of insults, name-calling, accusations I get regularly because I write about trans issues, and in particular, whenever I write about affirming and supporting trans and non-binary kids, I get accusations of pedophilia, child abuse, grooming, essentially just being a monster. And so that's probably the worst of what I get, but then, of course, I also get attacks based on my appearance, my weight, and a lot of the other things that people deal with in this industry, especially women and non--binary people.

Jetté Knox said she welcomed criticism of her work, including questions and healthy discussion, which, as she puts it, was the initial feedback she received concerning her career. Soon, however, healthy discussions “turned into a lot of outright lies and misinformation and accusations about me that just had no foundation.”

(C.W.) Jetté Knox has been writing on gender identity and 2SLGBTQ+ rights since the early 2010s, but in 2020, she explained that the online vitriol had become so vicious she considered death by suicide, stating:

Last year, I did have a breakdown directly related to my job, and I became suicidal. I had to go to the hospital and get support, I got a diagnosis of a trauma disorder, and I've been able to work my way back since then. That was a really pivotal time for me to re-assess if I want to stay in this work, which is very important to me, talking about these issues, reporting on these issues, I have to be able to keep my mental health in check, that's why I've done all this work.

Jetté Knox feels she has made immense growth since seeking help. As she relived one of the comments sent to her the day before interviewing for this thesis, she says the following:

Yesterday, for example, somebody was all over my Facebook page calling me a pedophile, and of course, nobody wants to be called that. That is a terrible thing to be called and a terrible accusation, but I also recognized that this was coming from this person's experience, and it's not a reflection of me. Being able to separate those two things has really helped me keep going in my job.

Reflecting on how the online abuse impacted her mental health, Jetté Knox is coping. As she explained, while the comments previously impacted her greatly, she has worked to address that:

I think initially I was hit pretty hard by them, and I had to learn both just through experience and through a lot of therapy actually that these comments aren't really about me, that they're coming from the person that is dishing them out. It's their perspective of the world, their experiences, perhaps their trauma, their anger, their fear, so I don't take any of it personally at this point.

Jetté Knox plans to continue to advocate for transgender people's rights despite the abuse and will denounce hate and harassment connected to her work.

Summary of Findings

The stories shared and explored in this chapter show the immense emotional labour required to sustain a media career. The personal communications from various journalists of colour and a member of the 2SLGBTQ+ community support findings from a recent harassment survey of Canadian journalists, which determined “Media workers who are women, Black, Indigenous, people of colour and part of the LGBTQ2+ community reported facing harassment more often -- and to a greater severity” (Bundale, 2021). Hate campaigns or targeted abuse can be organized in an effort to intimidate and silence diverse journalists from underrepresented groups (CFWIJ, 2021). As the industry looks to recruit and retain more journalists that reflect and represent

Canada's racial and cultural diversity, there must be resources in place and support for journalists of colour and those from 2SLGBTQ+ communities. These calls will be explored in more detail in Chapter Five.

Chapter Three:

Political Implications

As revealed by this research project, Canadian female and gender non-binary journalists who cover various beats are subject to harassment on the job. Yet, participants who cover politics reported frequent severe verbal abuse and physical abuse in more extreme cases. The descriptions shared through survey results, interviews and comments, as well as the situations shared publicly online, depict a pattern of more sustained abuse and threats for journalists reporting on politics and political coverage.

Research on the harassment of female and gender non-binary journalists in the United States and Canada conducted by Lucy Westcott (2019) found similar conclusions. Westcott's research revealed hate and harassment of journalists is related to anti-media rhetoric and the current political climate, including the 'fake news' era (2019, para. 16). A recent survey of Canadian journalists by market research company Ipsos²⁷ also revealed: "The overall media climate, accusations of 'fake news' and objections to the media organization a journalist works for emerged as the key factors prompting harassment" (Bundale, 2021, para 6).

²⁷ The Ipsos survey of 1,093 journalists and media workers was conducted online in both English and French between Sept. 27 and Oct. 13, 2021. <https://www.thestar.com/business/2021/11/09/canadian-journalists-grappling-with-epidemic-of-online-bullying-harassment-survey.html>

Of the 136 journalists surveyed for this thesis, nearly 58 per cent indicated that the harassment they face has been politically motivated or related to politics. Similarly, 61 of the 120 respondents who opted to provide additional details about the harassment they experienced mentioned extremism, political hostility, and accusations of being biased reporters or labelled fake news. Many of the respondents detailed online abuse, with some acts of physical violence occurring in person.

Here are some examples of abuse revealed by political journalists or those covering politics, shared anonymously through survey results. These situations demonstrate the threats faced on the job:

- “One rally I had to attend as a reporter, about 200 people all started screaming at the few media people there to ‘get the f*** out of here.’ They called us fake news and hurled other insults. One woman followed me as I was leaving and personally harassed me.”
- “People regularly scream ‘fake news’ at me. I’m routinely called a lying b****, the enemy of the people, the ‘virus.’ I had an anti-masker jump out and hug me while I was covering a protest... I had a woman follow me to my car, threaten to beat me up. Once I got into the vehicle, she started smashing on my windows with her fist.”
- “Fake news, lying to the public, general anger towards journalists. Once, outside a vaccine clinic, a man was yelling at us and wouldn’t leave us alone during our live hits. We moved, and he followed us. He kept getting

closer and closer. Police had to be involved. Also, ‘FHRITP [F*** her right in the p****]’ a few times.”

- “Being accused of lying to people in a deliberate attempt to hurt them. Being called hateful, a Nazi, etc. Being called stupid and unable to do math, understand the government etc. It's awful.”

Harassment Mimics Abuse Faced by Female Politicians

The harassment of women and gender non-binary journalists who cover politics can be compared to the harassment of female politicians, with many of the same tactics used to undermine their work (Organization for Security and Co-operation in Europe Parliamentary Assembly, 2021). In an annual report, the Organization for Security and Co-operation in Europe Parliamentary Assembly [OSCE PA] Special Representative on Gender Issues examines the violence against women journalists and politicians (OSCE PA, 2021). The report provides evidence of “violence against women journalists and politicians, including certain groups of women who are targeted for additional abuse because of intersecting identities” (OSCE PA, 2021, p. 5). The report looked at the growing crisis of violence against women politicians and journalists, stating:

While both men and women who enter journalism and politics are at risk of abuse, the violence against women in these domains is qualitatively different. It is gendered, and often sexual, in nature. It has the goal and impact of discouraging women from being in the

public sphere.²⁸ Further, it often focuses on matters unrelated to the women’s work as a journalist or politician, focusing instead on her appearance, intellect, personal relationships, professional credentials, and “likeability.” The perpetrators, the great majority of whom are men, often commit such acts with the aim of preserving traditional gender roles and restricting or preventing the public participation of women as a group. The range of violence targeting journalists and politicians can include physical, sexual, psychological and economic. (2021, p. 5)

In Canada, there is evidence to support the findings by the OSCE PA on female politicians.²⁹ In the last several years, more women politicians have shared their stories of violence, intimidation and sexual harassment both in-person and

²⁸ Special Rapporteur on violence against women, its causes and consequences, “Violence against women in politics,” United Nations General Assembly, Seventy-third session, 6 August 2018; Ludovic Rheault et al. “Politicians in the line of fire: Incivility and the treatment of women on social media,” *Research and Politics*, Vol. 1, Issue 7, January-March 2019.

²⁹ Public Policy Forum (PPF) explored issues and challenges women in the political sphere face with cyber harassment. A report on key recommendations discussed at a workshop was released in August 2019.

<https://ppforum.ca/project/finding-solutions-to-cyber-harassment-crime/>

through digital platforms (Smith, 2018). In 2020, former Infrastructure Minister Catherine McKenna, who had been open about being a target of harassment in the past, called for new and more robust measures to protect Canadian politicians from threatening, harassing and violent behaviours (Levitz, 2020). Her comments came after an incident at her office, where a member of the public shouted insults and expletives at a member of McKenna's staff (Levitz, 2020). In response, McKenna spoke out, stating: "We need to reflect on this and take action so we can all do our jobs" (Levitz, 2020, para. 5). McKenna had also battled back after being referred to as "climate Barbie" on several occasions while she was the Environment Minister (Global News, 2017; Zimonjic, 2018). The following year, a vandal defaced her campaign office with a sexist slur (Burke 2019).

