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“I LOVE WHAT I DO; I JUST CAN’T”: EXAMINING JOB BURNOUT AMONG
GENERATION Z LOCAL TELEVISION JOURNALISTS

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“I LOVE WHAT I DO; I JUST CAN’T”: EXAMINING JOB BURNOUT AMONG
GENERATION Z LOCAL TELEVISION JOURNALISTS

A THESIS APPROVED FOR THE
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Dedication

To all of the stressed and burnt-out journalists out there who tirelessly serve their communities every single day, come hell or high water, thank you for all that you do.

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Abstract

Research shows that burnout has plagued journalists for generations, yet there is a present lack of studies specifically investigating it among journalists in television news, which still remains a vital source of news for many, and Generation Z journalists, whom scholars have pinpointed as being at risk for burnout due to their young age and lesser years of experience. To address these research gaps, this thesis – to the researcher’s knowledge – makes a first attempt to examine burnout among these two populations. Interviews with 25 Generation Z local television journalists show that most of these journalists are burned out and felt its impact on their lives at work and at home. In following the job demands-resources (JD-R) theory of burnout, qualitative data reveal that doing more with decreased resources and issues with management drained the journalists the most, while making an impact on their communities and support from their co-workers were the biggest motivators. Being transparent about stress and burnout among journalists emerged as a key approach for news managers and journalism educators to better alleviate burnout in newsrooms and prepare journalism students for their workplaces respectively. Specific recommendations from the Generation Z local television journalists for newsroom and educational interventions to effectively minimize burnout among journalists are also discussed.

Keywords: burnout, Generation Z, television journalists, job demands-resources theory

Chapter I: Introduction

They are tired—like so many are these days, it’s true, but their burnout is born of a unique confluence of circumstances: with media business models struggling and reporting resources thinning all around them, journalists are expected to do more with less. The occupational hazards are many, the opportunities for happiness too few. (Lewis, 2023, p. 193)

Journalists have experienced job burnout for generations. Stemming from “chronic interpersonal stressors on the job” (Maslach & Leiter, 2016, p. 103), burnout is characterized by emotional exhaustion, cynicism and inefficacy (Maslach & Jackson, 1981; Maslach & Leiter, 2016). Scholars have examined this phenomenon for decades; the earliest study documenting burnout among journalists was published in the 1980s (Endres, 1988; MacDonald et al., 2016). Endres (1988) found that 36% of the 252 newspaper journalists surveyed in his study experienced burnout at some point during their career. Fast forwarding to the present, 70% of local U.S. journalists from a range of media types (print, broadcast and digital) reported experiencing work-related burnout (Thompson & Chedraoui, 2023).

The World Health Organization (2018) classifies burnout as an occupational phenomenon stemming from “chronic workplace stress that has not been successfully managed” (para. 4), which is concerning considering that being a journalist is often viewed as one of most stressful jobs one can have (CareerCast, 2019; Monteiro & Marques-Pinto, 2017). Decades of research have shown that journalists who are burnt out are more likely to have intentions to leave their job (Cook & Banks; Ivask, 2017; Jung & Kim, 2012; Liu & Lo, 2018; Reinardy, 2008; Reinardy, 2011; Thompson & Chedraoui,

2023). Factoring in the high number of burnt-out journalists at this time (Thompson & Chedraoui, 2023), this relationship between burnout and turnover intentions plus the shrinking number of jobs for journalists, reporters and news analysts driven by decreasing advertising revenue (Bureau of Labor Statistics, 2022) paints a worrying picture of the future of the journalism industry and its workforce. This bleak outlook creates an urgency to better understand burnout among journalists to curb turnover for a profession already struggling to retain their talent. As one news director described in the 2023 TV and Radio Staffing Report from the Radio Television Digital News Association (RTDNA) and Newhouse School at Syracuse University:

We are stretched too thin and that gets worse every year. Further, it's nearly impossible to get applicants anymore. We have jobs posted for months before we even see one application, let alone a good one. This business is broken, and if something is not done soon, at the top, television news will go the same way newspapers have (Papper & Henderson, 2023, p. 6)

While there is a growing body of scholarship examining burnout among journalists, researchers have yet to specifically explore this phenomenon among the newest cohort of journalists, Generation Z employees. Members of this generation were born between 1997 to 2012 (Dimock, 2019). Looking specifically at burnout, studies spanning decades apart have reiterated that journalists who are younger and have less experience are more at-risk for burning out and having turnover intentions compared to their older colleagues (Cook & Banks, 1993; Filak & Reinardy, 2011; Reinardy, 2011; Thompson & Chedraoui, 2023). This trend highlights the importance of studying the phenomenon among Generation Z journalists as they are not only younger but also in

their early years of their career. Additionally, Generation Z will make up nearly 30% of the workforce in the United States by 2032 (Bureau of Labor Statistics, 2023), further emphasizing the need to understand how these individuals operate in the workplace as they grow to eventually become the dominant cohort of employees. Thus, understanding how Generation Z journalists understand and experience burnout became a key objective of the present study.

Many of the available studies examining burnout among journalists used surveys to investigate their research problem (see MacDonald et al., 2016). While these studies have provided an informative and quantitative perspective to the phenomenon, they may not have captured the full essence of these journalists' experience with stress and burnout, which could be better achieved through qualitative research approaches (Lindlof & Taylor, 2019; Wimmer & Dominick, 2014). In addition, one review found that a majority of quantitative studies available at the time examined burnout among newspaper journalists; only two out of the 12 studies sampled looked at burnout among broadcast journalists (MacDonald et al., 2016). The authors argue that the applicability of the results from these newspaper-focused studies is limited due to the decline in print sources and increasing consumption of broadcast and digital media (MacDonald et al., 2016).

