

ISOJ 2022: Day 2

Panel: Mental health and the wellbeing of journalists in an era of online harassment, extreme polarization, denialism and pandemic

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- [Valerie Belair-Gagnon](#), director, Minnesota Journalism Center, University of Minnesota
 - [Elana Newman](#), McFarlin Professor of Psychology, University of Tulsa, research director, Dart Center for Journalism and Trauma
 - [Luisa Ortiz Pérez](#), executive director & cofounder, Vita-Activa.org
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Avery Holton Thank you, everyone. There we go. I still want to know how you got these videos. Like I was watching the video, I feel like you did some good sleuthing there. Thank you, everybody, for being here. And we know folks will be coming back in from the break. We really appreciate the opportunity for today's panel. And we also want to acknowledge Rosental, and Mallary, and Amy, and Ian, and all of those folks who helped to organize the panel and are giving space and acknowledgment to what we feel like is a really important issue. Before we start, as a panel, there are a couple of things that we want to convey for the audience. One is that we know this is a very important issue, but also one that might raise a mix of emotions, reactions, feelings. We acknowledge that and want everyone to feel safe in expressing whatever may come. So if you have questions, please put those on Twitter, or if you're joining us virtually, add those in via I think it's a Google Doc. And we'll have those for you. If you're here and you want to get up and move about, please do that as well. That's what we're here for, and we want to have that space. The second is, again, as other panels have done today, we want to acknowledge that many of us as former journalists, are the journalists in Ukraine and in that region, and what they're experiencing. We want to acknowledge those who have been lost and also those who are still there. And then to acknowledge the panelists, as we said today, the journalists that we've lost in coverage this year. The third thing that we want to remind folks again is that we are here to have an open dialog. And so we will go through a Q&A, a structured Q&A, with our panelists who will introduce themselves each with a question that we prepared ahead of time. And then after that, we'll have dialog for the audience. With that, I'll provide some opening remarks and then we'll get to our questions.

So I want to start with a very simple question for the audience, and it's one that, at least in the U.S. we use sometimes as a question of endearment, or when we see each other passing each day. And we don't always expect an answer. And that question is, how are you? How really are you today in this moment? It's an important question that we can ask ourselves, but that we all agree, at least on the panel, that we should be asking of our journalists, and that news organizations should be asking as well. And it comes at an important time, as you saw with our last panel, but throughout ISOJ this weekend and well beyond. The journalists very publicly now are asking us and asking news organizations to ask them intentionally, how are you? We've seen, especially in the past two or three years, journalists exiting the field in very public ways. And in fact, some of the news organizations that are here at ISOJ have acknowledged this, that journalists have left and said on

Twitter, or on TikTok, or on Instagram, their reasons for leaving the field, the profession. Those include issues of harassment, chronic, escalatory harassment, burnout, anxiety, a lack of support from news organizations. And some of that leads back to the question, how are you? It's a simple question to ask, but it's one that's very complex, and nuanced, and challenging in some cases. And today we hope that our panel helps open up room for that question and encourages news organizations, and in fact, each other to ask that question: how are you? How really are you? With that, I want to start with our first question that will go to Valerie, and the question is what is mental health and wellness look like for journalists and news organizations? And how are news organizations responding?

Valerie Belair-Gagnon Thank you for your question, Avery. So one of the things that I want to talk about before I start answering this question is that this is not a new, what we're talking about. It's something that's been happening a lot for a long time, but it has been exacerbated by digital media polarization and everything that is happening in society today. And also everything that I'm talking about is actually building on "giants," to use Danielle Kilgore, one of my colleague's expression. There's a lot of people who've been doing work on that topic for many years, from nonprofits, to researchers, to for profit. And even we saw during the conference this week that there is also a lot of people that have been doing good work, like at the Dallas Morning News. The work that Avery, and I, and other colleagues have done has two main components. First one is that we've realized that there's a lack of a systematic approach in journalism. And the other part of it is that digital media polarization has led to a lot of new practices in journalism that are not acknowledged today, that is some sort of an invisible labor that should lead us to think about changing the culture in our newsroom. And I'll give an example to that later on. But mostly our research, which was based in the U.S., saw that journalists were talking about how news organizations were using mostly an individual approach. Some very problematic comments that we've learned about. Like people said that editors tell journalists to go do yoga, go have a glass of wine. Also, a lot of the resources in news organization were mostly acute harassment. They were given little time off. They were encouraged to seek therapy, rely on other people who experienced similar issues, which leads to another kind of burden to the people who are experiencing mental health and well-being issues. And journalists also talked about adapting their content and their approach, which may lead to self-censorship. So essentially what we were seeing in the research was that there was not a lot of system-level intervention. By that we're talking about a rethinking of policy and procedures, like experimental training, like role play or videos.