Around the same time as McKenna's calls for action, two other Canadian politicians came forward with details of situations they faced involving harassment and abuse (Levitz, 2020). Lisa MacLeod, a member of the Ontario legislature for an Ottawa riding, reportedly required police protection due to threats made against her (Levitz, 2020). Macleod's alleged abuse came in the form of threats and took place after she provided an interview where she spoke out against the abuse faced by female politicians (Levitz, 2020). In the same month, Ottawa city councillor Laura Dudas reported having a rock thrown through the window of her home while her family was asleep (Levitz, 2020). Dudas posted the following statement to social media after the incident, "While I cannot speak to the motivations of the person behind this disturbing act, it comes

as the latest in a string of acts targeting my role as a woman in politics” (Levitz, 2020, para 12).

Politicians and experts reveal the abuse directed at female politicians has been ongoing for years, but the pandemic has made it more visible (Von Scheel, 2020). In August 2020, CBC News wrote on Alberta's women in politics, calling for an end to abuse (Von Scheel, 2020). In that article, female politicians reported being called the following names or having these insults hurled their way: Trash, incompetent blonde w****, rat baby girl, token coloured female, cold-hearted b**** and hooker among them, in addition to threats (Von Scheel, 2020, para 1). This dialogue is the same sexist, racist and misogynistic language described by survey participants in Chapter One.

Despite the calls for action to support female politicians, the harassment remains ongoing (Taylor, 2021). During the 2021 federal election campaign, the Samara Centre for Democracy and Areto Labs analyzed more than 350,000 tweets sent to Canadian political candidates, with 20 per cent labelled as toxic and nearly 10 per cent containing threats of violence and other aggressive languages (Taylor, 2020).³⁰ The research found that women and racialized candidates were

³⁰ The tweets were analyzed by a bot created by The Samara Centre for Democracy and Areto Labs. The bot uses machine learning to analyze tweets on seven point toxicity toxic attributes. www.ctvnews.ca/politics/federal-election-2021/racialized-female-candidates-more-likely-to-face-online-abuse-during-campaign-analysis-finds-1.5565820

frequently receiving toxic tweets and revealed that of the Liberal incumbent candidates, women were five times more likely to receive toxic tweets than their male counterparts (Taylor, 2020, para. 7).

As the OSCE PA report states, the problem is growing and fueled by the broader global context, including but not limited to democratic backsliding, a rise in authoritarianism, misogyny and sexism, toxic masculinity and inequality, adding (2021):

Indeed, women politicians and journalists share many similarities: they operate in the public eye and are subject to public scrutiny, they often bring attention to potentially controversial issues that are of importance to women, and they are working in spaces once reserved for men.

Female journalists who took part in the research for this thesis discussed the dangerous clash between hate and politics or political coverage. When asked how often they receive hateful or abusive comments, many participants noted that the frequency of hateful comments relates to their political coverage.

Speaking with Women who Cover Politics

Three Canadian political journalists took part in longer-form interviews on this subject for this thesis. All three said they routinely face hate and harassment

connected to their employment. Two veteran journalists felt the harassment and hatred increased in the last decade. The third journalist recently left the industry based on targeted harassment, which she reveals extended to her family.

Vassy Kapelos

Hateful and threatening anti-media rhetoric connected to politics is why veteran journalist Vassy Kapelos decided to reduce her time on the social platform Twitter. Interviewed for this thesis, Kapelos discussed how the harassment of journalists online has evolved in the last decade (personal communications, 2021). Kapelos described a light atmosphere on social media in the late 2000s, adding that she had often engaged in friendly discussion with members of the public online at that time. She has observed questions and primarily positive comments being replaced by toxicity online in recent years, stating:

It certainly has evolved over the 14 years. I've basically been on social media in one form or another right from the start. I don't know my job without it. But certainly, over the last few years, I would say my level of engagement on social media has decreased quite a bit from maybe its peak around 2010--2015, and then since then, it's kind of been on the decline. Especially over the last number of years, where I definitely found it to be... depending on the platform, I found it to be pretty hard to take. So I've definitely

engaged a whole lot less, I would say most especially on Twitter and Facebook than I used to.

Like other interview participants for this research, Kapelos explained that she welcomes feedback and constructive criticism but specified that the comments she referred to were threatening and intended to harm. She shared some of the extremely vile remarks launched at her, including the following (**Warning: Graphic Content**):

People talking about how it should look like when I die and I should be raped for the kinds of interviews that I do. It was, I don't want to give the impression that that was frequent, but I also, by that point, had really filtered out a lot of stuff, so the fact that it was still getting through to me makes me think that it was a bit more than I thought. So once it hit that point. I made a really cognitive decision to up high- quality filters and to pretty much mute the world.

Kapelos also described an increase in abusive comments directed towards her as she moved to more prominent roles in the industry. She feels the harassment increased most when she began as a Canadian political host of a well-known show. As she puts it, “I had not really been exposed to that level of scrutiny online, and I was overwhelmed in the first few months of taking on the job as host of the show.” Kapelos explained how overall, the tone of most of the tweets that followed was antagonistic and very aggressive:

It wasn't a comment to start a discussion; it was something to make me feel terrible. And it accomplished that. And so, I realized very quickly that it was getting way too much in my head. And I was kind of concerned about it impacting my ability to be the kind of host that I wanted to be.

Soon after, Kapelos limited access to the messages that reach her through specific social media sites. She explained how she added various filters and reduced her engagement online. Despite the addition of filters and other attempts at curbing online hate and harassment, Kapelos revealed the hatred soon amplified when she became pregnant. The vicious comments about her physical appearance taking a toll on her mental health, stating:

It was exhausting, and it was demoralizing, and I really didn't want it to make me doubt myself, and then I think I sort of alluded to it before, but it got really bad when I gained so much weight when I was pregnant. I was so sick, and it got so bad about my appearance, which I hadn't really experienced before... That bothered me more than anything else, to be honest.

Noticing she felt better after limiting time spent online, Kapelos considered making that move a more permanent one, at least on the social platform Twitter, which she continues to debate:

I don't know if I'll ever go back, to be honest. I haven't made this black, white decision. I would never pronounce it or anything like

that; who cares? It's just me, but I just don't know what the point is anymore... The advantage I saw of it in the past was that you could engage with people and create another layer of the relationship that you have with the audience that's more personal, which is kind of nice, but that whole thing got turned on its head because the personal was so negative, so then it just felt, it just started to feel pointless.

Supriya Dwivedi

Supriya Dwivedi began her career in media writing opinion pieces while in law school before moving to talk radio (personal communications, 2021). By 2016, she worked full-time as a morning show host in Toronto. Several years later, she would ultimately leave the industry due to the hate and harassment she experienced connected to her job. In 2020, Dwivedi explained how she chose to leave her former career based on the atmosphere and environment she faced, stating:

From my own experience, I would just say that increasingly, while I was on air, some of the content that was allowed on air, either by colleagues who were hosts or by regular on-air contributors, kind of veered away from fact-based hot takes and into the realm of hateful rhetoric, but more worryingly, misinformation and demonstrably false information, which I found led to an uptick in

my own hate mail, both in terms of volume and just in terms of the depth and breadth of the hate mail.

Dwivedi detailed how the company's website had an option to contact the show hosts, which is how she received much of the anonymous hate mail. She explained that the emails were not vetted or filtered, with the following gruesome messages coming through:

An email form would pop up, and you could pop in anything into the body of the email, and you could put anything into the sender email, and I had asked multiple times to deactivate that or to at least have mechanisms in place where there were filters in terms of the content or in terms of putting in a verifiable email address because I would often get emails from emails that were like, f***you@diversityhire.com or bill@suckmyc***.com.

By August 2020, the hateful emails had crossed the line for Dwivedi when one particularly heinous and violent threat referenced her then one-year-old daughter. **(Warning: Graphic Content)** Dwivedi said the following of the email, "It was a rape threat that referred to her being raped and described a bloody vagina as a result of that rape." At that moment, mentally, Dwivedi said she decided that she would leave her position as host. As she explained, "It wasn't worth it anymore."

Following that email, Dwivedi described being both horrified and concerned that anyone using an anonymous email could still reach her during her remaining time with the station. Shortly after, her email would be removed from the 'contact me page.' Still, she moved forward with her resignation, stating:

At that point, I had already sorta decided that I wasn't going to really continue on with this because I wasn't going to roll the dice on my daughter's safety, and so a few weeks later, I submitted my resignation to the station.

