

RESILIENT JOY: HOW JOURNALISTS USE HUMOR TO COPE WITH WORKING EXPECTATIONS

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“Fire at the hurricane to stop it” announced a meme released and virally shared in preparation for Hurricane Milton (floridaman, 2024). In the face of Hurricane Milton, Floridians responded, yes with caution, but also with great humor—sharing memes like a man casually eating a sandwich on his porch while a massive tornado loomed in the background. His laid-back demeanor, as he enjoys a beer with the storm raging nearby, perfectly embodies Floridians’ lighthearted attitude toward disaster, with the text “don’t even talk to me unless it’s category 11” (whitememejesus, 2024). These humorous responses to disaster reveal how Floridians cope with the high stress of a looming hurricane. Thunder Dungeon, a humor and meme website, captures this phenomenon with a compilation of 25 Hurricane Milton memes, curated by co-founder Phil, that showcase how humor helps people connect with one another and transforms fear into laughter during unpredictable situations. Phil notes, “As someone who’s ridden out a few Florida hurricanes myself, I know that humor is one of the best ways to cope with the chaos” (Phil, 2024).

This blend of humor and resilience in the face of disaster is reflected in the practices of journalists and were even shared by numerous Florida news organizations in the expectation of the storm. In the midst of low income, heavy job demands, and job insecurity, journalists experience disasters themselves along with their readers. In the past 15 years, 2,100 newspapers in the United States

have shut down, representing a quarter of the total number that existed in 2004 (Abernathy, 2020). The future looks even more dire, with projections that one-third of all newspapers could disappear by 2025 (Simonetti, 2022). The closure of long-standing newspapers like the *Press and Journal*, which operated from 1854 until its closure in 2020, reflects the growing challenges. The paper remarked, “Our newspaper survived the Civil War, two world wars, and multiple depressions and recessions. But unless a miracle happens, the paper won’t survive Facebook and Google” (Sridharan and Bosse, 2024, p. 592).

These closures highlight the precarious state of journalism today, where cost-cutting measures, job insecurity, and increasing workloads are forcing many journalists to leave the field altogether (Rick, 2023; Ivask, 2017). Yet, despite the bleak realities, many remain committed to their work, not out of dissatisfaction with the profession itself, but because of the conditions under which it takes place (Rick, 2023). What keeps them going, even as the industry deteriorates, is not only a sense of professional mission but also the small moments of joy that they find in the process.

In this study, we define resilient joy as the ability to cultivate and maintain moments of happiness amid stress, positioning it as a vital resource that helps journalists adapt and stay emotionally engaged in their profession. Our research identifies mood management and fluid transparency as key roles of resilient joy. These involve the ability to regulate emotions effectively in the workplace and express feelings openly, thereby fostering a supportive and collaborative environment. Among the most significant expressions of resilient joy is humor, which not only strengthens camaraderie in the newsroom but also provides emotional relief during periods of intense workload and high-stakes reporting.

Through the lens of Parks’ (2021) concept of joy as a news value, and interviews with 21 U.S. journalists, this study explores how moments of humor and emotional connection help journalists endure the ongoing crisis in their profession. It contributes to the existing literature, exploring what motivates

journalists to stay in the field (Perreault and Mellado, 2024) and addresses the call to establish joy as a core news value in journalism (Parks, 2021).

Theoretical Framework: Joy as News Value

The disengagement of individuals from news consumption can be attributed to a variety of factors. A significant factor in this disengagement is the inherent nature of news content itself, which is dominated by negative stories, including those about corruption, conflict, incidents, accidents, and disasters. Numerous studies have demonstrated that journalism predominantly emphasizes negative news, contributing to the proliferation of fear, cynicism, disengagement, and polarization, while also making the public feel depressed, lose motivation, and distance themselves from the news (Levendusky & Malhotra, 2016; McIntyre, 2016; Parks, 2019a; Schudson, 1995; Stephens, 1988; Cappella & Jamieson, 1996; Toff & Nielsen, 2022). This has had implications on news readership as well; 35 percent of Americans who avoid the news stated, “it can have a negative effect on my mood” (Benton, 2019, n.p.). And indeed, bad news can leave “their readers disengaged and disaffected” (Ettema & Glasser, 1994, p. 27).