Therefore, based on the research gaps addressed above, the present thesis aimed to make a first attempt to investigate Generation Z television journalists' experiences with burnout. To better understand what helps and hurts these journalists' risk of burnout, the job demands-resources (JD-R) theory of burnout – which proposes that job demands and resources will influence employees' job strain and motivation respectively and their subsequent risk for burnout (Bakker & Demerouti, 2007) – was used to guide this thesis.

The researcher utilized a qualitative research approach of semi-structured interviews with 25 Generation Z local television journalists who were at least 18 years old followed by a thematic analysis of the data collected to best accomplish the research objectives. The findings of this thesis provide guidance to newsroom managers tailor resources to best support their Generation Z employees to decrease their risk of burnout and subsequent turnover intentions. Journalism and mass communication educators can also apply these findings to better prepare their Generation Z students who are planning to enter the workforce as well. Additionally, in a scholarly context, this thesis expands available literature about job burnout in the journalism profession, now filling the research gap regarding the industry's youngest employees.

Chapter II: Literature Review

Burnout: Then and Now

Psychologist Herbert Freudenberger is credited as being the first to systematically describe what burnout is, becoming the founding father of the concept (Heinemann & Heinemann, 2017; Malesic, 2022; Martin, 1999). In his 1974 journal article, he defined burning out as “to fail, wear out, or become exhausted by making excessive demands on energy, strength, or resources” (Freudenberger, 1974, p. 159). Based on his observations and own burnout experiences while working at a free clinic in New York City (Heinemann & Heinemann, 1974; Malesic, 2022; Schaufeli, 2017b), Freudenberger noted down the signs of burnout to watch for:

- Physical: feeling of exhaustion and fatigue, lingering cold, frequent headaches and gastrointestinal disturbances, sleeplessness, shortness of breath
- Behavioral: easily angry/irritated/frustration, risk-taking behaviors, cynical, depression, accomplishing less despite spending time at work (Freudenberger, 1974)

According to Freudenberger (1974), everyone experiences burnout and its symptoms differently, but the people most prone to burning out are “the dedicated and committed” (p. 161). He says of those who fit this profile, “We work too much, too long and too intensely. We feel a pressure from within to work and help and we feel a pressure from the outside to give” (Freudenberger, 1974, p. 161). Freudenberger (1974) suggested several measures to prevent burnout, including avoiding assigning a worker the same task over and over again, setting a hard limit on the number of hours an employee works and being flexible with time off. When helping those who are burned out, he says they should

take a break away from work and only return when they are rested plus have an understanding and accommodating support group (Freudenberger, 1974).

Following Freudenberger's initial contributions, social psychologist Christina Maslach pioneered research into burnout. While Freudenberger's work was more of an autobiographical and qualitative nature, Maslach took a more quantitative approach to figure out how to measure the phenomenon (Heinemann & Heinemann, 2017; Schaufeli, 2017b). She went on to develop the first systematic measurement of burnout, the Maslach Burnout Inventory (MBI; Maslach & Jackson, 1981), which shifted subsequent burnout research to a more systematic and empirical direction (Maslach & Schaufeli, 1993; Maslach et al., 2001; Schaufeli, 2017b). The self-report questionnaire measures burnout across three dimensions, which are based off earlier qualitative findings: exhaustion, cynicism and inefficacy (Maslach & Jackson, 1981; Maslach & Leiter, 2016; Maslach et al., 2001).

Exhaustion refers to feeling overextended and exhausted due to work, and it is the most obvious symptom of burnout (Maslach et al., 2001; Mind Garden, 2023). Cynicism is having a distant or indifferent attitude toward the job, and it is strongly related to exhaustion (Maslach et al., 2001; Mind Garden, 2023). Inefficacy, also referred to as reduced personal accomplishment or professional inefficacy, constitutes an eroded sense of effectiveness and achievement in one's work (Maslach et al., 2001; Mind Garden, 2023). Exhaustion and cynicism are driven by work/demand overload, while inefficacy emerges from insufficient resources or reward (Maslach & Leiter, 2016; Maslach et al., 2001).

The MBI was originally designed to measure burnout among those working in human service roles only, including healthcare, social work and law enforcement (Maslach & Jackson, 1981; Mind Garden, 2023). Following growing interest in the phenomenon and decades of review, the questionnaire was expanded into three different versions to assess burnout among human service workers (MBI-Human Services Survey), educators (MBI-Educators Survey) and workers outside of those two fields (MBI-General Survey; Mind Garden, 2023). Even decades after its creation, the MBI is still the most widely used tool to assess burnout (Heinemann & Heinemann, 2017; Maslach & Jackson, 1981; Schaufeli, 2017b). Maslach's decades-long work into defining and measuring burnout later became the basis for the World Health Organization's decision to include burnout in the 11th Revision of the International Classification of Diseases (ICD-11) as an occupational phenomenon (World Health Organization, 2019). Its definition of burnout follows the three dimensions characterized in the MBI, namely exhaustion, cynicism, reduced personal efficacy (World Health Organization, 2019). The agency emphasizes that burnout should only be applied in occupational contexts and not be used to refer to other types of life experiences (World Health Organization, 2019).

While burnout has been widely discussed across a variety of professions in modern society, it is not a widely established medical diagnosis in most countries nor officially recognized in the healthcare system (Heinemann & Heinemann, 2017). In fact, there has been a longstanding debate on whether or not burnout should be characterized as a mental disorder (Heinemann & Heinemann, 2017; Nadon et al., 2022). Burnout was not listed as a diagnosis in the American Psychiatric Association's DSM-5, also known as the Diagnostic and Statistical Manual for Mental Disorders (Borysenko, 2019; Nadon et

al., 2022). Additionally, Heinemann and Heinemann (2017) also note a disconnect between how burnout is researched and how burnout is used in public discourse. However, it is still important to study and understand the phenomenon due to its long list of implications, not only on an individual level for the burnt-out employee but also for the organization as a whole.