Dwivedi also filed a complaint with the Canadian Human Rights Commission, which she later dropped, alleging an increase in hateful, racist and violent threats due to the company's lack of enforcement on misinformation. She described some of the following instances that stood out, stating:

I mentioned Motion 103, that was definitely a big spike in terms of hate-mail, particularly as well as the misinformation that was allowed on air. Another pretty big spike was during the Prime Minister's trip to India. There was a lot of [misinformation] that was allowed on air with respect to the Sikh community and with respect to Indo-Canadian relations more generally, I would say. Another spike was during the Yellow Vest Movement. I think that got re-branded like the United We Roll campaign is how they were calling it. And then the other point in my mind that kind of sticks

out is the debate around the UN Global Migration Compact, when Canada was debating whether or not they were going to sign on, or ratify, the Global Compact on safe migration. And again, there was a ton of misinformation that was allowed on air at the time.

When Dwivedi would attempt to fact-check misinformation, she explained that her attempts would increase hate and harassment from public members, who often wrote in anonymously. She acknowledged the design of talk radio is to include discussion on the topics of the day but felt more could be done to combat misinformation, as she puts it:

There's a line and a delineation there that a lot of, whether it's an editor, producer or media execs, they have advocated that responsibility, and so it's a little bit like creating a monster and then letting it get out of control, right? And particularly that we're in this weird post-truth kind of environment, if you're a news organization, if you're not standing up for the truth, then what the f*** are you doing? Because it's like, you should be standing for the truth, and I understand that there's a difference between objective news reporting and opinion writing or going on a talk radio rant, but we have to have an established set of editorial or journalistic standards here.

Dwivedi acknowledged her ability to achieve a career outside of talk radio, adding that she wanted to speak out for those who potentially could not for

fear of reprisal. To date, she does not regret her decision, feeling as though it started a conversation about what needs to take place in order to alleviate the harassment of journalists. In the end, Dwivedi said she pulled her formal complaint with the Human Rights Commission, stating she and the company resolved their differences rather amicably, adding that changes relating to online harassment and journalistic standards were implemented.

Elisha Dacey

Veteran digital journalist Elisha Dacey has covered various topics in her 22 years in the business, including Canadian politics. In Dacey's view, while harassment has always come with the job, she noticed particularly egregious hate and harassment directed towards women journalists in the last few years – as journalists became increasingly accessible to public members through social media and email. She explained the progression of harassment directed towards journalists as follows:

Normally, it came in the form of phone calls or the occasional, this was rare, but the occasional person would stop at an office to rant, and the poor receptionist always got the brunt of that. But 99 per cent of harassing comments came from phone calls, and that was probably true for the first five-ish years of my career. Then it started coming through in emails when we started putting in our email addresses so people could contact us, and that, of course, still

happens, but of course, since about 2010-2011 with the advent of Facebook and Twitter, it is far and away now social media.

Dacey explained that while the harassment she has viewed or received has been chiefly political, it used to lean towards accusations of biased reporting, such as, ‘I’m a conservative. Why are you writing with such a liberal bias?’ Or vice versa. She explained that she’s “been accused of being every type of biased.” In the last five years, Dacey discussed how the discourse has ramped up, stating: “We’re really getting into the two camps. Either you’re a conservative or liberal. U.S.-style politics, of course, are bleeding heavily over into Canada.” In 2021, Dacey revealed that the comments she had viewed or received were primarily political, sexual, or a mix of the two. She recalled live-tweeting an interview with Canada’s Prime Minister, with increasingly harassing responses to her tweets, stating:

Everything from, ‘You’re a Trudeau supporter. You’re a nasty liberal,’ to eventually it did turn into sexual. And I think the worst comment was actually from someone who said on his bio that he was a former police officer, so someone who should have known better, asking me if I gave the Prime Minister oral sex before the interview.

Dacey explained that incorporating *both sides* of a story no longer seemed acceptable to some viewers or readers, “It’s just so much more black and white.” Like Kapelos, Dacey explained that the harassment of female political journalists

also connects to the ‘fake news’ mentality circulating in the last few years. Both Kapelos and Dacey were able to pinpoint a shift from polite online engagement on social media sites like Facebook and Twitter to harmful, hateful comments full of vitriol about five years ago. It comes around that same time as the anti-press rhetoric in the United States, with phrases such as ‘fake news’ adopted in the global north (Wescott, 2019). Dacey detailed, in her view, the frustration associated with the inability to have a productive dialogue with viewers:

I remember when Twitter started, I really enjoyed it because we could have those kinds of conversations, and it was generally polite. And I did my best, especially when I was helping launch [a] newspaper, I did my best to be available to my readers. So if they had questions, I would answer them, and it got to the point where you started to really recognize the bad-faith actors who just wanted to vent and rant at you. And no matter how you answered the question, you were wrong, and they continue to harass you. And so I learned what a troll was very quickly, and I no longer answer a lot of the questions that people have because I can tell they don't really want an answer. They just want someone to confirm their point of view. And it is funny how often, especially as a woman, how often these harassing comments can go from political to sexual and combine quite a bit.

Homing in on the “fake news” phase, Dacey remains concerned with the misinformation circulating online: ³¹

It's not just COVID – It's not just that kind of misinformation. It's an attack every day on how we do our jobs, and that can be frustrating. And again, people don't want to hear your explanation because you're lying, that's what they think, and there's no arguing with them. So, it's very stressful.

Dacey explored the option of leaving social media altogether to avoid the harassment and subsequent mental health challenges that can be associated. However, in her view, it is unfair to be forced off of a social media site due to online harassment – versus addressing the structural and social issues built into these sites. She also mentioned that certain reporters need social media to connect with interviews and stay informed. She has curtailed her Facebook activity thus far; her profile is now private, and she has added filters to make it more difficult to find her or message her without being her *actual* friend. Due to privacy concerns, she adds: “Now the only thing I post on my Facebook pages are the

³¹ Misleading news on social media: Shifting attention to accuracy can reduce misinformation online. (Pennycook, Epstein, Mosleh, Arechar, Eckles & Rand, 2021). <https://www.nature.com/articles/s41586-021-03344-2>

occasional question to a group or to try and reach out to a source. That's pretty much it.”

Summary of Findings

As explored in this chapter, violence against women journalists echoes the violence experienced by women politicians and is a growing crisis. The behaviours range from verbal harassment to threats and physical violence. The abuse is often sexual and psychological. Despite references to women politicians speaking out about abuse for several years, the harassment has continued and extended towards women journalists online. Instead of discussing the risk of losing female voices in politics and journalism, there needs to be protections in place, focusing on creating more and safer spaces for women in these fields. The next chapter will explore the emotional labour and trauma connected to the job.

Chapter Four:

Emotional Labour and Trauma

The harassment and abuse explored in previous chapters clearly demonstrates the emotional labour connected to the field of journalism. This chapter will focus on the mental and emotional toll that harassment takes on Canadian female and gender non-binary journalists, ranging from sleepless nights to leaving the industry altogether. Research for this thesis supports the conclusions of previous studies: namely that harassment is an added barrier for women and gender non-binary journalists to contend with while performing their job (Powell et al., 2020; Pulfer, 2020; Posetti et al., 2021). Reporting on topics such as crime and human tragedy is already emotionally and mentally demanding; with the addition of harassment, it can be too much to bear (Brayne, 2007; Cherry, 2021; Truong, 2016). The additional, significant risk of experiencing direct harassment on the job – and subsequent related stresses – can encourage women and gender non-binary journalists to leave the industry completely. This removal of specific perspectives in journalism is a loss of diversity and also, I argue, a loss for Canadian democracy.