The criteria for establishing news values, which have been in place for over a century, contribute to the prominence of such negative news items (Parks, 2021) across different types of news media. The tenet of “if it bleeds, it leads” is widely adhered to in newsrooms, irrespective of media format (Miller & Albert, 2015, p. 61). Hence, reporting tends to emphasize conflicts and issues that are difficult to resolve, and it perpetuates detailed coverage of major disasters or horrific incidents to an extent that can induce lasting trauma (Parks, 2023). Parks (2021) advocates for the incorporation of joy as an additional news value to the traditional set of prominence, proximity, unusualness, magnitude, human interest, and timeliness (Galtung & Ruge, 1973).

Recent scholarship in journalism and media studies has increasingly emphasized the need for an *emotional turn* in response to the prevailing

news reporting practices that contribute to diminishing audience engagement (Moran & Usher, 2021; Wahl-Jorgensen & Pantti, 2021; Parks, 2023; Perreault & Mellado, 2024). This shift reflects the need to enhance the credibility of news reporting by transcending mere factual recounting, thereby fostering a more nuanced understanding of journalistic practice (Parks, 2023). Parks (2019) conceptualization of joy is informed by dialogues from three contemporary spiritual leaders: the Dalai Lama, Archbishop Desmond Tutu, and Douglas Carlton Abrams, who collectively identify eight “pillars” of joy: perspective, humility, humor, acceptance, forgiveness, gratitude, compassion, and generosity (Dalai Lama et al., 2016). These eight pillars of joy not only describe the work of journalism but also motivate it. Indeed, Perreault (2023) argued that the opportunity to serve the audience proved to be essential in motivating journalists to enter the field and encouraging them to stay in the profession. In this study, we postulate that these eight joyful pillars in journalism are better understood as three “clusters” of support for news work: altruistic joy—others-oriented joy, introspective joy—joy emerging from journalists’ reflections on what news offers them, and resilient joy—joy manifested to help journalists and their audiences cope with the wider world.

We focus in this study on the later cluster, given that resilient joy would seem to be material to how journalists manage the key pressures they face within their professional work. As Relly and Waisbord (2022) put it, “it is difficult to envision effective responses to the formidable challenges in the short term without professional and personal resilience embedded in the field of journalism” (p. 164). The Dalai Lama and Desmond Tutu, in particular highlight the resilient power of humor as a means of transforming pain and adversity into understanding and connection (Dalai Lama et al., 2016).

The relationship between resilience and humor has been extensively examined within the field of psychology (Kuiper, 2012). Evidence supporting the resilience-enhancing effects of humor is derived from a variety of sources, including stress-buffering studies (Martin & Lefcourt, 1983; Nezu et al., 1988; Shaunessy & Suldo, 2010) and naturalistic research conducted in

high-stress environments, such as during bombings and air raids (Gavrilovic et al., 2003). Indeed, Kuiper (2012) stated that “a good sense of humor can add a degree of richness and fullness to one’s life, including enhanced enjoyment of positive life experiences, greater positive emotions, a more positive view of self, and greater psychological well-being and quality of life,” which is “consistent with a resiliency perspective” (p. 479).

Humor in Journalism

Humor is an emotion that has been researched in a variety of communication fields including advertising and journalism (e.g. Markiewicz, 1974; Strick et al., 2009, Kim et. al., 2024). Explicating humor proves to be somewhat of a challenge though as it has numerous definitions. Freud (1905) believes that telling jokes offers an outlet to express opinions without fear of reprisal. However, operationally, humor is considered *a message, image, or visual that causes some sort of reaction such as increased arousal, smiling, or laughter for a specific audience* (Sternthal & Craig, 1973). In this way, humor is a discrete emotion with a positive valence that produces positive affect and has a variety of utilities including resilience to negative experiences (Eisand, 2009; Gulas & Weinberger, 2006). This is particularly relevant in the context of a newsroom in which reporters are often faced with different stressors through their work including hostility, sadness, anger, or anxiety (Feinstein & Nicolson, 2005; Hughes et al., 2017).