Through a systematic review of job burnout literature, Salvagioni et al. (2017) found that burnout had physical, psychological and occupational repercussions for employees. In a physical context, prior research has documented links between burnout and the increased risk of cardiovascular diseases, changes in pain experiences (e.g., musculoskeletal disorders), fatigue, gastrointestinal and respiratory problems and mortality for those under 45 years of age (Bailey, 2006; Salvagioni et al., 2017). Looking at the psychological consequences of burnout, researchers have documented that it impacts mental health negatively, predicting insomnia, depressive symptoms, antidepressant treatment, anxiety, reduced self-esteem and more (Maslach et al., 2001; Salvagioni et al., 2017). As for occupational outcomes, burnout can trigger job dissatisfaction, absenteeism (i.e., increased absences from work) and turnover intentions in employees (Maslach et al., 2001; Salvagioni et al., 2017). Given the exhaustive list of the effects of burnout documented by various studies, it underscores the need to continue research into the phenomenon so that employees and employers alike can find ways to identify and prevent burnout in their workplaces.

Stressed and Burnt-Out Journalists

The Poynter Institute called burnout in local journalism an “unsustainable crisis” (Djinis, 2023, para. 1). The Center of Innovation and Sustainability in Local Media found

that 70% of local journalists in the U.S. reported experiencing work-related burnout (Thompson & Chedraoui, 2023). In a nationwide study with more than a thousand current and former news practitioners in the U.S., a majority of respondents (78%) told the Reynolds Journalism Institute (RJI) that they saw burnout worsening over the next five years (RJI & SmithGeiger Group, 2024). Unfortunately for journalists, "it is part of our work culture to be stressed," said health and science journalist Bara Vaida (NPC Journalism Institute, 2024, 1:37). Considering that work stress and strain lead to burnout (Maslach et al., 2001), it is not surprising to see how the phenomenon has plagued the journalism industry.

Journalists are subjected to a fast-paced work environment, facing the pressure of churning out constant content to satisfy the 24-hour news cycle while racing their competitors to break accurate news first. As Sophie Scott, a former broadcast reporter for the Australian Broadcasting Corporation, described: "Journalism isn't a nine-to-five profession, but I was either working or thinking about work from the minute I woke up until my head hit the pillow, and that's a recipe for burnout" (TEDx Talks, 2023). One international study conducted during the COVID-19 pandemic found that upwards of 70% of journalists surveyed did not have adequate breaks between their shifts, time off from work to rest or flexible hours to take care of their children while working (Posetti et al., 2020). Journalists also struggle to take breaks, with one Canadian study finding that 51% of media workers said it was difficult to do so (Pearson & Seglins, 2022). A Canadian reporter described their struggle with this in more detail:

I'm ashamed of feeling burnt out because I'm a relatively new journalist but this industry feels so unsustainable sometimes. Weekly papers are especially hard due

to miniscule newsrooms and the scramble to fill a paper each and every week.

The cycle doesn't stop, news doesn't stop and neither can I. (Pearson & Seglins, 2022, p. 25)

The digital convergence of the media industry has also forced journalists to do more with less. Journalists now are expected to produce their stories in multiple formats (e.g., print-style and video), even if they may only be working for one medium, plus keep up a social media presence to connect with their audiences (Campbell et al., 2019).

Despite the high demands of the job, journalists are compensated with low pay. The Pew Research Center found that newsroom employees are more than twice as likely to be college graduates but are paid less than college-educated workers in other industries (Grieco, 2018). Alongside financial insecurity, journalists also face job insecurity in an industry plagued by downsizing organizations, mass layoffs and record turnover rates (Bauder, 2024; Darcy & Passantino, 2024; Fischer, 2023; Lewis & Soroñgon, 2022). As newsroom employment falls, those who are still in the business are working in understaffed newsrooms, further overloading journalists who are already stressed and stretched thin.

Journalists are also working in a trauma-facing profession, which only exacerbates their stress. Journalists are first responders (Clay, 2020; Rugar, 2020), racing toward crises and disasters like police officers, firefighters and medical staff do. In their line of work, journalists both in the field and in newsrooms often witness or are exposed to human suffering and traumatic events, including automobile accidents, executions, fires, mass casualties, murders and wars (Smith et al., 2015). Prior research suggests that 80-100% of journalists have been exposed to a work-related traumatic event (Smith et al.,

2015). In addition to covering traumatic events, journalists may also experience trauma first-hand through violence, intimidation and harassment (Smith et al., 2015), which has only increased thanks to the accessibility provided by social media (Gottfried et al., 2022). Moreover, this hostility toward journalists have only worsened due to former U.S. President Donald Trump's attacks on media and journalists (Downie Jr., 2020) and during the COVID-19 pandemic (Posetti et al., 2020).

The working conditions modern-day journalists are subjected to on a day-to-day basis paint a grim picture of what it means to work in this profession. As editor John Crowley (2023) summarized, "In recent years journalists have been beset on all sides by a so-called perfect storm" (p. 188). Even though journalists are under severe strain, they report not receiving adequate support for their mental health from their employers (Pearson & Seglins, 2022; Posetti et al., 2020). If journalists are not able to successfully cope with their stress and trauma, they will burn out and eventually leave the industry (Nilsson & Örnebring, 2016; Pearson & Seglins, 2022). Most worryingly, the International Center for Journalists found that there was "an urgent need for mental health support and interventions to help alleviate burnout" among journalists across the world (Posetti et al., 2020, p. 6).