In 1983, sociologist Arlie Hochschild coined the term ‘emotional labour’ to describe the ‘management of emotions’ in the context of social work (as cited by Steinberg & Figart, 1999). Integrating this concept into the field of journalism, researchers Miller and Lewis (2020) use it to describe the process of journalists

regulating feelings and emotions while on the job. In the journal article, “Journalists, harassment, and emotional labor: The case of women in on-air roles at US local television stations” (2020), these authors reveal that the emotional labour required by journalists in order to negotiate and hopefully resolve harassment “can have a significant impact on one’s personal and professional well-being” (2020, p.18).³²

Concerningly, the data gathered for this thesis reveal that a vast majority – nearly 93 per cent – of women and gender non-binary journalists surveyed indicated they had faced harassment connected to their job. Equally startling, 58 per cent agreed the harassment escalated to the point where they felt unsafe, and these feelings have real-life implications. In general, those who experience harassment and abuse connected to their employment have reported psychological and physical consequences (Parker, Drevo, Cook, Slaughter & Newman, 2014). A study published by Statistics Canada (Hango & Moyser, 2018) concluded workplace harassment is associated with lower levels of personal and workplace well-being. Based on that survey, researchers concluded: “workplace harassment has a relationship with indicators of workplace well-being, such as job

³² The Statistics Canada results were published in *Insights on Canadian Society*, titled "Harassment in Canadian workplaces" and are based on 2016 data from the General Social Survey on Canadians at Work and Home (Hango & Moyser, 2018). <https://www150.statcan.gc.ca/n1/en/catalogue/75-006-X201800154982>

dissatisfaction, level of motivation to perform at one's best, and sense of belonging to one's current organization” (Hango & Moyser, 2018, section 4). While there are fewer studies specific to journalists, individual journalists have reported the following emotions or symptoms related to harassment: (Parker et al., 2014, section 4)

- anxiety attacks;
- tension headaches;
- insomnia;
- weight loss;
- extreme and excessive vigilance;
- general fear for safety;
- social isolation;
- inability to get out of bed.

The journalists interviewed for this thesis revealed many of the abovementioned symptoms and additionally expressed the following emotions or symptoms:

- generalized anxiety;
- exhaustion;
- anger;
- self-doubt or self-blame;
- depression;

- post-traumatic stress;
- suicidal ideations.

Their lived experiences provide a real-life glimpse into the kind of risks associated with harassment, violence and intimidation tactics connected to their status as journalists. In several instances, those involved in this research received physical and sexual violence threats, with many publicly sharing the death or sexual assault threats they have received on Twitter. The journalists also reveal a pattern of ‘critique’ that goes well past constructive criticism or feedback and instead involves sexual, racial and gendered slurs, often intended to discredit or attack the journalists’ character. The interview participants revealed that these negative encounters deeply impacted them personally and emotionally. In detailing the harassment they faced, some survey respondents offered insight into how discriminatory or abusive comments weighed on them. One shared, “This kind of thing is exhausting, and it's expected, and no one in this industry has any idea what to do about it.” Along the same lines, another expressed how the derogatory comments directed towards their race “becomes increasingly exhausting.” In addition to working with high-pressure and complex high-profile stories such as natural disasters, political violence, and human suffering (Reichel, 2019), journalists must also process and attempt to control incoming online or in-person abuse (Miller & Lewis, 2020).

Research by the International Federation of Journalists (IFJ) found online abuse brought on psychological effects such as anxiety or stress (IFJ, 2018, para.

4). Studies on stress note how it can manifest in many different ways, including provoking such a strong reaction in the body it poses a challenge to sleep (Kalmbach, Cuamatzi-Castelan, Tonnu, Tran, Anderson, Roth & Drake, 2018). Focusing on the individual interview portion of this research, at least two of the journalists revealed they had developed insomnia following harassment connected to their status as journalists. Insomnia, which is marked by problems getting to sleep, staying asleep through the night, and sleeping as long as you would like into the morning, can lead to excessive daytime sleepiness, a higher risk of auto accidents and widespread health effects (Suni & Dimitriu, 2021).

In Chapter One, respondent Isabelle explained how some of the harassing emails brought her to tears. Thinking back to one email in particular that insisted upon her removal from her new job, Isabelle recalled being “stunned and so heartbroken.” She revealed how the “awful messages” would add up and lead to symptoms of insomnia. As a result of the mental and emotional toll, she began staying up all night, ultimately sleeping through her alarm and missing work:

I slept in, but it had been three nights after that email where I hadn't been sleeping, so like the fourth morning, I didn't wake up for my shift, my bosses ended up calling me, being like, 'where are you?' I wasn't picking up. She ended up calling my mom, my mom was calling me – it turned into this disaster because I hadn't slept for three days, thinking about this email, any way that wasn't a good

experience.

Kori, who shared her story involving an aggressively-sexually harassing email, also detailed a sleepless night debating how to respond. After going public with the email, she explained how it invited further criticism and inappropriate or sexualized comments from community members directed at her on-air performance and body. From this point, she described extreme stress before going on air, stating: “I was on level 10 anxiety every time I was on air – there's a level of nervousness you have before going on – but this was something totally different; I dreaded it.” Kori described checking emails before, during and after a show in anticipation of crude remarks. She detailed how her fear and anxiety would reveal themselves on the air through a more reserved performance that someone described to her as appearing to have a ‘chip on her shoulder.’ Kori tended to agree, stating, “I think I was judged unfairly and mistreated by [the public], so I developed this really hard, hard shell over the last year, and I was coming to a breaking point.” Shortly after this situation, Kori was removed from her anchoring position and switched into a permanent reporter role. Kori’s story exemplifies how stress and emotional labour can impact a journalists’ career trajectory. Though she was affected mentally and emotionally by the harassment, switching positions within the office was not her desired outcome.

Several participants offered this type of insight into the stress associated with harassment and intimidation tactics connected to the job. A ‘general fear for safety’ was mentioned by B, as she discussed worrying that the man threatening

her would find her home address. Eitizaz discussed being “really traumatized” due to the abuse and harassment she dealt with, including a disturbing and threatening email referencing her being “shot in the back of the head” and calling her a traitor. Syed tweeted about having a “nervous breakdown” after receiving the harassing, racist and abusive tweet she received. Alex Brown revealed she often considered whether the person harassing her would escalate to physical violence if she responded or attempted to defend herself.

While online harassment can increase anxiety and perpetuate feelings of vulnerability or being less safe, research also shows it can lead female journalists to take part in self-censoring online (Amnesty International, 2018, para 3). For example, when asked how often they received harassing emails or messages online, some research participants reported they no longer checked these accounts or limited their time and interactions online. In their interviews, Both Dacey and Kapelos discussed reducing time spent on the social media platforms Facebook and Twitter, respectively. Kapelos mirrors a growing group of prominent journalists of all genders who are choosing to spend less time on Twitter, according to reporter Mark Lieberman (2021). Based on his interviews with individual journalists and online observations, Lieberman (2021) wrote an article on the topic for the *Poynter Institute*, where he stated:

But for all the value journalists can extract from Twitter, they can also fall victim to its less savory aspects: engaging in petty squabbles over esoteric issues; fielding bigotry and bad-faith attacks from anonymous users and bots; enduring relentless brain

stimulation that can distort perception and distract from more pressing responsibilities. (para. 9)

Still, many journalists who took part in this survey mentioned engaging online as part of their job. Most newsroom leaders expect and, in some cases, require their reporters to participate online, from connecting with the public to finding or developing sources and relationships (Ordway, 2018). Other respondents discussed how they should not have to withdraw or end their online participation due to the risk of threats and harassment, instead suggesting addressing or removing those causing harm online. For example, Eisenberg explained how she does her best to combat online violence with what Shanahan (2017) calls “robust counterspeech,” where journalists use nuanced approaches to address hateful dialogue (p. 69). Shanahan describes it as a recommended tactic in countering the online harassment of journalists (2017). Eisenberg will often share the incoming harassing messages and speak out against hate and anti-Semitic comments directed at her. Yet, due to the emotional labour required to speak out (Miller & Lewis, 2020), she adds that she often needs to take social media breaks to recoup and recover before participating again. This pause from the digital realm exemplifies another form of invisible labour required to work in media; many journalists must mentally garner the strength to combat their abusers.

Breaking away from online platforms has also been critical for Jetté Knox, who discussed a recent breakdown related to her work. **(Content Warning)** In Chapter Two, Jetté Knox revealed having suicidal thoughts “directly connected” to

her job. Upon seeking help, she was diagnosed with a trauma disorder. Jetté Knox debated whether to continue writing, ultimately deciding to return to the digital space and continue to advocate for 2SLGBTQ+ communities online because, as she puts it, “it's important to me.” She continues to prioritize her mental health, reducing her time online when required.