And the second part of the question, which is something that we're going to see in a book that is soon to be published with the University of Illinois Press, is all of this work related to digital media and branding that is not recognized. And one of it is the process of disconnecting. When you're disconnecting from social media because you can't afford it anymore. So disconnection can go from completely disconnecting from social media to tactics like blocking or muting on Instagram. I'm sure a lot of us have done that before when we were tired of seeing someone post. And that comes with a certain privilege to disconnect. Not everybody can disconnect. There's a lot of factors that can affect that. But what we have found in the research is that there is a need to create intentional spaces for strategic forms of disconnection, and also to recast journalism practice with the changing medium political context, social, political context. So I'm a sociologist. I always think about these issues from the perspective of culture. And the truth is, also as an educator, and I'm seeing students coming into and trying to find jobs in journalism, we cannot think that students are going to try to adapt to an environment that is toxic, and that could potentially be toxic for them. We have to adapt to them and to the sociopolitical context in which we are.

Avery Holton All right. Thank you, Valerie. And other panelists, please chime in as you will.

Elana Newman I just want to echo what you're saying from a little bit of a different historical perspective, and that of psychology. So when I started doing this work, I was looking at journalists as first on the scene, and thinking about other first responders or first-on-the-scene folks, and the kinds of services they were getting when they were exposed to traumatic events. And really thinking about it again as what is the industry standard in other fields, and how do you help people who are at risk for mental health problems? I think that since that point, we're talking about two things, and we slip into them. One is talking about preventing occupational health problems, just like with ergonomics, just like all the kinds of things you would have that are part of the job, and occupational sort of standard of care, duty of care. Then I think there's another element about mental well-being, and we need to be thinking both about mental health problems, as well as promoting wellness, and promoting positivity, and promoting ways of keeping journalists in the field doing the wonderful work that you're all doing. And thinking about those as related but separately.

Luisa Ortiz Pérez And probably just to the crowd, this pavlova, this meringue of advice, I would say it's important to normalize that it's okay not to be okay. This culture of radical boasting of "I'm so burnt out." "No, you're more burnt out than me." "No, you're more burnt out." It's something that we really need to dismantle. And it's important to be able to express that without repercussions or backlash from colleagues, from our employers, and even from our family members. So, yeah, radical transparency.

Avery Holton And Hannah, I know you're joining us virtually. Is there anything you'd like to add?

Hannah Storm No, I'd just echo what Lu said there about this fact that I think we have this kind of cloak of resilience. And it's really important to acknowledge that journalists, by and large, are resilient. But I think there's this kind of macho sense that actually we have to be strong, and we can't possibly admit vulnerability. And I think the key thing is actually reframing and acknowledging that sometimes vulnerability can be a strength. And it's really important to kind of say, as we said, some days it's okay to admit you're not okay. The reason I'm not with you is because I had an issue at home with my family, and that meant that I was not okay. So I had to stay in the U.K. and join you from here, so I think it's really important to normalize that as Lu has said.

Elana Newman Thank you for modeling it, Hannah.

Hannah Storm Thank you.

Avery Holton Thank you, Hannah. And I wanted to add too, just before we move on to the next question, in the research that Valerie and I have conducted, where we've interviewed journalists here in the U.S. and found by and large that women journalists and journalists of color are the most harassed almost on a daily basis, one of the journalists told us something that I thought was poignant, and stuck with me, and has stuck with me. And she said for so long she was worried about going to her editor to talk about the harassment she was experiencing because she felt she would be stigmatized, or she would be told, you know, "buck up, be braver, be a better journalist." And when she finally took that step and finally had, I guess, the courage to go in and talk with her editor, her editor told her to

go have a glass of wine with another woman journalist. And that was the response. That was the offer. That was the support for her. And that was the palliative care that she received. And it's really stuck with me not just because it's one story, but because it's a story of many. And we're hearing it more and more often. So I'm glad that we're having conversations that can help destigmatize, just being able to approach one another, but also the organizations that we work for to talk about these issues. And with that, I think our next question fits right in. What are the main issues in mental health and wellness for journalists, and why is now the time to care?

Luisa Ortiz Pérez You asked me this question as you're dropping the patriarch bomb on the table. Now when I say I was discussing this with María Alvarado, this is personal, my friends. It is personal, and it's important. So I want to say two things before I just really squeezed my brains to be very brief. So I'm going to make two statements, and explain to you why in the individual and the collective level, mental health is important and the time is now. So two provisos. Proviso one. I'm sorry for my throat. Journalists are humans. Journalists' rights are human rights. Yeah. This is the moment where you clap. So when we call for media professionals to show up, we need to expect, and this is Steve Jobs. When Steve Jobs was trying to populate Apple, he calls on to interview engineers, and he says in his biography, and people showed up. So, yes, we are people. We are humans. And we show up in the newsroom as our full selves. All of this, the perfections and imperfections, my intersectionality, my age, my weight, my political views, all of that is what I bring to the table, and it is my forte. And second, whatever context or whatever stressor is going on in the environment, you're going to suck it in because you're a journalist, and that's what you do. I'm looking at Rosental. We look at the environment, and that's how we report. So if there's tension, if there's racism, you're going to feel it in your heart. You're going to feel it in your body. We need to find paths to heal. So schematically, mental health manifests in the individual. And I made very good notes here. When we show us our full selves, we are putting on the table the very big notion of objectivity. And in this conference we've been discussing how objectivity can, should, needs, and ought to be questioned, and also supplemented with other qualities in our toolkit. So let's be very conscious of the fact that I can be objective in my brain, but my stomach, my sleep, my heart, my partner, my friends, my colleagues are not. So when I am stressed, when I am depressed, when I'm sad, I am not going to be able to hide it. I'm not going to be able to control it. And it's going to see through my work. So we need to tackle, and we need to do it, second point, collectively. You spoke about the newsroom. The newsroom is the place where we sleep with the enemy. The newsroom is the place of micro-aggression. The newsroom is a space of harassment. The newsroom is a space of discrimination, and is the space where they teach us that we need to grow a thick skin because that's part of the job. Watch out. We're coming to the newsroom to change the culture. And third, and I'm closing. They said the time to be able to understand that in a newsroom, you can have probably five generations. At the Times, there's people who are Boomers, and there's people who are Gen Z. Not everybody's going to need the same tools to take care of their mental health because we all have different connections to our bodies and our spaces. So our approaches are differentiated, are multidimensional. Son de multilinguajes y son geniales. And I'm going to stop here.