While burnout is not exclusive to journalism, it is especially important for scholars to further develop research for this profession because journalists may have a harder time than most workers realizing that they have it. As journalist Samantha Ragland writes for the American Press Institute, "Sometimes, burnout can be difficult to spot, especially for journalists. We just care so much about our work, and we are used to powering through difficulty and schedule to get the story" (Slattery, 2022, para. 12). In

addition, with organizations already struggling to staff their newsrooms due to high turnover (Lewis & Soroñgon, 2022), it further underscores the need to examine burnout among journalists to retain the talent that is left before they burn out and subsequently leave the industry too. Moreover, if journalists' stress and burnout experiences are not supported, it could have implications for the quality of journalism being produced, as professor of psychiatry Dr. Anthony Feinstein explains:

The newsroom has to be acutely aware that, if you want good journalism, you need healthy journalists.... Because if you've got a journalist on the frontline that is not doing well, and their reporting has been biased or compromised by their poor emotional health, you're going to end up with journalism that is compromised. (Reuters Institute, 2023, 29:58)

Journalists have been trained to distance themselves from their feelings and emotions to strive for objectivity and rationality in their coverage. Mental health is also a taboo topic of conversation for many newsrooms and cultures (Mohammed, 2023). Nevertheless, the discourse around burnout in newsrooms has become more robust recently, with more journalists speaking out about their experiences and organizations sharing resources to manage it, particularly after the COVID-19 pandemic (e.g., American Press Institute, 2023; Hare, 2024; Hatch, 2021; Headlines Network, 2023; KING 5 Seattle, 2021; Medium, 2023; NBCU Academy, 2023; NPC Journalism Institute, 2024; Ragland, 2020; Slattery, 2022; Vaida, 2021). However, even though burnout in journalism has become more talked about in the professional context, academic research about it is still sparse, especially in a post-COVID-19 context.

Burnout in Journalism: What We Know So Far

Burnout among journalists is not a new phenomenon. Professor emeritus in journalism Fred Endres (1988) conducted one of the earliest studies examining burnout among journalists. He administered surveys to journalists working at Ohio daily newspapers, exploring the prevalence of stress and burnout in their newsrooms (Endres, 1988). He asked the journalists if they had suffered burnout, and 36% of them said, “yes,” sharing that they experienced it either at the time of the study or in the past (Endres, 1988). These journalists also reported that the stress and burnout affected their lives outside of the newsroom, spilling over into their personal relationships and hindering their ability to enjoy life (Endres, 1988). However, Endres did not use a psychometric scale in his study nor provide a definition of burnout to respondents, drawing criticism over the reliability and validity of his questioning (MacDonald et al., 2016). Nevertheless, Endres’ (1988) study provided the first snapshot of how burnout was affecting journalists and a foundation for the decades of research to come.

Numerous studies following Endres’ work used a quantitative research approach of surveys and/or used a version of the MBI to examine burnout among journalists. Cook and Banks (1993) were the first to do so, surveying reporters and copy editors working at five daily newspapers. Based on their results, they put together a profile of the kind of journalist who would be most susceptible to burnout:

a young, entry level journalist, working as a multiple assignment copy editor at a small paper. This “at-risk” journalist is paid a less than average income, expresses intentions to leave the field, has found journalism to be much different from what

was expected and demonstrates a low overall level of job satisfaction. (Cook & Banks, 1993, p. 116)

This profile was based off the 110 full-time newspaper journalists that Cook and Banks (1993) surveyed then. Yet much of the profile's attributes were reflected in studies that were published years later. MacDonald et al. (2016) reviewed available quantitative studies that investigated burnout among journalists from 1988 to 2013. Based on 12 studies, their profile of a journalist most at risk for burnout was "young females with fewer years of journalism experience, working in small circulation size newspapers" (p. 42), which largely mimics Cook and Banks' initial 1993 profile.

Some studies have documented how a journalist's demographics may impact their risk for burnout. For instance, the trend of younger and less experienced journalists being at a higher risk for burnout and turnover intentions were repeatedly found in studies authored years apart (see Cook et al., 1993; Filak & Reinardy, 2011; Reinardy, 2006, 2011), even as recently as the past year (Thompson & Chedraoui, 2023). Various scholars have also tried to examine the relationship between gender and burnout among journalists, but the results have been mixed, likely due to gender splits in samples (MacDonald et al., 2016). However, the most recent study examining burnout among journalists found that a higher percentage of journalists who identified as women or non-binary reported experiencing personal and work-related burnout in comparison to male respondents (Thompson & Chedraoui, 2023), which echoes studies by Jung and Kim (2012) and Reinardy (2009).

In an organizational context, scholars have also identified several common work-related factors that increases journalists' risk for burnout. They include decreased

cohesion with peers at work, increased workload, low pay, lower levels of perceived organizational support, lower job satisfaction, reduced autonomy in the workplace, unpleasant work environment and work-family conflict (Liu & Lo, 2018; MacDonald et al., 2016; Thomas & Chedraoui, 2023). The type of role journalists worked as also played a part in their burnout experience, with studies finding that editors, reporters and journalists in non-managerial roles were at risk of higher levels of burnout (MacDonald et al., 2016). The link between burnout and employee turnover in newsrooms was also underscored in multiple studies conducted both within and outside of the U.S. (Cook & Banks, 1993; Ivask, 2017; Jung & Kim, 2012; Liu & Lo, 2018; Reinardy, 2008, 2011), highlighting the need to understand journalists' burnout experience to prevent them from leaving.

Available studies examining burnout among journalists have largely either focused solely on newspaper journalists (MacDonald et al., 2016; see also Cook & Banks, 1993; Cook et al., 1993; Jung & Kim, 2012; Reinardy, 2008; Reinardy, 2011) or combined journalists of various mediums in one sample (e.g., Ivask, 2017; Liu & Lo, 2018; Thompson & Chedraoui, 2023). While research into burnout among journalists has clearly spanned decades, there are two populations that are relatively understudied in this area: television journalists and Generation Z journalists. The following sections review what is known about these two populations so far and highlight the gap for research regarding their experiences with stress and burnout.