The risks of online bullying and harassment are just not worth it for other journalists (Petersen, 2018). From limiting time spent online to micromanaging how they engage in digital spaces, author Anne Helen Petersen (2018) points to some women journalists having to debate what they cover. In “The Cost of Reporting While Female,” Petersen (2018) explores how the abuse women journalists receive can manifest in ‘invisible’ ways. As Petersen explains, it happens “in the stories that have gone untold or unexplored by women because the risks of telling them, psychologically or physically, require too damn much” (2018, para 3). This psychological impact was true for Jetté Knox, who explains it in the following way:

I really had to assess just how important it is and my reasons for doing it, and why I felt that I specifically should be doing this work. Why is it me and perhaps not, why am I not leaving it to other people and it's not that other people aren't doing a great job reporting these things and talking about these things and educating, they are, but also I had to, I guess, realize that my voice is important too, and I add something. I'm very passionate about this job, and

that's why I do it every day.

Both Eisenberg and Jetté Knox demonstrate how harassment from outside sources links to burnout or more severe outcomes, including the desire to leave one's job (Miller, 2021). Barton and Storm (2013) describe similar coping behaviours by journalists facing abuse, including avoiding stories or particular beats, seeking comfort from other journalists facing similar experiences, or giving up working in journalism entirely.

Those who monitor the harassment of journalists in Canada agree with global findings that this is an ongoing crisis (Posetti et al., 2021). Interviewed for this research, members of Canadian press freedom organizations and those who work towards anti-discrimination in media point to a rise in coordinated abuse tactics. Brent Jolly, the president of the Canadian Association of Journalists,³³ notes that harassment of journalists "is sadly not something new" (personal communications, 2021). Though, on the heels of the online attacks reported in September (CFWIJ, 2021), Jolly acknowledges increased widespread abuse directed at Canadian media members, especially women and racialized journalists. The Canadian Association of Journalists is actively working with international groups in developing methods to combat the harassment of all

³³ The Canadian Association of Journalists is an independent press freedom organization that provides advocacy and professional development for journalists across Canada (Canadian Association of Journalists, 2021).

journalists. Jolly notes that having threats reach journalists at work and at home through their computers or phones is “a press freedom issue in a lot of ways.” Shree Paradkar (personal communications, 2021), a columnist and internal ombud³⁴ at her current station, began working as a columnist about six years ago and agrees the abuse has always been present but feels “the frequency of it has gone up.” She describes an increase in instigated attacks, where multiple harassers will pile on to attack one journalist, with female and racialized journalists most frequently targeted. There is also a level of personalization with the attacks, according to Karyn Pugliese (personal communications, 2021), who describes the use of intimate or personal detail in the threats sent to female journalists:

When they write to one person or write to another person, it's not a form letter, it's an individualized letter, and some of them are threatening violence. Which now goes beyond just the name-calling or the insulting. So it's one thing to deal with, I think what a lot of journalists have dealt with up to now, which is "you're fake news," "your stupid lefty publication is crap," "your writing is crap," that's one thing to get. It's nasty, but you can take it. But now it's getting more gendered. When people receive it, and you're a racialized person, it's racialized, and it's occasionally threatening. It's calling

³⁴ An ombud, often called an ombudsman or ombudsperson, provides impartial assistance for conflict resolution.

people traitors. It's saying that something should be done to them because they've committed treason.

Pugliese calls this type of language worrisome, adding that it is “beyond what anybody should take at a job.” The OSCE states that “psychological pressure and fear are understandable responses to online attacks and threats and may render journalists unable to work effectively” (n.d. para 1). Furthermore, other research shows how this may create a ripple effect of multiple negative outcomes. In its joint report “Attacks and Harassment” (Ferrier & Munoz, 2018), the International Women's Media Foundation and Troll-Busters.com conclude:

Misogynistic attacks and retribution are swift and coordinated. The fear of future harassment and attacks changes the behaviors and actions of women journalists. Women journalists who experience abuse report psychological health issues, self-censoring, and long-term concerns about their professional choices. They may close or avoid social media accounts. And the problem still lacks effective response when the activity is reported to management and law enforcement. (p. 48)

Loss of Perspectives

In exploring the loss of female and gender non-binary journalists based on harassment and abuse faced, there is value in exploring more closely other stresses in which journalists must contend. In “Trauma and Journalism,” author Mark Brayne (2007) studies the distress resulting from covering emotionally

difficult stories such as a crime scene or tragedy. The day-to-day grind can also be stressful for those not covering tragic events (Reichel, 2019). Looking at the impacts of occupational stressors on journalists' health and well-being, a group of researchers reviewed work published from 2002 to 2015 (Monteiro, Marques Pinto, & Roberto, 2015). The authors indicated the most common sources of stress as follows (Reichel, 2019):

- Job-role demands, such as ambiguous expectations or uncertainties about a particular role, or over-burdensome expectations.
- Interpersonal demands, such as problems among colleagues, competition and ethical issues in reporting.
- Physical demands, like the stresses of working in a busy newsroom without natural light.
- Working conditions, such as low pay, long hours and late-night deadlines.
- Task-related stressors, such as interviewing distraught sources, time pressures, violence and intimidation, and exposure to traumatic events.

Former Canadian journalist Tamara Cherry (2021) recently researched the intricacies of trauma and journalism, publishing “Trauma survivors and the media: A qualitative analysis.” Interviewed for this research, Cherry (personal communications, 2021) states that working in media is “an extremely stressful job.” As part of her study, Cherry surveyed 22 journalists and found the vast majority had little to no trauma-informed training before entering journalism.

Based on more than a decade of experience, the majority as a crime reporter, in combination with her research, Cherry discussed the increased risk of journalists developing post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD) connected to their jobs (Greenberg, Gould, Langston & Brayne, 2009). Cherry's findings suggest:

When you add in things like reporting on trauma, then you've got all the traumatic exposures, as well what the journalists are coping with, and by and large, not dealing with. So I'm talking about the interviews with the grieving family members, the images and sounds that they see, and just the repetition of this over time really puts journalists at a much higher risk of developing something like PTSD, vicarious trauma, and also the moral injuries that journalists suffer.

In addition to the trauma exposure resulting from witnessing a tragedy like a crime scene, Cherry agrees with findings that suggest journalists are already under added stress due to difficult circumstances at work, including hitting multiple deadlines (Monteiro et al., 2015). She also describes a constant pressure, from some newsrooms, about being replaced by "100 people lined up outside the door ready to take your job." With an industry under constant restructuring (O'Donnell, Zion,

Sherwood, 2015), Cherry adds the potential for layoffs as another stressor.³⁵ In her view, there are various stressful events to contend with, on top of reporting and potentially dealing with harassment. Cherry also speaks to the way stress can manifest or appear later in life, stating:

You have to remember the fact that journalists are human beings first, right? So somebody might be able to brush off that online vitriol, "Oh, that guy is an idiot. He's ignorant," and another person might be very deeply affected by it. And then the person that brushed it off might actually realize years down the road after taking years and years of this harassment that it's been building and building and suddenly they're in crisis mode where they don't know how to handle other stresses in their lives.

The above-mentioned stressors combined with harassment and abuse can leave many journalists vulnerable. Cherry's (2021) research concludes that journalists want their newsrooms to be trauma-informed and foster environments promoting wellness and self-care. She envisions a situation where a journalist who has been harassed or is mentally struggling would, or even could, opt out of an emotionally taxing story,

³⁵ Since the pandemic, research for the The Canadian Journalism Project found more than 3,000 editorial and non-editorial jobs have been cut temporarily or permanently, with more than 1,250 permanent job losses (Wechsler, 2021).

Where you can go and tell your assignment editor, ‘I’m not okay today to do this. Can you put somebody else on it?’ and it will just be a, ‘Yeah, no problem.’ So basically, I found that we have a long way to go when it comes to supporting mental wellness.

While the survey portion of this research did not ask about what supports journalists would like to see in place, it did ask if participants felt supported by anyone following experiences with harassment. 127 participants responded to this question, and of those, 70 per cent agreed they received assistance, nearly 17 per cent had received none and 12 per cent chose “other.” A follow-up question asked if the journalists specifically felt supported by their employer following experiences with harassment. In this case, 131 participants responded. Of those, only 43 per cent of participants agreed they felt supported by their employer, while roughly seven per cent said they did not feel supported, and 37 per cent said they sometimes feel supported.