Valerie Belair-Gagnon Adding another kind of a more media management perspective. And to a serious question, how much money do you spend on retention? How much money do you spend on hiring? How many people have left because of mental health issues? How much do you spend on the new program, and how hard is it to hire new talent? So these are all my question that I think that at the end of the day actually also affect the bottom line. And it should be about putting the human being and human rights

first, but it is also in the mind of managers affecting their bottom line. And it's contributing to the crisis of journalism, too.

Hannah Storm Could I just pick up on something Lu said, if that's okay? And my heart goes out to you, Lu. I want to hug you. You're my friend. And what you said there was just so powerful. I could feel it in my body and every bit of my being. I launched a podcast recently with Headlines, the organization I've just set up, and in it we say journalists aren't robots. I think it's really important to remind ourselves that journalists are not robots. We're human beings, and journalism cannot exist without journalists. And so we need to protect the most precious resource of journalism, which is journalists. And we need to recognize, as Lu has said, that these are human beings. And as I think it was Valerie, I can't see you, so I'm trying to figure out the voice is based on the names, but I think as Valerie just mentioned, the bottom line, it's an icky thing to talk about sometimes in terms of the kind of the cost, and the kind of money that we're spending, and the money we're losing. But it's really, really important that we invest in this conversation, that we invest in this conversation the way we've been investing in physical safety conversations for the past decade or so, and that we do everything we possibly can to follow the kind of paths that my colleagues have just spoken about in terms of trying to change that culture and create a space where everybody, no matter what we look like, our perspective, where we come from, who we are, how we identify, feels safe to be able to share our experiences of mental health. Because I strongly believe if we can do that, then journalism benefits. Journalism gets better when we are better.

Elana Newman Absolutely. And I'll just chime in, Hannah, and agree with you and even push it further. We were just talking about media freedom. This is a freedom of the press issue. Mental health is a freedom of the press issue. If we don't have healthy folks, we don't have a healthy media.

Avery Holton And I think maybe that leads into our next question, Elena, which is what advice can you provide that comes from psychological science about how to promote well-being, occupational health, resiliency and recovery for journalists exposed to trauma and also to different, difficult working situations?

Elana Newman I'm going to answer that, but I'm going to go off script for just a second and invite everyone on Zoom, if they're comfortable, to type in a piece of advice they have for their colleagues. And I'm going to give tables one minute to give a piece of advice to the person next to them, and then I'll answer the question. So I'm going to count for 60. Turn to somebody and give a piece of advice about how to stay healthy, engaged, happy. And then I'll answer it. I'm going to bring you back in just a minute. All right. So I think this is really important, and I wanted to get people talking because we need to break the silence about this. And I'm not necessarily, I am an expert in this area, but you are all experts. You are the journalists. You know what's important. And thank you those of you, I couldn't see it on Zoom, who are also engaging with your colleagues, because that's what we need to be doing consistently. So I'll tell you my advice coming from the psychological literature, and I want to start by saying again that I think wellness is different from resiliency, which is bouncing back after you've done some things, which is different from recovery. And all of those are all possible.

But I'll start with wellness. What are the things that we know from science and from psychological science that keep people well? One of the things that my colleagues were just talking about is having a validating environment, having an environment that validates your pain. And more and more, through the last two days, I've been thinking about the fact

that being a journalist in the U.S. Context, I'll start with that, has become more and more invalidating in this period of time. And there's always been issues of press freedom, but I think across the world there is now an assault on the press. And it's being felt in every fiber from online harassment onwards, and they're just more toxins. And that's why it's more important than ever for us to respond as organizations. So a validating environment, and I think my colleagues can talk about that more from the organizational perspective. But the organizations need to provide support and resources on all of these things. Training, safety, psychological safety, mentoring. We're losing mentoring just because people are spread so thin. We need those kinds of things. We need boundaries as individuals, whether that's technical boundaries, whether it's boundaries of making space to have time to play. We need exercise. We need to be physically active and healthy in our bodies. And you could maybe talk more about that. We need to have meaning and purpose. Now, I am not a journalist, but I've walked aside. I call myself a journalist ally. You have one of the most important jobs, and I think we're seeing right now what happens when you don't exist. We were just talking about that. The need for accurate information is what makes the world go round. It's what helps citizens like me. Your job is so important, and I think we need to continue to remind you. And you need to continue to remind yourselves what your mission is, and your organizations need to do that. And I'll also mention that one of the biggest things that organizations can do is say "good work." A manager saying, "good work, great job" can go a long way.