Television Journalists: Understudied in Burnout Research

In a time where legacy media are fading away and digital sources are taking the lead, television still remains a significant source of news and information for many. The

latest data from the Pew Research Center (2023b) shows that Americans source their news from television and digital devices more often than print publications and radio. When it comes to local news, consumption through television also takes the top spot (Charter Communications, 2022; Pew Research Center, 2019). Moreover, more than eight in ten Americans (83%) trust local news coverage from television and radio most, while social media was ranked as the least trustworthy at 46% (Charter Communications, 2022). Despite the present reliance on television for local news, these journalists are seldom represented in journalism burnout literature (as discussed in the previous section).

Former journalist-turned-journalism scholar Scott Reinardy has made some headway in this research area. In a 2013 study, Reinardy surveyed 887 television journalists to examine their levels of burnout, their workload and perceived organizational support. He found that his sample was experienced average rates of exhaustion and cynicism on the MBI-GS (Reinardy, 2013a). However, more than 22% of his sample had high rates on those dimensions, signaling that they were at a high risk for burnout (Reinardy, 2013a). Those journalists also reported experiencing less organizational support and more role overload (Reinardy, 2013a). Of the nearly 200 television journalists who were close to burning out, 37% said they had intentions to leave the broadcast news industry within the next five years (Reinardy, 2013a).

Following this, Reinardy conducted another survey among the same number of television news workers a year later to understand why they may want to leave the business. More than half (54%) of his sample had a weakening commitment to working in their television newsroom (Reinardy, 2014). Reinardy (2014) also found that 19% of his sample indicated that they wanted to leave the industry in the next five years, and

these news workers had significantly lower levels of job satisfaction, organizational support, job autonomy and perceptions of work quality than those intending to stay. Respondents cited low pay, family issues and concerns over the decreasing quality of journalism work as the top reasons for leaving the industry (Reinardy, 2014). While Reinardy's contribution to understanding burnout and turnover intentions among television journalists provide insightful contributions to this research topic, his findings may not accurately reflect the current state of television newsrooms, which have gone through a multitude of changes and shifts in the last ten years since his studies were published.

Alarmingly, nearly two-thirds (62.9%) of local television news directors surveyed by RTDNA/Syracuse University said they have seen more evidence of staff burnout in their newsrooms now than in the years before (Papper & Henderson, 2024). News directors working in the top 25 and smallest markets saw this less, with only 52% and 54.5% of news directors respectively agreeing that burnout is a growing problem (Papper & Henderson, 2024). In contrast, 70% of news directors working in the top 26 to 100 markets agreed that staff burnout is increasing. According to the news directors, these were some of the ways they saw burnout manifest in their newsrooms (Papper & Henderson, 2024, pp. 5-6):

- “Calling out for unscheduled ‘mental health days’ more often”
- “Inexperienced journalists often find it difficult to cope with the mental strain of long hours, weekends, and witnessing tragic events. It is difficult for them to receive support from their team as well.”

- “Demonstrating reduced passion, becoming easily frustrated, and lacking the willingness to exceed expectations”
- “More breaking of contracts despite liquidated damages, more leaving the business (either at the end or in the middle of contracts)”
- “More complaining, lack of checking over one’s work, more sick days, morale is super low”
- “Two employees referred to harming themselves”

Considering how burnout has plagued television newsrooms recently, it is concerning that these journalists are not featured more in research. The researcher argues it is important to investigate burnout specifically among journalists who work in television news due to the high rates of burnout in their newsrooms (Papper & Henderson, 2024). Additionally, television journalists face stressors specific to their medium that make them stand apart from journalists working for other types of media, which should warrant burnout research catered specifically to their work conditions. These stressors and factors will be discussed in more detail below.

Firstly, in comparison to print journalists, television journalists have a shorter amount of time to report information while incorporating visual and audio elements to make their piece engaging, making it a “particularly difficult task” for them (Redmond et al., 2005, p. 1). Moreover, the Pew Research Center (2023a) found that the average number of hours for weekday local television news programming has increased over the last two decades (2003-2022). This means television journalists are now also having to produce more news content to fill more news hours than before, as former television producer and manager Bob Papper recalls:

I mean, when I started, news was a half hour at 6 and a half hour at 10. I was in Central Time. And that's what you did. That was that was local news. You know, we now relentlessly produce local news hour after hour. We do it morning, we do it midday, we do it early, mid-afternoon, we do it late afternoon or into early evening and then again late evening. Because once you've spent the money as a station, once you've spent the money to establish a news department, the incremental cost of adding more news is comparatively small. The problem is that stations keep adding that kind of news. They don't add that number of people. So, the burden is higher and higher and higher every year, relentlessly year after year. (Depp, 2023)

Furthermore, in the current digital era, the Internet functions as a repository for images and videos (Campbell et al., 2019), meaning that television journalists are under more pressure to be perfect – to deliver their story accurately and elegantly live on the first try and before their competitors beat them to the punch. If they fail to do so, television journalists – particularly those who appear in front of the camera – may find themselves being ridiculed by millions of people in a blooper compilation online (e.g., Bloopers Central, 2021; Funny Local News, 2020) or mislead their audience with the wrong information. As the popular saying goes, “what goes on the Internet, stays on the Internet”. On a darker note, the live element of television newscasts also means that television journalists have to be extra cautious to not accidentally air graphic and disturbing content while reporting from the scene (e.g., suicides, dead bodies, violence) at risk of traumatizing their thousands of viewers who may be watching.

Moreover, while most journalists are exposed to crises and disasters in their work, television journalists experience those often-traumatic scenes in a more realistic way (Deavours, 2023). Television journalists like camera operators have to be physically closer to and spend more time around traumatic scenes to fulfill the need for visual content (MacDonald et al., 2020). On top of witnessing these scenes first-hand, television journalists may have to rewatch them while editing video or through video playback, meaning that they are repeatedly exposed to disturbing and graphic material (MacDonald et al., 2020; Pearson & Seglins, 2022). In addition, television journalists are at a higher risk of experiencing trauma directly as they are more likely to experience harassment compared to online, print and radio journalists (Gottfried et al., 2022). Lewis et al. (2020) found that online harassment is especially pronounced for journalists who are more visible in the news (e.g., appeared on camera) and television journalists who are younger women.