In 2014, Vivian Smith wrote *Outsiders Still: Why Women Journalists Love - and Leave - Their Newspaper Careers*, discussing the lack of support for women in print media at that time, detailing the connection between underrepresentation and the loss of unique perspectives in coverage. According to survey results from research for this thesis, eight years later, the risk of losing the voices of female and gender non-binary journalists is still present. When asked if they considered leaving the industry based on the harassment they had received, 55 survey participants or 41 per cent, said they had. Eight per cent of participants bypassed the yes or no option to select ‘other.’ Under the ‘other’ heading, 10 additional

respondents indicated they had, at times, considered leaving the industry or had left the industry already. As Smith connected the loss of women in print to the removal of a unique perspective in Canadian media, this research agrees and further highlights the risk of female voices in journalism in connection to online attacks.

This loss is made evident through the stories shared by Sam in Chapter One and both Dwivedi and Jettée Knox in Chapter Three. Dwivedi (personal communications, 2021) ended up leaving her show due to an increase in racist comments and violent threats online – one, in particular, directed towards her young daughter. Dwivedi leaving her position is an example of how these threats contribute to the loss of female and racialized voices and the necessarily unique perspectives they bring to Canadian media (Smith, 2014). Another example is Jettée Knox, who decided, in the end, to continue her reporting and coverage of 2SLGBTQ+ communities. However, had she determined it was no longer worth it, it would silence a fierce advocate. A third example comes from Sam (personal communications, 2021), again showing the loss of a unique perspective. Despite achieving a top position in a Canadian newsroom, Sam also left the industry based on “toxicity” in the media industry and harassment from public members. Prior to leaving, Sam pushed for increased stories and coverage for BIPOC communities. Unfortunately, her retirement from the industry will come at a cost for the journalist herself and the consumers of Canadian media and the diverse Canadian population as a whole.

Silencing or losing female and non-binary voices in journalism yields several implications for Canadian democracy. In “When Women Are Silenced Online, Democracy Suffers,” author and project coordinator at the Montreal Institute for Genocide and Human Rights Studies at Concordia University, Marie Lamensch (2021) states, “Women’s exit from these toxic spaces also means that the individuals behind cyber harassment and misogyny have achieved what they wanted: instilled fear and delegitimized and silenced women whom they saw as taking up too much space” (para. 11). Removing these voices then influences future coverage, by perpetuating existing biases in societies and working to “universalize men’s perspectives as the default” (Kassova, 2020, p.13). More specifically, the discrimination results “in the underrepresentation of women on the media agenda and affects the way women are represented through these media when they do appear” (2018, p. 63). Doing so removes half of the story, according to Pulfer (2020), who specifies the need for racialized female voices in media, stating “if only white women are covering the news, you’re not getting genuine coverage of diverse perspectives, nor are you achieving true balance, accuracy, and fairness in reporting across all demographic communities and groups” (Pulfer, 2020, p. 8). There is also a risk of repeating patterns for younger generations. The OSCE PA’s report on gender issues (2021) explores how the harassment and violence against women politicians and journalists may scare off prospective girls and young adults with similar ambitions (p. 21).

Summary of Findings

Democracy thrives when multiple journalistic voices from various backgrounds work together towards the truth. Yet, the contributions of women and gender non-binary journalists continue to be at risk of being reduced or eliminated in media. In an already high-pressure environment, this loss is connected to the emotional labour, trauma, and stress caused by harassment and abuse journalists contend with. The participants for this research described fears for safety, insomnia, anxiety and, in one case, suicidal ideation. Survey responses in combination with individual interviews show many of these journalists do not feel fully supported following instances of abuse. The safety of all journalists should be paramount, whether physical, emotional or mental.

Chapter Five:

Conclusion & Recommendations

This research establishes that Canada is no exception when it comes to the online violence perpetrated against women and gender non-binary journalists. While the survey data revealed that nearly all participants were targets of various forms of harassment, the comments directed at racialized and 2SLGBTQ+ journalists and those who cover politics show a pattern of increasingly aggressive and threatening remarks, as explored in Chapters Two and Three. In its entirety, this thesis contributes to the existing literature on harassment of female journalists and further explores the experiences of non-binary journalists by expanding existing theories and research into the Canadian context. Furthermore, it delves into how this abuse impacts Canadian women and gender non-binary journalists. The evidence from this research re-affirms many previous findings, namely that these journalists are psychologically, emotionally and at times physically affected by the unique harassment they receive.

The harassment discussed in this research directly correlates with participants' positions as journalists, and thus news media employers must be held more accountable. Social media platforms also play a crucial role in the dissemination of online harassment; their owners must do more to assist users by monitoring, addressing and removing online abuse. Police are not void of accountability either: abusive, hateful and threatening comments revealed to officials must be investigated and addressed according to the law. Meanwhile,

government officials must also step up and create policies that do more to protect these journalists, who are essential denizens of democracy. Where existing methods are currently failing, policies and regulations should be reviewed or updated to reflect a society that operates consistently in a digital world.

Many of the women and the non-binary journalists interviewed for this research have been very transparent with their experiences of harassment, some even sharing the remarks online on several occasions. Going public with abuse has become more common in the past several years, especially with the rise of social media. Doing so allows journalists and marginalized communities to foster meaningful counter-narratives and call for solutions among digital communities and their administrators. (Vermes, 2021). While stories of online violence are plenty, solutions or meaningful recourse are seemingly scarce among news teams. This harassment requires input and care from all members of professional journalistic teams and cannot be left to the individual people to fend for themselves.

This research explored the harassing messages on Twitter in September of 2021 as journalists called for change (CFWIJ, 2021). Yet, there are many stories and trauma that will remain unknown – except to the survivor and perpetrator – as some journalists will neither inform the police nor share their harassment publicly for various reasons, including privacy concerns or fear of becoming a further target (Vilk, 2020; Posetti et al., 2021). To help counter this silencing, media organizations, social media companies, and multiple levels of government must create increased opportunities and varied avenues to report experiences with

harassment and receive assistance. While the perpetrators of online harassment are able to remain anonymous, the journalist(s) on the receiving end – often female, non-binary or racialized individuals – suffer the consequences. As previously explored, abuse and harassment, when gone unchecked, can silence journalists, which could ultimately result in women or gender non-binary journalists leaving the field, even as the industry faces simultaneous calls to increase these demographics in the newsroom to address system racism and intolerance in the media industry. The absence of these diverse voices from the industry also threatens Canada's democracy as it limits which stories are told and removes unique perspectives from the country's multicultural societies. This thesis contends the situation as it stands is a gender equity crisis.

If news organizations intend to retain their journalists, media companies must address the disproportionate harassment experienced by female and gender non-binary journalists and actively support their mental health, and work to keep them safe online. This support should extend to creating a better workroom culture that prioritizes mental health and insists on equity and diversity. While a number of survey participants confirmed they felt supported by their employer, 44 per cent only felt supported at times or not at all. Although changes are being considered or enacted by media organizations and social media conglomerates, much more must be done (Toronto Star, 2021). Canadian newsrooms should directly work with their members to find viable plans and solutions that best suit their team. There should be resources in place to combat harassment and abuse, and ample support for journalists should be provided. These recommendations

result from interviews with journalists and experts and the analysis of existing research.

Removing/Filtering Access

Perhaps one of the first steps towards creating a safer environment for journalists is to have an email filtration system in a newsroom's shared inbox. Many research participants reported checking the shared work inbox for news tips, only to find hateful comments explicitly directed at them. There is an added layer of stress with this as their colleagues could see the same message that insulted their looks, hair, size, voice, skin colour, news capabilities, performance, clothing or any other superficial – yet no less hurtful - messages. At the very least, organizations could add a profanity filter to their email to catch and remove vulgar or abusive comments. Another option is to task someone trained and capable of examining these emails to remove messages that harass or threaten staff. This person could bring attention to any message that poses a risk to staff or the public, whether to upper management or legal officials and work to find the best possible solution for all parties involved. Helpful or useful news tips would still be passed on to the news inbox, but inappropriate or potentially abusive messages would be filtered out.

Additionally, media companies should be in direct communications with their journalists and other staff to determine precisely how much access – such as email addresses, phone numbers, social media handles – that each employee would like to have offered to the public. By individually confirming the comfort

levels of each employee, the organization can then ensure that each member of their team feels safe. This recommendation could expand to removing the “contact the reporter” option on some news sites.