Humor also has been Implicitly or explicitly, humor and laughter have been used for mitigating fear and anxiety as well as for helping to build re-establish self-control and social connection (Miczo, 2021). Social connections play a particularly important role in journalism both in terms of interpersonal relationships within the newsroom as well as with the audience. People use humor to solidify relationships in the workplace and humor also allows strangers to quickly get along because it ultimately takes little cognitive effort (Brennan, 2011; Cotter, 2010). Workplace humor creates a sense of cultural meaning and belonging (Henderson, 2017). This goes beyond the walls of the newsroom though. Humor is known as an attention-getting,

pleasant emotion and has been shown to attenuate deeper message processing (Nabi et al., 2007; Young, 2008). In fact, humor and emotion are increasingly viewed as legitimate journalistic techniques that can enhance information processing, induce empathy, and encourage engagement (Jandura & Friedrich, 2014; Papacharissi, 2015; Wahl-Jorgensen, 2019).

Humor occurs through three mechanisms. First, humor reflects a deep seated need to demonstrate superiority—engage in laughter at the expense of the misfortune of others (Lintott, 2016) This has been reflected in certain types of humor used by journalists in political journalism, including political satire. Second, humor occurs through incongruity—that is an expectation needs to be created and then violated as a way to create laughter (McBride & Ball 2022). According to Morreall (1987), humor is recognized when there is a perceived incongruity which is then paired with a positively valenced and sudden psychological shift. McBride and Ball (2022) argue that incongruity proves vital for exploring humor during crises because norms are often challenged during stressful times which often happen within the confines of a newsroom. Finally, humor occurs as a means of *relief*. Relief occurs in the releasing stress and tension (Morreall, 2008)—this occurs when people feel overwhelmed, the result of an increase in physical energy which cannot be channeled through normal outlets (Spencer, 1963). And indeed, research suggests that in many professionals, individuals use humor, as a way of coping, with positive implications for their job satisfaction.

Journalists consistently face daily work stresses that force them to deploy these humor mechanisms to combat these obstacles. Humor has become one of those coping strategies that journalists use to buffer the effects of exposure to trauma. Buchanan and Keats (2011) found that journalists used black humor or gallows humor as a way to detach or focus away from the horrors that they sometimes faced on the job. Other studies suggest that positive forms of humor are positively related to well-being which helps to combat adversity (Edwards & Martin, 2010; Ford et al., 2016; McGhee, 2010).

A common means that journalists use to offer humor to their audience is through satire. Satire is a device often found in political journalism in particular and it has shown great utility for building social connection with audiences. For example, some news shows use satire to convey political information which encourages audience's critical thinking and opinion formation (Lichtenstein et al., 2021). Other journalistic satire is used as a unification tool to bridge competing opinions (Odmark & Harvard, 2021). Some satirists look at their role as that of advocate (Waisanen, 2018). This "advocacy satire" has shown itself to be a powerful form of humor and social connection because it includes satirists defending disadvantaged people which motivates audience engagement. This can come in the form of using a new hashtag on social media or product and company boycotts (Bode & Becker, 2018; Waisanen 2018). Lichtenstein et al. (2021) found that satirists humorously cover certain topics with the explicit goal of motivating audiences to continue researching those topics.

Working expectations in Journalism

But what requires the leveraging of this resilient joy? The working conditions of the modern journalist reflect difficult working expectations: in recent years through a global pandemic, and increasing rapid technological advancement (see Kotišová, 2024; Perreault, Kananovich & Hackett, 2023; Perreault, 2022). These difficult working expectations for journalists are reflected in emotional labor and precarity.

Emotional labor in journalism sets the tone for working conditions in relation to mental health in the journalism profession. During natural disasters, some journalists reported compartmentalizing or pushing down their emotions to focus on their work (Dworznic-Hoak, 2020; Perreault, Hackett & Handler, 2024). Other studies reflect that emotions are not so much suppressed - but rather deferred; this carries serious mental health implications for the journalists impacted by emotional labor (Hopper & Huxford, 2015). Indeed, "the use of avoidant emotional strategies could aggravate reporters' feelings of exhaustion and cynicism," (Guo, 2022, p.18). Research

suggests that men and women journalists emotionally respond in divergent ways - with women visual journalists displaying emotional investment and men visual journalists emotional management. Both genders mostly reported using informal techniques to deal with the emotional labor of the job as opposed to more formal emotion management strategies (Thomson, 2021). Race can also define how journalists deal with the emotional labor of the job – with Black journalists understanding the intense demands of the job through the lens of their racial identity – which suggests that Black journalists don't have the privilege of removing their race from their work (Singleton, 2023). COVID - 19 exacerbated existing labor concerns within journalism, with almost, almost 60% of journalists receiving no workplace support during the pandemic (Hoak, 2023; Perreault, Hackett & Handler, 2024). For example, British political journalists indicated that the lack of a physical newsroom, combined with more informal conditions like socialization in the field, contributed to anxiety, frustration, loneliness, and nerves surrounding work (Simunjak, 2022). The pandemic also offered longstanding implications for the field, re-shaping the working expectations of the field (Audette-Longo & Alexiou, 2024).