The above conditions combined showcase the especially stressful environment that television journalists are working in, and its implications are recorded. Gottfried et al. (2022) found that a lower percentage of television journalists (34%) report that their job has a positive impact on their emotional wellbeing when compared to online (54%) and print journalists (52%). Compared to online, print and radio journalists, television workers were also the least likely to say they were satisfied with their jobs (Gottfried et al., 2022). Plus, Papper and Henderson (2024) found that the average local television station hired 8 replacements in 2023 – a slight decrease of 1.7 replacements from the year before – with multimedia journalists (MMJs) and producers topping the list. In sum, these bleak findings further underscore the importance of examining stress and burnout among

television journalists to prevent subsequent turnover intentions and actual turnover, especially with television newsrooms already struggling to retain their talent.

Generation Z Journalists: The Industry's Newest Employees

The Pew Research Center defines members of Generation Z as those who were born between 1997 and 2012, meaning these individuals are 12 to 27 years old in the year that this thesis is written. Generation Z stands out as being the world's first digital natives; they have grown up with digital technologies like the Internet and the iPhone as the norm and do not know a world without it (Prensky, 2001). As many of these Generation Z individuals approach adulthood, they are also entering the workforce for the first time. By 2032, the Bureau of Labor Statistics (2023) projects that Generation Z members who are aged 20-34 will make up 29.4% of the American workforce. Of course, as Generation Z journalists are just finding their footing in the industry, this group has not yet been featured in literature about burnout in journalism so far. However, the unique characteristics of this cohort of journalists create a call for further research in this area as they will play a vital role in shaping the future of the journalism industry and its sustainability.

Generation Z members – at least those who are 18 to 27 years old – are the emerging adults of the present time (Arnett, 2000; 2015). These individuals are no longer considered adolescents due to their increased independency and freedom from parental control, but they are not yet considered young adults as many of them have not yet fulfilled the traditional markers of adulthood like marriage or parenthood (Arnett, 2000; 2015). As Generation Z emerging adults explore and form their identities on their way to

adulthood, they are faced with a period of uncertainty and change (Arnett, 2000; 2015).

Arnett highlights the five characteristics that define emerging adulthood:

1. *Identity explorations*: answering the question “who am I?” and trying out various life options especially in love and work;
2. *Instability*, in love, work, and place of residence;
3. *Self-focus*, as obligations to others reach a life-span low point;
4. *Feeling in-between*, in transition, neither adolescent nor adult; and
5. *Possibilities/optimism*, when hopes flourish and people have an unparalleled opportunity to transform their lives. (Arnett, 2015, p. 9)

As new workers, many emerging adults start off with various low-paying and low-level jobs for the sake of paying bills and figuring out what they would want or not want from a job (Arnett, 2015). Generation Z emerging adults will work their way through job changes and instability as they narrow down all the possibilities of what a satisfying, long-term career looks like to them (Arnett, 2015). With this thesis’ research topic in mind, this rockier period that Generation Z members will have to go through as emerging adults may impact their experiences at work as well as with work-related stress and burnout. Therefore, it would be valuable for scholars to further research focusing on Generation Z members, not only as individuals but also as employees.

As the newest cohort of employees, scholars have documented how Generation Z workers possess different workplace attributes from their older colleagues. Generation Z is entering the workplace as the best-educated generation so far (Parker & Igielnik, 2020). Generation Z is also more vocal about what they want and do not want, including in a job. These workers highly value companies that align with their interests and values

more than other generations (Anders, 2022) and provide flexible work arrangements (Aggarwal et al., 2020; Vitug, 2022), and they will leave if it is not a good match. Generation Z workers value intrinsic motivation more than their older counterparts (Mahmoud et al., 2021) and regularly seek out feedback on their work to feel satisfied at their job (Aggarwal et al., 2020). These characteristics show that Generation Z is distinctive in the workplace, suggesting that more research should be conducted so that employers and managers can better understand how to lead and support their youngest employees.

In relation to burnout as the focus of this study, Generation Z is more open to talking about their mental health than prior generations. The American Psychological Association (APA, 2018) found that these individuals are more likely to report fair or poor mental health versus millennials, Gen Xers, Boomers and older adults. Considering how mental health has traditionally been a taboo topic for newsrooms (Mohammed, 2023), it would be valuable to understand how this particular generation of journalists may respond to and talk about their burnout experiences since they are more willing to discuss mental health issues. Concerningly, Generation Z individuals struggle more with their mental and emotional wellbeing in comparison to previous generations at the same age (Gallup & Walton Family Foundation, 2023).

Generation Z not only struggles more with their mental health, but also with managing their stress. In 2018, APA (2018) found that only half of Generation Z members feel like they do enough to manage their stress. Two years later, the organization found that Generation Z adults reported higher stress levels (6.1 out of 10) than all other generations, including millennials (5.6), Generation X (5.2), boomers (4.0),

and older adults (3.3; APA, 2020). Generation Z individuals say that their significant sources of stress stem from several key issues, such as gun violence (i.e., mass shootings and school shootings), increased suicide rates, news reports about widespread sexual harassment/assault, and changes to abortion laws (APA, 2018; 2020). These findings paint a worrying picture for the Generation Z individuals who decide pursue careers in news. As journalists, not only are they struggling with their stress and mental health more than their older counterparts, but they will also likely have to cover the news stories and issues that are significant stressors for them.