Social Media

Social media platforms must do more to address growing violence and abuse on their sites. Currently, many authors recommend the following steps to counter abuse: block, document and then report the scenario (Wright, 2016; Vehkoo, 2019; Vilks, 2021). While these steps seem reasonable, the emotional labour is still placed on the journalist to respond to and deal with the abuse. With social media sites like Facebook being scrutinized for disseminating and mishandling hate speech, many sites have started to offer further protective measures for users (Rajagopalan, Thuy Vo & Soe, 2018; Yaraghi, 2019). This includes options for removing the comment section or filtering who can see a post; however, it still leaves the anti-harassment duties up to the individual, the victim and survivor of the abuse. Thus, social media sites must increase and strengthen their methods in monitoring those causing harms. These sites must have strict anti-harassment and anti-violence guidelines for online participation, and they must also enforce these guidelines to a further extent than they are currently. Regulations should be clear and thoroughly enforced by each platform.

As much of the online harassment is ‘anonymous,’ social sites need to focus on the offenders. Temporarily blocking accounts that encourage hate and

violence is not sufficient for long-term security. Those who threaten physical violence or death must be held accountable for their words and at least face removal from the platform. The companies should also assist legal officials if these threats are brought forward to the police. In her interview, Karyn Pugliese (personal communications, 2021) questions to what extent online platforms may have knowledge or access to who is committing crimes on their sites. These social media websites should ensure that they can track down culprits if required for safety reasons such as a serious threat or persistent abuse.

Social media has another task in all of this: to address disinformation online. Platforms should remove those using and spreading disinformation to promote hate or distrust or encourage violence. Disinformation or misinformation should be monitored and fact-checked. As it stands, social platforms are slow to remove harassment and disinformation in general, including comments aimed at journalists. Newsrooms also play a role in protecting journalists through social media. News organizations should prioritize their journalists by monitoring and eliminating bad players in the comments feature. If warranted, a news station should remove the comments section altogether. Other potential solutions may include limiting anonymity and more aggressively moderating content. Members of the public can also help the situation by reporting harassment online.

Online Safety Training

As part of a journalist's training on the job, organizations should prepare new employees for the potential of harassment connected to their new position and implement online safety and intervention training, much as they train reporters they send out to cover conflict zones. This training would include feedback on who to bring concerns to, how to handle online or in-person harassment, awareness that it could take place and a review of the company's current policies to combat it. There should also be discussions with journalists about an action plan when harassment occurs, which could include having a trusted colleague or manager delete harassing emails on their behalf if they wish (Vehkoo, 2019). These changes could also create trust and openness for new journalists to avoid suffering in silence at their place of work. Shree Paradkar (personal communications, 2021) suggests that the entire newsroom should be aware of the anti-harassment policies. Upon a report of harassment, an appointed person or group responsible for addressing harassment should also do a risk assessment of the situation. This group would then suggest best practices for handling the specific scenario and offer support to the journalists in any way they might require.

Online Safety Audits

With more people working and operating in the digital realm, cybersecurity threats are rising (Canadian Centre for Cyber Security, 2021). Thus, news organizations should take steps to protect a journalist's personal information.

Organizations can perform or have an audit performed to see what personal information lives on the internet. If identifying information such as an address appears in a simple search, companies should assist in concealing and removing that information. If, for example, the audit determines a journalist's personal information is involved in online identity fraud, such as a fake social media account impersonating them, the company should reach out to the social site to terminate the account. Supriya Dwivedi (personal communications, 2021) suggests newsrooms should take it a step further and follow Defector Media's lead, using proxies to monitor targeted journalist's social media accounts temporarily.³⁶ Defector Media also offers employees coverage from DeleteMe, which provides "on-going scanning and removal of personal information from online and offline sources," according to Defector's statement (Sternberg, 2021).

Journalists can contribute to online safety by double-checking privacy settings and leaving images and documents they do not want to be viewed offline. Media organizations can step in to assist in checking privacy settings upon request. This recommendation is about being one step ahead versus reacting to

³⁶ Subscription-based sports publisher Defector Media adds a proxy to temporarily manage a targeted employee's social media accounts (Sternberg, 2021). <https://www.adweek.com/media/defector-media-harassment-protection-policy-new-precedent/>

online abuse only when it arises and could help alleviate threats involving confidential material, images or personal information.

Mental Health Support

Mental health support is critical for journalists. Services such as counselling, therapy, access to social workers and further mental health resources should be provided without limits and at no cost to the employee. In her interview, Tamara Cherry (personal communications, 2021) explained that it is not enough to have supports in place. She adds that resources must be readily available and effectively communicated to staff. In addition to resources, places of employment should prioritize checking in with staff members who have faced harassment or abuse on the job. Many of the interview participants for this research expressed that having management in their corner assisted with handling an attack. On the contrary, those who did not have their management's support felt isolated, which caused further emotional distress. Cherry promotes fostering environments that encourage self-care and communal support so that no journalist feels left alone or like they have done something wrong in the face of abuse. Cherry adds that journalists are not all the same, and treating all employees as such is not best practice; however, mental health supports should be accessible for all team members. Cherry vehemently disputes the notions that journalists should have a "thick skin" and that harassment, abuse or anxiety are just a normal part of any job.

Paradkar (personal communications, 2021) discusses how vital support can be and advocates for a culture of care within newsrooms. In addition to community resources, assistance for journalists in dealing with abuse and support in the process of taking legal action, she pushes the need for emotional support during this time. Paradkar explains how often the abuse aims to humiliate or belittle, so journalists need reinforcement that it is not their fault. As she puts it,

No matter what they wrote, no matter if they have a tweet that said the F-Word, no matter if they gave an opinion against somebody and it was a negative opinion, it doesn't matter. They don't deserve abuse or threat.

Robust Counterspeech

Community members and journalists alike can turn to counter-speech to address hate and abuse (Shanahan, 2017). However, a caveat to this method is that engaging with harassment could encourage online ‘trolls’ and incite further abuse (Vilk, 2020). For this reason, it is essential to pre-plan responses in order to counter the negativity deliberately. Doing so can be empowering if done correctly. In exploring this option, Viktorya Vilk (2020), the Program Director for Digital Safety and Free Expression at PEN America, writes:

Counterspeech could involve forcefully denouncing harassment and hate, defending your reputation, reclaiming an abusive

symbol or hashtag, fact-checking disinformation, and enlisting the support of your allies or employer. Some folks have even gotten creative, responding to their abusers by sending puppy photos or telling their mothers about their bad behavior. Basically, do what feels right for you — but be mindful of your employer’s social media policy and avoid resorting to abuse yourself. (para. 18)

Paradkar (personal communications 2021) adds that if colleagues want to offer support, they can also jump in on the counter speech, stating, “Stand up for that person, maybe on social media. Say something good about that person on social media if that's where the abuse is happening.”

Public Education/Media Literacy

Negative tendencies from the broader culture, such as sexism and racism, are reflected online (Gibson, 2019). Referencing Herring (1996), Gibson (2019) offers that when women assert their presence, they can be met by silence or attempts to delegitimize their statements (p. 486). In her interview, Nana aba Duncan (personal communications, 2021) touches on the broader issues of harassment online, stating, “The long term is that we just have to, as a country, we have to be less misogynistic and less racist.” Duncan believes this wider change starts with our youth and school systems teaching diversity, equity and inclusion, adding, “It's really about applying principles of inclusion everywhere we go, applying principles of belonging everywhere we are.” She adds that other

institutions that play a role, such as media, should pay close attention to stories that denigrate women or people of colour, stating:

The job is on a lot of institutions. The answer to what you're asking about is really systemic changes. It's very, very big. So education in public schools, education in university. So when I'm doing something on American history, I have to think of the place of women as well. I have to think about the place of people of colour as well, or even in book publishing; let's acknowledge that publishing editors are often white. We should be talking about the existence of these imbalances.

Duncan also emphasizes the importance of acknowledging that while online harassment is happening to all women, society must recognize the “added quality when it is a woman plus something else.” Duncan is referring to the additional hate directed at women of colour and members of 2SLGBTQ+ communities (Shanahan, 2017; Chen et al., 2018; Iyamah, 2018; Vilks, 2020).