Precarity, associated with feelings of uncertainty or unpredictability, is especially prominent within the journalism field. Some studies suggest that factors of precarity are linked to factors like age, gender, work relationship, and the media used (Rick, 2024). According to Rick and Hanitzsch, the level of precarity an individual journalist experiences is subject to their circumstances, “When examining precarity in journalism from a subjective perspective, one will categorize journalists who do not assess their situation as insecure because they value freedom, autonomy, and flexibility or because they can rely on other compensating factors, such as financial support,” (p. 212 - 213, 2023; Perreault, Ferrucci & Ficara, 2024). Other studies done on the subject of precarity support these ideas – with female journalists expressing difficulty advancing in the workplace and feeling seen professionally by their employers (Hackett, Tavares & Perreault, 2024; Melin and Wiik, 2024). In the exploration of both established and aspiring

freelance journalists, precarity was found in the struggle to make a decent living (Hayes & Silke, 2019). Some journalists found that accepting periods of precarity allowed them to become more focused on the civic duty of being a journalist in today's society (Nölleke, et al., 2022). Additionally, student journalists are especially subject to precarity. Sethusa looks at questions of "newsroom" practice in students and what happens when there are no newsrooms to graduate into after graduation: "respondents pointed out that the constant instability in the industry makes for increased stress and anxiety" (Sethusa, 2024, p.12). The digitalization of the journalism industry since COVID-19 has contributed to the precarity in the journalistic field. The entrepreneurial spirit that journalism often requires can only be sustained by students with the finances and the time to do so (Trimithiotis & Stavrou, 2023). Some students are pursuing degrees in potentially more lucrative industries, and those who prioritize job security were found more likely to pursue a career in public relations (Mellado and Scherman, 2017). When it comes to actually being in the workforce - discrepancies between expectations and experience showed a correlation between unmet job expectations in conjunction with job dissatisfaction (Lee, 2024). Dissatisfaction with the job was also found in other factors including deadlines, work-life balance, and job hours but did not seem to be the driving factor out of the workforce (Reinhardt, 2009).

RQ 1: How does resilient joy allow journalists to cope with difficult working expectations?

RQ 2: How does humor help journalists manifest other forms of joy?

Method

To address the research questions, this research team collected interviews with 21 US journalists. The United States is certainly not the only site where journalists manifest joy, but it is perhaps an ideal location with which to study this; journalists themselves have faced particularly acute cases of precarity, even as they have been accepted to perform happiness in lifestyle specialties and separate their emotions from their work in hard news

(Belair-Gagnon et al., 2024). In this way, the United States perhaps reflects an exaggerated case of needing to manifest joy amidst challenging circumstances (Perreault, 2023).

Interviews were semi-structured and lasted approximately 50 minutes. In the interview questionnaire, journalists were asked about a range of topics--their emotional labor, audience hostility, experiences with adaptation, and their experience with the eight pillars of joy (Lama, Tutu, and Abrams, 2016). For the purposes of this study, we focus on joy, and emotional labor within the field. Sample questions on labor include “What is the most labor-intensive reporting you do?”, “Is it possible to disconnect from your work? How so?”, and “How do you manage the work expectations for your job?”; sample questions on journalism and joy included “Are there experiences in journalism that have humbled you? If so, what are those things?”, “Do you see humor in your job?” and “What are the parts of your job that you find humor in?”. Questions were guided by the interview questionnaire from other studies on journalists’ working experiences (Perreault & Belair-Gagnon, 2024; Perreault & Mellado, 2024). Interviews were collected until the research team determined that an appropriate *information power* had been achieved (Malterud et al. 2016),

Interviews were conducted by trained research students in the United States. Journalists were identified broadly, reflecting a range of specialties and locations across the United States; journalists were defined as those who report and disseminate information on timely topics (Fröhlich, Koch, and Obermaier, 2013). In this way, the sample aimed to present the “widest possible perspectives possible within the range specified by their purpose” (Koerber and McMichael 2008, p. 464).