In addition, many Generation Z individuals reported that the COVID-19 pandemic disrupted their educational and career goals (APA, 2020; AP-NORC Center for Public Affairs Research, 2021), which only adds on to their stress and uncertainty. At the same time, mass layoffs and record-high employee turnover continue to plague the media industry (Bauder, 2024; Darcy & Passantino, 2024; Fischer, 2023), only making it more challenging for the Generation Z journalists trying to secure their first jobs at this time. With the current state of the industry in mind and Generation Z's struggles with stress, it is important to examine burnout among this particular generation of journalists as these conditions may make them more susceptible to experiencing burnout than their older colleagues.

Looking specifically at the literature about burnout in journalism, Endres (1988) found that the younger the journalists were, the more they said their jobs caused them stress. This was echoed in research published decades later, with numerous scholars finding that younger journalists and journalists with less experience were more likely to burn out and have intentions to leave the industry (Cook & Banks, 1993; Filak &

Reinardy, 2011; Reinardy, 2011; Thompson & Chedraoui, 2023). This pattern raises concerns for Generation Z journalists, who may be at a higher risk for burnout due to their younger age and lack of experience on top of their poorer mental wellbeing. “When news organizations around the world have spent many resources attracting young and diverse talent, it’s beyond negligent not to consider how to retain them” (Crowley, 2023, p. 188). Thus, considering the research gap in burnout literature about television journalists and Generation Z journalists, the present thesis proposes the following research questions:

RQ1: How do Generation Z television journalists define burnout?

RQ2: How do Generation Z television journalists experience burnout?

Job Demands-Resources Theory of Burnout

Researchers interested in examining burnout have also looked into how the different characteristics of the job impact burnout. While these characteristics may vary across professions and organizations, they can be largely split into two categories – job demands and resources (Demerouti et al., 2001). Thus far, the findings show that an overload of demands and a lack of resources increase an employee’s risk of experiencing burnout (Maslach et al., 2001). To further understand this relationship, scholars have turned to the job demands-resources (JD-R) theory of burnout (Bakker & Demerouti, 2014), which is an expansion of the JD-R model (Demerouti et al., 2001). While the MBI based its foundation in human services, the JD-R theory argues that exhaustion and cynicism – the two core “ingredients” for burnout – can still happen in other occupations, thus providing a broader theoretical framework to generalize burnout research outside of the area (Nadon et al., 2022).

Job demands are defined as the “physical, social, or organizational aspects of the job that require sustained physical or mental effort” (Demerouti et al., 2001, p. 501). These demands are associated with physiological and psychological impacts, like exhaustion (Demerouti et al., 2001). Some examples of job demands are workload, interpersonal conflicts and work complexity (Bakker et al., 2023). On the other hand, job resources are the “physical, psychological, social, or organizational aspects of the job” that help employees to achieve their work goals, regulate the impact of job demands and foster their personal growth and development (Demerouti et al., 2001, p. 501). This includes things like training, job autonomy and feedback (Bakker et al., 2023). The JD-R theory proposes that burnout follows two processes, a health impairment process and a motivational process.

First, in the health impairment process, the theory proposes that chronic job demands cost employees’ efforts and consume their mental and physical resources, which then leads them to a state of exhaustion and health problems (Bakker & Demerouti, 2007, 2014). Secondly, in the motivational process, the theory assumes that job resources fulfill basic psychological needs and predict employees’ dedication and commitment to their organization (Bakker & Demerouti, 2007, 2014). Through this process, a presence of job resources helps engage employees, but the lack of it led to their disengagement and a cynical attitude toward work (Bakker & Demerouti, 2007). Job demands and resources also have joint effects – (1) high job resources can mitigate the impact of job demands on strain, including burnout, and (2) high job demands can amplify the impact of job resources on motivation and engagement (Bakker & Demerouti, 2007, 2014).

Beyond the characteristics of a job, the original JD-R model was later expanded to include personal resources, which are defined as positive self-beliefs that are linked to resiliency and refer to employees' perceived ability to control and impact their work environment (Bakker & Demerouti, 2014; Bakker & de Vries, 2021; Hobfoll et al., 2003). These resources, like optimism, self-efficacy and resilience, are motivational and help employees achieve their work goals (Bakker & Demerouti, 2014). "Thus, when individuals have a positive belief system and have access to many personal resources, they are less likely to experience job stress and burnout" (Bakker & de Vries, 2021). However, despite its integration, the authors note that it is still unclear where personal resources should be placed in the model due to a lack of systematic studies (Schaufeli, 2017a; Schaufeli & Taris, 2014).

JD-R Theory in Journalism

To the researcher's knowledge, few researchers have applied the JD-R theory in studies investigating burnout among journalists. Chan et al. (2015) conducted one such study, utilizing the JD-R model in their qualitative study looking at job stress and burnout among people working in communication industries in Hong Kong, which included journalists. Through interviews, the 13 communication professionals in their sample identified difficult clients, heavy workload, tight deadlines, and having to strive for perfection as their top job demands (Chan et al., 2015). Job variety and autonomy and social support from colleagues, managers and supervisors were often reported as job resources (Chan et al., 2015). Interestingly, the respondents saw the use of information communication technology (ICT) in the workplace as both a job demand and resource (Chan et al., 2015). For instance, ICT helped these communication professionals

communicate better with colleagues, but also extended their working hours beyond what was officially set (Chan et al., 2015).

Ivask (2017) used the JD-R model in his study to examine turnover intentions among Estonian journalists in print, digital and converged newsrooms and how job demands and resources impacted their experience. His survey of 181 respondents found that those who were hesitating to leave the field were more satisfied with working conditions than those who intended to leave (Ivask, 2017). Respondents often named their exhausting workload, interactions with aggressive sources and re-reading their published stories as top job demands (Ivask, 2017). In contrast, having good relationships with colleagues and supervisors and salary led the respondents' list of job resources (Ivask, 2017).