Journalists and Coverage

In the interview portion of this research, some of the participants discussed feeling excluded or felt their ideas were not supported within their newsrooms. Thus, news organizations should employ, promote, train and retain women, gender non-binary and BIPOC journalists. This effort takes place in various ways. In continuing the dialogue on mental health and support, journalists should be

encouraged to foster relationships with their colleagues and to offer help when possible. Any employee placed in a position of authority or a managerial role should receive training on fostering an inclusive environment and handling instances of abuse appropriately. Newsrooms should listen to their young, female, gender non-binary and BIPOC journalists and create space for unique perspectives.

As much as ensuring diversity and equity in the newsrooms is critical, these same considerations must apply to news coverage. News organizations must consider the impact of specific stories and how they are reported. Newsrooms should also take time to discuss how decisions regarding their coverage can and will impact an outcome or reception of a story. One example provided by Paradkar is giving legitimacy to those spreading misinformation by including them in coverage. From misinformation to racism, Paradkar wants to see newsrooms remove anybody who might have xenophobic or Islamophobic views (among other discriminatory ideals) from coverage, stating, “The trouble right now is our newsroom leadership is not affected by any of these issues, and that is why they're able to make these decisions so casually.”

Governing Bodies

Given that freedom of the press is recognized under Canada's Charter of Rights and Freedoms,³⁷ officials should revisit these laws to ensure they are up to date in today's climate. In an opinion piece in the *Toronto Star*, Natalie Turvey, president and executive director of The Canadian Journalism Foundation, joins Brent Jolly from the Canadian Association of Journalists (2022) in calling for the government to protect journalists online. The pair agree it is time for a review of Canada's laws to reflect the digital world, suggesting a look at the United Kingdom's (UK) Online Safety Bill in establishing "a new regulatory framework to tackle harmful online content" (2022, para. 11).³⁸ According to a recent press release by the UK Government (2022), its Online Safety Bill contains a new list of criminal content for technology firms to remove as a priority, including criminal offences to tackle domestic violence and threats of sexual assault or death (para. 1). It also includes criminal offences to "force social media companies to stamp out the most harmful illegal content and criminal activity on their sites quicker" (para. 1). According to the release, the sentences for each offence differ from a few months to five years (2022, para. 19-29). Until this type

³⁷ Guide to the Canadian Charter of Rights and Freedoms:

<https://www.canada.ca/en/canadian-heritage/services/how-rights-protected/guide-canadian-charter-rights-freedoms.html>

³⁸ Information on the UK's Online Safety Bill (2022):

<https://www.gov.uk/government/news/online-safety-law-to-be-strengthened-to-stamp-out-illegal-content>

of change occurs in Canada, police must take threats against journalists seriously. Journalists could still report severe incidents to officials if they see fit. If the police do nothing, the abuse is still documented and tracked.

Consider Legal Action/Formal Complaints

This research recognizes that harassment of female journalists is not new (Adams, 2018; Amnesty International, 2018; Wescott, 2019). Despite a recent pledge by more than 25 news or press freedom organizations in Canada to do more to protect journalists from online harassment in the wake of escalated threats, the abuse continues (Toronto Star, 2021). Recognizing the slow pace of making change, female and gender non-binary journalists must consider legal action or formal complaints in some scenarios where it is evident they have not been supported or protected at work. News organizations, social sites and those causing the abuse must be held liable where institutions fail to address the attacks. Looking at the legal options for reporters in the United States, Sarah Eberspacher (2019) states where news organizations fail, female reporters should look to “cases finding employer liability for third-party sexual harassment to force the issue via legal action” (p. 160). In Canada, a journalist may choose to work with an employment lawyer to bring forth cases of employer negligence or harassment connected to their employment, in situations where they are not feeling protected. Journalists may also look to the Occupational Health and Safety Legislation in their province, or make a formal complaint to their provincial Human Rights Commission, or the Canadian Human Rights Commission. This option was

previously discussed in Chapter Three by Supriya Dwivedi (2021). As explored, Dwivedi had filed a complaint with the Canadian Human Rights Commission, alleging an increase in threats due to the company's lack of enforcement on misinformation. She says she withdrew that complaint following a resolution, which included changes/additions to the company's policies on online harassment and journalistic standards (2021).

Summary of Recommendations

This thesis, bolstered by existing literature, contends that the harassment and abuse targeting women and gender non-binary journalists is ongoing, abundant, and utterly unacceptable. The subsequent challenge is ensuring news organizations, social media platforms, and the government recognize these acts as a crisis. In creating these recommendations, it is clear that there is no one fix or simple solution to ending harassment. The points brought forward are meant as considerations for newsrooms and journalists alike in their efforts toward a safer, more inclusive industry. Accepting hate and harassment as 'free speech' can no longer occur. As a society, online users must distinguish between freedom of speech and where that speech turns vile and threatening. When laws are broken online or in-person, governing bodies must act. At the same time, intimidation tactics cannot be accepted. There must be a considerable effort to remove the responsibility from journalists to protect themselves and place it instead on their employers, unions and governing institutions to create better and safer working environments. Overwhelmingly, participants reveal that working as a journalist,

particularly as a female or non-binary person, means you will likely be harassed. The days of passing off sexual harassment, abuse and threats directed at journalists as normalized within the journalism industry must immediately come to an end.

Appendix A: List of Survey Questions

Are you a current or former journalist?

What type of work do (did) you do within the journalism industry?

Do you work primarily work in: Print media, Television Media, Radio Media, Digital Media

What province do you work in?

How do you identify?

Please tell me about your racial identity: What race do you identify as?

Do you identify as a member of the LGBTQ2S+ community?

Have you experienced harassment in connection to your employment?

Is this harassment: Online / In-Person / Both?

Is this harassment happening more: Online or in-person?

Is this harassment happening more: Online or in-person?

Is the harassment more aggressive: Online or in-person?

Is this harassment: Internal (by co-workers or management) or external (public), or both?

Is this harassment: Internal (by co-workers or management) or external (public), or both?

Is this harassment **more**: Internal (by co-workers or management) or external (public) ?

Have you noticed an increase in this harassment this year (2020-2021) compared to others?

What is the nature of this harassment?

Can you describe some of the comments you have received?

How often do you receive comments that you find harmful?

Has the harassment ever escalated to the point where you felt unsafe?

Did you feel supported by anyone following this harassment?

Who did you feel supported by?

Do you feel supported by your employer when dealing with harassment?

Have you ever felt like leaving the industry based on the harassment you have received?

Appendix B: List of Interview Questions

Can you tell me about yourself & how you identify (examples include your age, race, the gender you identify by, sexual orientation, etc.)?

Tell me about your current employment.

How long have you been in the industry?

Have you dealt with harassment online or in person?

Please describe how these comments made you feel?

Have you ever felt scared or unsafe following a comment/encounter?

What kind of comments do you feel are directed at you (For Example, targeting you based on race, gender, attacking political views or comments that seemed violent

Do you recall a particular topic or piece you covered that brought out comments?

Has the harassment ever escalated to a point where you needed to seek help for your physical or

emotional safety?

Follow-up: Can you describe this experience - providing as much or little detail as you feel comfortable?

Did you feel supported by anyone following this harassment? If so, who?

Have you ever felt like leaving the industry based on the harassment you have received?

Do you feel supported by your employer? If yes, what measures were the most effective in supporting you? If not, how do you feel things could improve?

How could the industry improve in terms of combating harassment?

Appendix C: List of Interview Subjects

Note: Positions accurate on date of interview

Anonymous: B

Broadcast Journalist

August 2021

Anonymous: Ins

Broadcast Journalist

August 2021

Isabelle

Broadcast Journalist

August 2021

Alex Brown

Canadian Television Anchor

August 2021

Maddy Eisenberg

Canadian Journalist, Radio

August 2021

Kori

Broadcast Journalist

August 2021

Fatima Syed

Canadian Journalist, Print

November 2021

Priya Sam

Former Canadian Television Anchor

September 2021

Saba Eitizaz

Canadian Journalist, Print

November 2021

Amanda Jetté Knox

Canadian Journalist/Author

August 2021

Karyn Pugliese

Canadian Journalist

September 2021

Tamara Cherry

Former Journalist / Crime Reporter

October 2021

Nana aba Duncan

Carty Chair in Journalism, Diversity and Inclusion Studies at Carleton University's

School of Journalism and Communication

October 2021

Shree Paradkar

Columnist / Internal ombud

October 2021

Brent Jolly

President, Canadian Association of Journalists

October 2021

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