And I also think something we've mentioned already, having transparent and effective policies to deal with the stressors and many of them are dangerous, are really important. From the resiliency side of things, I've already talked about mission and purpose being important, social support being really important. And I'll just ask you to think about a time you felt really supported by a colleague. I'd encourage you to do that to your colleagues. Usually I spend a half hour doing an exercise like that. I'm thinking about your signature strengths. I've been admiring you all week, thinking about how curious all of you are, the quality of the questions you ask, your willingness to learn. How can you use your signature strengths to improve your organization and to improve your own life? One other thing I want to mention is that people who are resilient tend to have a moral compass. So journalistic ethics, keeping ethical. And we've been talking about ethical issues. Being an ethical journalist is in itself a way to stay resilient. Having resilient role models, all of the managers and editors here. And at a personal level, being connected to something bigger, whether that's religion, spirituality, or a sense of purpose. The other things we've already talked about. I think we need to reduce stigma about mental health in general, and I also think stigma about emotions. Often I hear journalists not talking about emotions until you're talking about your audience. And when I train clinical students to do interviews with their clients, we talk about how emotions affect the interview process and how to respond to it. But in journalistic training, we don't start talking about emotions until we're talking about our presentation to the audience. And I think that an entire look at emotional labor and emotions earlier on will be helpful. Stronger policies I've talked about, and then access to therapy and health. And I think those are a whole list of things very quickly. Then I'll let my colleagues add on to it.

Luisa Ortiz Pérez I am so happy that we're sitting side by side because we need the community too. Shout out to my community, the Coalition Against Online Violence, the Vita-Activa crew, todos los que nos escuchan, everybody who is online. Shout out to you all because we don't do this on our own. Big clap if you want. This is again, we love you all. ISOJ'ers, we see you, and you are not alone. And yeah, it's personal, but it's also collective. What about the newsroom?

Valerie Belair-Gagnon I'm in my head right now because I'm listening to your thoughts, and I'm kind of learning as well. But I'll say that from the emotional part was really interesting because I think we started seeing that more in newsrooms. The research has shown that. There's a huge, vast area of research in journalism studies about emotion in journalism in the past ten years. It's starting to appear as well in job searches, and like you see that editors are asking people to have more empathy. So I think it looks like that is that part. It's moving along a little bit more, but you need to have this system around it to support it.

Elana Newman Yeah, empathy requires skills and not skills that are necessarily taught as part of it. To also respond to this idea of community, formal peer support networks are happening more and more. And again, they're structures that are formal and created to supplement natural communities. And I think we're seeing that more and more in industries as a possibility. And people are paid to do social support. It's not extra work. It's work that is compensated. And I think that's also important that we not put the burden of dealing with this on people who are burdened, and it is also done in consultation with experts so that people are not carrying the load.

Avery Holton Right, and I would add again from our research with journalist, and then Hannah, I'll see if you have a comment too. One of the things that we've heard from some journalist is when they are bringing up mental health, emotions, well-being, those sorts of questions are often directed to H.R., Human Resources, which in a Western sense, or at least in the U.S., H.R. helps us with our 401Ks, sets up, you know, our insurance, and then moves us along. H.R. representatives are not mental health and wellness experts. They are not therapists. They are not people in general who can guide us anywhere other than back to our insurance or to life-oriented claims. So one of the positive things that's come from our research is finding beyond human resources what resources are in the newsroom. And these typically, at least those that are successful, are trained experts in areas of mediation and of just mental health and wellness. They are there on the ground to be a resource for journalists to talk to, to engage with, and then to find other resources if necessary.

Elana Newman And I would add that there need to be experts for PTSD, specifically, because journalists are at risk. They're actually quite resilient, but they are at risk for PTSD. And not all mental health therapists are prepared to treat PTSD either, or to understand journalistic culture. And we've been doing some work at the Dart Center, where we've been training trauma therapists on journalist culture so that they can understand the work environments that you're in, and I think that's also very important to build capacity on that end.

Hannah Storm Could I just pick up on what Elana has just said there about PTSD? So I had a diagnosis of complex PTSD. Well, there's no diagnosis of that in the UK, but complex PTSD I know exists in the States. But for years and years and years, well, I wasn't well. I couldn't find somebody who spoke my language. And by that, I mean the language of the journalism and the mental health that Elana has just mentioned. And I think it's really critical that a lot of the time that we can't find the help we need. We can't seek the help we need. We can't give ourselves permission to search out that help simply because there's a stigma, but there's also the reality that it doesn't exist outside of our world. And that's a really, really interesting thing to kind of contemplate. There's a lot more I want to say about things like empathy and leadership, but I wonder whether perhaps the question that you might be posing to me, Avery, might help me answer that as well.