Interviews were auto-transcribed through video recording software (e.g. Microsoft Teams) and then transcriptions were checked against the original recording for accuracy. Transcription data was then organized and read completely by the research team. Analysis followed a standard ground theory-style approach (Glasser et al., 1968) with open coding--in which all

data was read and notes were taken on emerging themes, axial coding-in which the research team compared their themes, synthesized them and then reread the data to code for the emergence of these themes, and then finally, selective coding-in which the research team read the data in order to find the quotes that best reflected the themes from the data. Following data analysis, one of the authors engaged in member checking to ensure data quality and clarity from participants.

All of this was done in accordance with University of South Florida Institutional Review Board ethics approval #00667.

During the open coding of questions drawn from the eight pillars of joy, the authors identified three clusters of joyful experience that broadly operate in particular ways within the work experience. We identified Introspective Joy, reflected in acceptance and forgiveness, as joy experienced through an individual's internal self-reflection; Altruistic Joy, reflected in generosity, gratitude and compassion, as others-oriented joy; and finally, Resilient Joy, reflected in humility, perspective and humor, as joy manifested in order to cope with the challenges of daily life. Given the focus on humor in working experiences, this last form of joy will be the primary focus of this study. Furthermore, we will argue that humor plays a central role within resilient joy in motivating journalists' coping mechanisms.

Resilient joy as coping with work expectations

In response to RQ 1, "How does resilient joy allow journalists to cope with difficult working expectations?", resilient joy, particularly through humor, helps journalists manage tough work demands by fostering stronger connections with colleagues, offering emotional release, and enabling them to adapt to increasing pressures over time. But first it's worth acknowledging what our participants felt they needed to prove resilient *from*. This approach establishes a clearer context for understanding how resilient joy, especially through humor, helps journalists navigate these challenges.

Journalists recognized the importance of release in their profession; that “having days off and taking breaks for myself” (Journalist 2) and “getting away and making that time for your mental health and more importantly your family” (Journalist 7) helps maintain a work-life balance. However, the realities of many participants’ lives were far from this ideal. Due to the anxiety that someone else might perform better as a substitute, Journalist 13 was unable to take vacations. Similarly, Journalist 3 misses long weekends during Thanksgiving and Christmas while others enjoy time off, and he worked instead of attending his mother’s birthday celebration. One sports reporter (Journalist 9) sold her home in Queens and lived in a hotel during the professional baseball season to cover the New York Yankees. Journalists cited the nature of their work, which requires them to stay informed 24 hours a day, as a reason for the difficulty in maintaining the work-life balance necessary to manage difficult job expectations. Journalism is “almost a profession where we’re working around the clock almost 24 hours a day” (Journalist 5), as there is “something you’re following or news could break at any time” (Journalist 6). As a result, journalists “have to be always aware, have our notifications on social media and different other news alert feeds, 24 hours a day” (Journalist 17). Journalists are “like always having to be plugged in” (Journalist 15), fearing “you’re going to miss something” (Journalist 15). Even on off days, “I always try to stay on top of what’s happening in my area” (Journalist 19). Some journalists do not view this as challenging; instead, they (Journalist 5, 6, 13, 15, 16) see the inability to disconnect from work as an inevitable part of being a journalist. One journalist (14) argued that “now,” given that she is not married and does not have children, is a time when she can blur the lines between work and life—implying that this may differ later.

That said, some journalists, who cover beats they are passionate about, such as sports (Journalist 16) and environmental issues (Journalist 21), do not consider it work at all.

Amongst each other, like our coworkers, we sometimes have to laugh through the pain. If the workload is pretty crazy or if we’re having a

hectic week with the news just going off, and everyone's trying to catch their breath, there's a lot of internal joking around. We all find solace in each other. (Journalist 21)

One sports journalist (Journalist 9) said that on days when she had to wake up at 4 a.m. to catch a flight, "you have to have a sense of humor about it." She noted, her favorite place was the baseball press box, in that "the press box where you had familiarity. I had the person. I sat next to whatever game, and we had our little jokes, and it was just... we had fun." Journalist 7 reflected on their newsroom as a place of joy where reporters, editors, and designers all worked together and "there was always banter. There was a lot of back and forth, a lot of camaraderie. It was just great going to the newsroom." Another participant (Journalist 3) said that "there's just the camaraderie when you're doing something" in a situation where "everybody's sacrificing together."