Avery Holton Sure. Thanks. Thanks for the lead in. So, Hannah, how can we have a global or globalized approach to understand the differences across countries, and across newsrooms and media organizations when we are talking about mental health and wellness for journalists?

Hannah Storm I think a number of ways. I think I'd just like to take perhaps one backward step and just pick up on something we've said before about empathy. I think sometimes it's difficult to teach empathy, but I do think that one of the core things that makes journalism and good journalists effective is the empathy that we have with the people whose stories we amplify. And I think one of the issues we have is actually we very rarely turn that empathy on ourselves. And so I think if we were to use some of the tools that make us great journalists on ourselves to support our mental health, I think that's a really good first step. In terms of a global approach, I used to be the director of an organization called the International News Safety Institute, which was predominantly physical safety based. But what we did was we began conversations in global newsrooms that were, you know, competitive newsrooms, where we were able to pretty much for the first time, set aside competitive pressures and practices to talk about issues that really made a difference for us, in terms of when we came together, it made a difference for us to talk about this. So I would say that there can be an incredible solidarity in the community that we've heard within the newsrooms, but also the kind of global community as well.

There are a lot of different issues that cut across different countries and cultures and places. So we're not always kind of coming from the same place, but I think a kind of recognition that this needs to be a global conversation is really important. I think that the recognition that this conversation has to intersect with other conversations around safety. So it has to be that if we're talking about online violence and online harm, we're also talking about the emotional impact. If we're talking about physical safety, we're talking about the fact that if our mental wellbeing is not good enough, we might make decisions that can compromise our physical safety. And if we're talking about emotional well-being, and resilience, and emotional safety, and psychological safety, all of these things interconnect in terms of the other parts of the safety conversation, too. What I would like to say is globally, because I run regular industry conversations across the world with news organizations speaking about the challenges that news organizations are facing around mental health and well-being, and I hear similar stories, whether it's in Asia Pacific, whether it's in North America, whether it's in South America, whether it's in the Middle East or Africa. I hear similar conversations around things like people are exhausted. The pandemic has exacerbated preexisting pressures. That people are burned out as well, recognizing that is not a medical term in inverted commas. That people are struggling because managers are often not recognizing the burden that they are feeling. And managers themselves are struggling because they don't know how to start a conversation. And a lot of the time, managers feel they don't have the training in order to give them the confidence to approach somebody to say, exactly as you said at the start, Avery, "How are you? How are you, really?" And that's a really important thing I think that we can do globally is to join together in that conversation.

There's one other thing I'd just like to point at. And I'm looking down at my notepad, so please don't think I'm checking my WhatsApp or something. And it's two things, actually. It's the sense Elana made about validation. I speak with news organizations and people around the world who feel like they're not validated, who feel like they are so resource stretched that it's kind of cogs in a machine. And the journalists themselves are being treated in a way that they're not being valued and validated. I think it's really important to do that, to take time to pause, to recognize, as I said before, these are human beings. I

worry. And we heard before from Elana about this idea of the moral compass. I worry that people are experiencing, or at risk of experiencing, moral injury, the sense of guilt when we worry about the parameters of our journalism, when our boundaries become blurred, when the work that we're doing puts us in a situation where perhaps we might not have been in the past. And so I worry about that. But I do think that just back to the initial question, Avery, that sense of it is time. It's long past time, but it is time to have a conversation about mental health in a way that we have been having a conversation about physical health, and well-being, and safety probably really that came to the fore maybe 11, 12 years ago, and actually really start having this conversation about how we need to support our colleagues to be better. And that actually as Elana said before, this is an issue about media freedom. And when we talk about issues of media freedom, we're also talking about issues of democracy. Unless we support our journalists, perhaps it's somewhat of a leap, but unless we support our journalists globally to be able to feel safe, to speak, and share their experiences, then we're actually not being able to support media freedom. And we're actually potentially not being able to support democracy.

Luisa Ortiz Pérez I'm so happy with what you're saying, Hannah. And I want to say I push the envelope, I elevate what you say, and I raise the bet. It is time to move from wellness and well-being to welfare. This about labor rights, my friends. This is about negotiating our contracts. This is about getting what we need. And if it's not in cash, it's in time. And if it's not in time, it's in love. It's in kindness. We need to bring that into the conversation, especially because we are hurting. And we just heard a panel. It is very clear.

Elana Newman And I was also going to up it in a slightly different way, which is also thank you again, Hannah, is that I think in order to make organizations safe, we need to have organizational justice and policies. And a lot of the research that I've done has shown that the place that journalists are most likely to be sexually harassed is by their colleagues and their managers. And so as part of this, we need to clean up our own house, so to speak, and take care of these issues and address the microaggressions. So I like this term of welfare because in order to make it the safe spot to do what Hannah's suggesting, we need to truly have safe institutions. And then I want to add one more thing is we're also not talking about freelancers. And as we're talking about welfare and rights, we need to be thinking about those that don't have formal contracts, and that's part of this as well.

Hannah Storm Can I just pick up on that, what Elana said? I totally support what you've just said about freelancers, because often those who are most vulnerable, marginalized, are those who experience the biggest impacts on their mental health and well-being. While you were talking there about welfare, I kind of thought. I like playing with words and, you know, "welfare," and then you twist it around and it's "farewell." So you'd rather have welfare with the news journalists, than say farewell to our journalists. And I think that that's really, really important. I would just say that, you know, it's such a privilege to be here being part of this conversation, hearing this. But two things to be very, very brief. The first one is mental health in English starts with two letters, "me" and "m" "e." We have to prioritize ourselves. We have to give ourselves permission to look after ourselves. Because if we don't look after ourselves, nobody else is going to look after us. I mean, of course they are, but we have to start with us. Right. And maybe that sounds selfish. Too often I see in newsrooms people saying, "Oh, well, well, I can't. I can't say no, I can't say no." And actually, you can say "no." It's really liberating, really empowering, saying "no" sometimes. I speak as a woman of privilege. I recognize that, and I'm saying that now. But sometimes I think we scare ourselves into not saying no. And then my final point is we heard before from Elana about leadership, and this idea that some of time's the most egregious acts come from within the newsrooms. I still feel it is incumbent on news

managers and leaders to lead from the top. Too often we have seen toxic behavior. Too often we've been conditioned to accept that behavior and model that behavior back. Because the leadership in our newsrooms is not modeling the effective, empathetic behavior, the good practice, the communication, the empathy that we so badly need. So I'd say, leaders, it's up to us. It's up to you to lead from the top and also to listen, because it doesn't just go one way. It doesn't just go one way. We have to listen to those who are coming up and working with us to ensure that they feel supported as well.

Valerie Belair-Gagnon Actually, I have a question. So sorry to throw you a curveball, Avery, but we were talking about freelancers. We're talking about people who may not necessarily have power if they are a young journalists coming into the industry, people with various identities. We talked about women and people of color being affected by this, and we saw that in our research, especially in the case of harassment. And my question, I guess, is, and it's probably not as well formed because it just occurred to me, like what are we talking about in newsrooms right now, what are we doing with freelance, but also people who are not in large organizations? What can we do? What is your happiness suggestion? What is the way forward for people who might not have the power that a newsroom would have?

Avery Holton I think one of the things we can do, at least from, and this is my positionality, which I understand is much different, is to listen, acknowledge and then to offer action. Right. And in the cases that we've seen, and Valerie and I have been tracking a number of journalists who have exited the field publicly, again on Twitter and in other spaces, and having conversations around those within our research, and two fairly prominent cases of that happened here in Texas. I won't name the media outlet or outlets, but these were younger journalists who gave us all the clues we needed, who gave the news organizations all the clues they needed, who had fantastic jobs, even said they loved the reporting. They love journalism, but. And the "but" behind that was, I'm anxious. I'm burnt out. I want to disconnect, and I can't. I'm on 24/7. And I'm blending all of my personal and all of my professional, and I can't separate the two. I can't ask for support. Those are all clues that news organizations can take, especially for journalists who are saying them. And my guess is, and I don't want to speak for those journalists, that saying that publicly was difficult, and it probably was not the first time they had said it. They more than likely had said it to those around them and hopefully to leadership. And in at least one case, we saw a leadership response that also was public that essentially said "adios" to these folks. And we now have openings, publicly, a public response to that. And again, this is, you know, in our own backyard that we can see this. And in part, maybe it's time to call those folks out. You know, just because you have positionality, because you have power, because you have money coming in, that doesn't give you the right to be dismissive of the very people that you depend on.

Luisa Ortiz Pérez Wow. Well, we saw that gap three years ago. Yesterday, it was our anniversary. Vita-Activa is a helpline that we founded three years ago, and it's a peer support space where women, LGBTIQ folks, journalists, freedom of expression defenders can come free, confidential, and anonymously, using whichever way they want to come and talk to us. And we've been talking to, I mean, every day we talk to around 200 people through WhatsApp groups, Signal groups, Telegram groups. And what people tell us most oftentimes is, "I just want to tell you what's going on. Please listen to me. Escucha lo que te digo." A peer support network will not help people overcome, but they will help people build the muscle strength to be the owners of their narratives. If it's the narrative of your violence, if it is the narrative of your survival, it's also the narrative of your future. And that's why we all exist.

Avery Holton Okay. I think we can take some questions now from the audience, and I'll start with, I'll bounce around here. But this one is sort of a softball question. How can we access the research that you're doing, Valerie? Where can we access that, and what's coming?

Valerie Belair-Gagnon Oh, I love this softball. I have a website ValerieBelairGagnon.Com. You can email me as well vbg@umn.edu. And we also have a network that we started with Avery and two other faculty members, Claudia Mellado in Chile and Mark Deuze in Amsterdam, where we're trying to get scholars and practitioners together. It's called the Happiness Project to have more of these conversation and come up with more positive solutions, so that's another thing that I can add you to that list if you email me.