Despite working in a newsroom often filled with tension due to covering crime, serious injuries or deaths, and breaking news on tight deadlines, the journalists' effort makes it possible that "we're always laughing, I am going to laugh today" (Journalist 11). They emphasized that "there's humor. If you make it a priority, make it part of it" (Journalist 14) and "you just always gotta find laughter and the darkness for sure" (Journalist 16).

Several participants mentioned that joy was the driving force that kept them moving forward, even in the challenging circumstances of journalism and tough work expectations. A participant (1) stated "that's what I found when I've been doing this. It's just so much joy and looking forward to doing it and not getting tired of it." A journalist (13) with over 20 years of experience in radio mentioned that two women she co-hosted a sports program with served as her mentors. She stated, "They let me know that you can be a pretty girl and talk sports, have a sense of humor, and keep up with the boys. It can all happen. They were helping me, all of that leads me to where I am." A broadcast journalist (16) mentioned a difficult time when she was stripped of his press credentials by a sports team due to a serious mistake

in her reporting and interviewing. She said, “I was just grateful for the team around me,” and added, “They said, ‘Hey, everybody messes up, everybody makes mistakes. Just learn from it.’ That’s how they helped me navigate that situation and become a better journalist afterward.”

Journalists navigate the challenges of demanding work expectations by fostering resilient joy, often through humor, as a coping mechanism that helps them manage stress and maintain camaraderie in the newsroom.

Humor as a bolster for resilient joy

Humor offers the opportunity to bolster other forms of joy and in this dataset, we saw that it helped journalists manifest perspective on news events they were reporting on as well as their news work.

Journalists were able to find humor on the job when working with multiple different kinds of news events, this allowed them to gain, and offer, a larger perspective through their reporting. For instance, finding the perspective that might not be for the viewer’s eye when it comes to coverage, “There’s always humor. Now, I might not report on the humor, but something in the background, you know, something off the record, whatever” (Journalist 15). In this way, behind-the-scenes humor becomes accessible, though not explicit, in storytelling. Journalists also used humor as a way to change pace from the beat they were covering – finding news events that shifted their reporting styles. For instance, Journalist 10 said that humor helped them find side stories that may not have been the main focus of what brought them on the scene – and how nice it is to cover something other than “COVID-19 or the president.” To analyze this critically, it is important to recognize just how humor changed the game – by bringing joy to the journalist. The humor perspective can be just as critical to the power behind excellent reporting. The person being the story wants to find joyous perspectives in the news, just as the audience does, “We’re not always reporting on the negatives of life even though it may appear that way to our audiences” (Journalist 7). When it came to the perception of the people featured in the

stories, many journalists found it refreshing to see humor reflected in their sources. Sports journalists in particular were pleased, “Ohhh, my gosh, I think it’s really funny because a lot of these players that we interview have very interesting personalities,” (Journalist 1). Journalist 1 went on to say that being humorous helped sources open up, giving both the journalist and the interviewee the pleasure of being able to laugh on the job. This kind of back-and-forth was also reported by Journalist 11, who found humor power in the ability to watch a baseball game and establish repertoire with the players. Similarly, Journalist 19, shared a humorous memory of working on a story that featured new “streaker” laws, which prevented fans from running across the field without any clothes on. In the sample for this study, each journalist was able to recall a humorous moment that stood out to them, and associate it with a news event. In this way, humor offers not just positive affect, but helps offer scope that makes even mundane news events memorable. Humorous ties between storyteller and source were a powerful driving force in the recollection of each journalist.

Finally, news work was improved by the presence of humor in the newsroom among colleagues, and was even experienced by journalists in more precarious positions. As a journalist, it is vital to be able to laugh at the ways stories can shift in the blink of an eye. To Journalist 7, it is important that those in the workforce know when to laugh and when to take the work seriously, “Yeah, I would say there’s humor. You just have to be able to practice discretion about what’s funny and what’s not funny.” In this way, the newsroom became a safe place for journalists to express what they found funny, “Every day it was absolutely hilarious because of the people I work with, they’re incredibly bright. The stress has a tendency to work in one direction or the other. It can either make you angry or miserable, or it can bring out the humorous side of things” (Journalist 5). The stress of the work is mentioned in many of the journalists’ responses – with Journalist 13 expressing how “finding levity” during the difficult times was vital to the work and Journalist 7 conveying how finding humor allows journalists to express their “human side.”