Elana Newman Can I add to this? So I've been looking at this coming more from the trauma perspective. One of the problems in this field is that there are so many people looking at this problem using different terminology and different fields. So once a year, the DART Center for Journalism and Trauma, we update a article database where we are trying to have a definitive gathering, at least of all the things that bear on trauma and journalism, which are happiness and wellness, because it is a very hard area. You always miss a scholar because we're coming at this from so many different directions. So if you look for the DART research base, it has right now 3000 articles located in it, and you can search by field.

Avery Holton That's a fantastic resource. And just to reiterate, if you'd like to be part of the Happiness Project in journalism, you can tweet at Valerie or I, and we'll add you to multiple lists. And then we have a growing international and globalized list of scholars where we've already hosted one informal conversation just connecting with each other's work. And as you mentioned, Elana, trying to understand how we're talking about things and how we can do that in a synergistic way. So we start learning from one another, but then opening up spaces like this to have conversation.

Valerie Belair-Gagnon We're going to add your list because I think the idea is that we love having more lists and having more people, so that there's visibility online. So we have a book project where it's going to be open access. And for us, the idea is to have as much visible conversation about this so that people don't feel that they're alone in that experience.

Avery Holton Okay. I'll ask another question from the audience. Journalists of color in the U.S. already face systemic issues on top of mental health issues in the workplace. What can employers do to better help their employees of color to process and care for their mental health in this context?

Luisa Ortiz Pérez I would like to ask this person, is the editor a person of color? And this a loaded question. Because it's going to be important to be able to mirror ourselves. I understand that, which I understand. I see myself in you. And it's super important to do that. Diversity, equity and inclusion are key.

Elana Newman Yeah, I agree with that. There are a few, I would say, groups that are supporting one another. There's a fund now for Black journalists, journalists of color, to support therapy. Also, the Asian American, this is again in the American context, the Asian Journalism Society has a fund that they've also sourced for helping at least getting

resources and some groups. But these are specific small not addressing the real problem in that way. They are emergency funds, and they're helpful. But we need the systemic changes. And I think that journalists of color who experience traumatic experiences or occupational stressors and microaggressions have double whammies that need to be addressed and need to be acknowledged.

Avery Holton I think, too, I'm learning both in my position at Utah, but through journalists in our community that people with positions of power or positionality, recognizing that positionality, and acknowledging that in response, and challenging themselves to either change or find new ways of active allyship is extremely important. And it can be very difficult for people who haven't engaged in that exercise before to take part in it, which is why it's important, I think, to remember what you said earlier, Elana, about having training also for leadership. Right? Because leadership are not perfect and will not get everything perfect, but have to acknowledge that, and be okay acknowledging that, and opening space to feel safe.

Elana Newman And I will say that I am encouraged by that. I've been doing this work for 20 years, and it used to be management never engaged in the desire or the wish for training. And that is changing, and I'm very encouraged by that.

Avery Holton Hannah, I see you nodding your head.

Hannah Storm Yeah, I think the management point is, I mean, everything that all my colleagues have said is so important. I'd just like to kind of give them space back to kind of let us hear that again. The management, it's so important. But again, I'm still hearing this sense from managers around the world at the moment that they themselves are struggling, and they feel like sometimes they don't have the words or the tools in their toolbox, I guess, to start conversations, to help support people. And I think it's really important that they are given those. And yeah, I'm noticing, as Elana has just said, there is a change. There's a changing appetite, but I'm not sure it's happening perhaps as quickly as it ought to be.

Avery Holton Think we have time for just a couple of more questions. So one of those is which industry is worse, and if I may add, best, at supporting mental health? Journalism or academia?

Elana Newman Yikes.

Avery Holton So I repeat the question one more time. Which industry is worse or best at supporting mental health? Journalism or academia? I misread the question. So journalism or academia?

Elana Newman I actually think it's journalism. Now, again, I'm not in communication academics. I'm in academics. But there is a little bit more autonomy, and a little more, it's not much better, but there's slightly better health care. So I would say, at least in the U.S. context, I would say from my perspective, where I sit it.

Valerie Belair-Gagnon It's really hard. I think now I can speak that I'm on my tenure. So, what is worse at supporting mental health in journalism or academia? And you said both? Yeah. So I've been involved in quite a few mental health initiatives in my own institution, and I would say that there's also a shift. And I don't want to be positive. It is hard also in academia, but there has been a shift. And I know that I've been involved in a lot of public

health perspective into advocating for a public health approach to mental health in journalism and my own institution through mental health advocates. So I think there are changes that are happening, and it's a good question because it's not just in journalism, it's also in academia. But it also gets to the questions that as we're using this approach from a pedagogical approach with our students, we also need to teach them how to be journalists, and how to think about that, and how that context of academia is going to reflect in their work practices later on. And that's an important thing to think about.

Elana Newman And also having being in an institution that's struggling, I certainly appreciate the question. But I also think that we put journalists in physical danger in a way that we don't. I mean, yes, there is the possibility of shootings and things for academics, but the kinds of occupational stressors we put journalists in is very different. And so I think a better question, and the question that I asked, is how do they compare to other first responders? And if you look at the police, firefighters, ambulance drivers, 911 workers across countries, all of those organizations take care of their staff, and that is not necessarily the case for journalists.

Hannah Storm Can I just have one brief thing? Thank you. So two things. I was just going to say what Elana said, but she said it. But actually, I feel like there's still a stigma in journalism around speaking about mental health, but perhaps there isn't in some first responders. But also the other thing is, I just want to throw a miniature curveball at you, sometimes comparison is not helpful. So it's a little bit like I remember having a conversation with Anthony Feinstein, who may be familiar to some of you, and talking about my mental health. And he said, "Hannah, if there's two people in a hospital in bed side by side, and one person has a broken leg and one person has a broken arm whose is worse?" Because I was saying to him, "But Anthony, I can't complain about my mental health because of dot, dot, dot." Okay. And I said actually, and I started trying to unpick the question as journalists do. Right? "Well, it depends where the break is, and it depends how severe the fracture is. La la la la, la." But actually, he's like, "Hannah, Hannah, you have this experience. We have these experience. Journalists have these experiences. And sometimes just holding the space to acknowledge that we're hurting and giving us permission not to for a moment compare with somebody else. And that doesn't undermine the other person's experience whatsoever. Sometimes it's really important to know that."

Elana Newman That point is really important. Hannah, thank you.

Hannah Storm I'm sorry for interrupting you, Lu.

Luisa Ortiz Pérez No, you can't see my face, but I'm having, like, a smile.

Hannah Storm I wish I could. I wish I could see your face.

Luisa Ortiz Pérez I have a smug smile, and I'm going to tell you why. Because I'm a recovering journalist, and I'm also a recovering academic. And I'm going to say no, no and no. Please say thank you to the civil society organizations, because we have been pushing the agenda for much longer. Philanthropy was supporting a lot of these efforts way before, and we got to you because you started studying us. You started asking us the questions. And then, I mean, we just talked about it. We talked a few people, then we said, "Oh, it was their mental health. That was the problem." We had to be out of the loop to be able to look at the circus, and that's when we started seeping in. Thank you for organizing this panel, because it means that we're mainstreaming people. We are in, and we're not getting out.

Avery Holton Okay. I think we have time for one more question, and it'll come from me. So we can wrap things up, and this will be for each of our panelists. What is one piece of advice or solution-oriented thought that you can provide with regards to mental health and wellness for journalists in our conversation today? And maybe we can start with Lu, if that's okay?

Luisa Ortiz Pérez I'd rather pass the ball to Hannah.

Avery Holton Okay, Hannah?

Hannah Storm I was listening, but it's like 11:00 here in the evening. So I was listening, but I was also thinking, "How can he ask me for one piece of advice?" How can you ask me for one piece of advice? Okay. So it matters. You matter. Journalists matter. Journalism matters. And the only way to ensure that all of that matters is to think about this matter here. Right. It's brain matter. And it's about how we are, and how we're functioning. We have to prioritize this. We have to make this as much a part of a normal conversation as it would be if I'm at work with a bad back. So let's make sure that, you know, we're trying to tackle the stigma. We're trying to tackle the barriers to speaking about this, and let's make sure that we really recognize that this matters. Thank you, Lu.

Valerie Belair-Gagnon I really like what you said when you talk about civil society and this discourse becoming mainstream, and well, I think it's rebuilding from the work that all the civil society has done would be to say that it's not about people adapting to an institution, it's about institution adapting to people and civil society.

Elana Newman And I agree with this. But I'm going to give a practical piece of advice in terms of what you can do as an individual. I think the systems need to change. But I guess that what I'll say as individuals, I'd invite you to think about a period of your time where you had a lot of stress. And think about what did you do that, you know, was pretty healthy? That despite all of that, like you did a good job. And what did you do that wasn't so healthy? That, you know, maybe you drank too much, maybe you ate too much, whatever it is. Maybe there were some things that weren't so good. I'm going to encourage you now to do a little more of the things that were helpful to you and to do a little less of the things that were not, in your view, so helpful. As a first step, I'm just going to be very practical, as a first step of moving forward in sort of coping with these things and starting to take your mental health seriously. So I'll give that as a different level of advice, fully agreeing that we need the systems to change.

Luisa Ortiz Pérez I love it, and I push it. I agree. And I push it further, and I say, "It's time to move from self-care to collective care." And I want to invite you all because we're having a festival about collective care in June 4 and 5 is the Vita Fest. And we are all invited. It's free. It's fantastic. It's in Español. And we also have a wall in the back because we want to continue the conversation with you all. Shout out to Teresa Mioli. She organized this fantastic thing outside. There's Post-its. Ask your questions there, offer help over there because we need to help each other and find solutions together.

Avery Holton All right, fantastic. And I'll add one more in there just to bring us full circle that we remember that question: how are you? And we really ask one another that question with intentionality and give each other room to respond to that question and to do so publicly so that we challenge those around us, especially in leadership positions and

positions of transformation, to ask the question and to listen as well. How are you? So thank you, all. Thank you, panelists, as well. Thank you, Rosental and ISOJ.