Taken together, it's imperative to see that journalists are constantly trying to reclaim power within a field that is prone to burn out, cynicism, and emotional distress. Humor is a way to navigate news events and look at news work with a positive lens. Finding the good in the bad, laughing with coworkers, and focusing on the stories that make them smile drives the work to inspire a new kind of perspective – the one that comes from cracking a smile. Journalist 15 put it best, “What brings me joy about my job is – we're always laughing, right?”

Discussion

As with journalists responding to hurricanes with the sharing of humor to lighten the mood, the journalists in this study argued that resilient joy allowed them to respond to crisis with perspective and manage the pressures of crisis with grace.

In regards to RQ 1, resilient joy allows journalists to cope with difficult work environments and expectations, through bridging connection and engagement with colleagues. In regards to RQ 2, humor offers an aspect of resilient joy that serves to bolster other forms of joy—in particular granting perspective on their work and humility regarding their experiences.

Finding and keeping moments of happiness during somewhat bleak times allows journalists the motivation to stay in the newsroom. Through resilient joy, journalists are able to maintain an emotional engagement with the profession and their community (Henderson, 2017). This study highlights the substantial role humor in particular plays within resilient joy and in bolstering joy more broadly.

Journalism can be taxing due to long hours and stressful due to frequent emphasis on negative news. It can eventually take a toll on those charged with reporting on the news, whether it be depression or disengagement from the public whom journalists strive to inform. Through this “joy as a news value” theory (Parks, 2021), humor operates as a pivotal pillar on which journalists in the newsroom can rely in order to maintain a positive

frame of mind. Resilient joy remains key to mitigating negative affective states and keeping a positive mood (Zillman, 1988), as the comments from the journalists reflect.

The journalists interviewed reaffirmed the value of humor as a coping mechanism. As the journalists discussed, they needed relief from excess time spent on the job without time for themselves (Bossio et al., 2024; Simunjak, 2022). Because so many were not able to spend ample time with their families or take holidays off due to the nature of their jobs, they had to find a release elsewhere. Since they were often covering dark topics such as crime, serious injury, and death, they needed to find relief: humor offered an avenue to help them overcome the perils of a stressful working environment (Ivask, 2017).

Job expectations often result in journalists suppressing, or deferring, their emotions which has detrimental impacts on mental health due to this emotional labor (Hopper & Huxford, 2015). However, the interviews showed that because they are able to, or have no other choice but to, joke in the newsroom, they are able to release tension and stress which allows them to feel resilient joy and a sense of job satisfaction (Waznor et al., 2005; Morreall, 2008). Several journalists alluded to not taking time to focus on themselves, however perhaps through the use of humor, they were able to foster a sense of well-being, again providing a sense of relief (Edwards & Martin, 2010, Ford et al., 2016; McGhee, 2010).

Another theme that emerged was camaraderie in the newsroom. Humor plays such a strong role in the solidification of relationships and helps create and maintain relationships (Henderson, 2017). As several journalists alluded to, there was constant banter in the newsroom and a sense of community, a sense of *sacrificing together*. That sacrifice is often made possible due to the use of humor: “You...gotta find laughter” (Journalist 16). Finding laughter helps journalists move through challenges both external and internal in order to fulfill their normative obligations.

However, that camaraderie was not limited to those working together in the newsroom. Humor, and the joy that resulted from the use of that humor, allowed for richer engagement between journalists and the public they sought to inform (Jandura & Friedrich, 2014; Papacharissi, 2015; Wahl-Jorgensen, 2019). Seeing humor outside of the newsroom and from those they interview helped to build bonds and helped sources to be more open, journalists perceived, thus allowing resilient joy to build and provide a richer journalistic experience.

As Perreault (2023) reasoned, the opportunity to serve the audience was a strong motivator for journalists to enter the field, however this study shows that resilient joy can be a persuasive factor in keeping them there. A strong argument can be made that humor and the resilient joy it brings makes journalism better by making journalists better, thus making resilient joy an essential component of what helps maintain the process of journalism.

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