Liu and Lo (2018) also employed the JD-R model to inform their study. Following the propositions of the model, the authors investigated the relationships between workload, news autonomy, burnout, job satisfaction and turnover intentions among Taiwanese reporters working for newspapers, television stations, radio, wire services and online media (Liu & Lo, 2018). Their survey with more than a thousand reporters revealed that heavier workload and lower levels of news autonomy predicted higher levels of burnout (Liu & Lo, 2018). Job satisfaction was negatively correlated with burnout, plus mediated the relationship between burnout and turnover intentions for these journalists (Liu & Lo, 2018).

Adjacent to burnout research, Muala (2017) used the JD-R model in his study analyzing the impact of job demands and resources on job stress for journalists working in Jordan. The results showed that emotional demands, task significance (i.e., the extent

to which journalists perceived their job having significant impact on others) and job insecurity had significant and positive effects on these journalists' job stress (Muala, 2017). Interestingly, Muala's (2017) results did not find a relationship between quantity demands and job stress, which the author suggests could indicate that a journalist's job has only a few physical demands. Furthermore, the author found that organizational support played a moderating role between job stress and task significance (Muala, 2017).

As these studies showcase, the JD-R theory is useful in identifying the job characteristics that play into journalists' burnout experiences, providing managers a better idea of what helps or hurts their journalists. Surprisingly, where Western-focused research has typically dominated in media studies, all of the abovementioned studies were conducted in international contexts. Due to the scarcity of journalism studies adopting this theory, the researcher hopes to fill this gap by applying it in this thesis to examine burnout among television journalists and Generation Z journalists. Thus, the researcher suggests the addition of the following research question:

RQ3: What do Generation Z television journalists identify as job demands and job resources in their burnout experience?

Solutions for Burnout in Journalism

Despite the present prevalence of burnout among journalists, there seems to be a lack of resources offering effective or practical recommendations for journalists and newsrooms to deal with stress and burnout (Miller, 2021). For instance, Monteiro et al. (2015) systematically reviewed 28 peer-reviewed journal articles about journalists' occupational stress published between 2002 (after the 9/11 terrorist attacks) and 2015. The authors found that there was a lack of studies addressing occupational stressors and

coping strategies for journalists (Monteiro et al., 2015). Concerningly, in their search for studies at that time, Monteiro et al. (2015) also highlighted a research gap for applied studies examining stress and burnout interventions for journalists.

Various industry experts have offered tips for journalists to manage their stress and burnout on an individual level. One Poynter article listed having a buddy system, avoiding extra caffeine and alcohol, and implementing mindfulness habits as some strategies to deal with burnout (Hare, 2024). Another report said journalists can manage their stress by setting realistic expectations for oneself, fostering boredom, creating good sleep habits, and decluttering digital spaces (Ragland, 2020). The GroundTruth Project wrote that it was important for journalists to, first, recognize the symptoms of burnout, then include breaks in their day-to-day routine, occasionally unplug from technology, talk to fellow journalists, and seek out professional help to manage their burnout (Hatch, 2021).

While these suggestions show promise, they may not realistically work for a typical journalist. For instance, the 24-hour news cycle and the expectation to keep up with breaking news may make it challenging for journalists to find time to unplug or take a break. Plus, if a journalist is working in an unsafe or hostile work environment, it may not be feasible for them to find peer support for a buddy system or a mentor to lean on. These suggestions and strategies could also be more complicated for younger journalists to implement, like those from Generation Z, as they may not yet have the agency to do so (e.g., limited time off and benefits due to newness at organization).

Looking beyond the individualized tips and tricks, experts have also argued that the responsibility of addressing burnout among journalists falls on newsroom

management. Green (2019) wrote that burnout is a reflection of poor management, rather than a problem with employees. The American Press Institute (2023) underscored that journalism burnout is a “systemic” problem (para. 11), saying that individual journalists have “little opportunity to address the root causes of burnout” (para. 11). Papper and Henderson (2024) found that 88.3% of television news directors say they were doing something to address the problem of burnout in their newsroom, which included approving more time off for employees and adding coaching/training for employees. Recently, the Reynolds Journalism Institute at the Missouri School of Journalism published a February 2024 report suggesting possible solutions for newsrooms to tackle burnout among journalists. Their report, based on survey responses from 1,140 current and former journalists, highlighted the top five preferred categories of solutions that newsrooms should implement to help journalists with their burnout:

1. addressing work hours and being flexible with it, including establishing four-day work weeks, more hybrid and remote work options, and increased flexibility in shifts and hours;
2. evaluating coverage and story responsibilities, including assessing employee workload and responsibilities, allowing journalists’ more job autonomy/control in executing their work, breaks from covering hard news stories, and more opportunities for creative storytelling;
3. changing newsroom culture, including acknowledging employees’ work contributions, constant feedback, and emphasizing bigger mission/purpose of journalism;

4. emphasizing time off, including providing more days off, encouraging employees to use vacation time/family leave, limiting communication outside of work hours, and enforcing breaks during work day; and
5. adding employee benefits, such as flexible benefits, resources for childcare, gym memberships, and wellness programs (RJI & SmithGeiger Group, 2024).

While RJI's study does make a substantial contribution with identifying actionable steps to realistically address burnout in newsrooms, the average age of a survey respondent was 42 years old (RJI & SmithGeiger Group, 2024). Journalists who were in the 18-24 and 25-34 range – which includes those who are Generation Z – only made up 27% of the survey sample. In the context of the present thesis, it is uncertain how well these strategies may translate for Generation Z journalists, especially since scholars have already established that they have unique workplace needs and expectations (see Aggarwal et al., 2020; Mahmoud et al., 2021; Vitug, 2022). Therefore, to figure out what would work best to address burnout for Generation Z journalists, it would be valuable to examine these strategies and suggestions specifically from their perspectives. Based on this argument, the present thesis suggests the following research question:

RQ4: What suggestions do Generation Z television journalists have for newsroom leadership in dealing with stress and burnout in the workplace?

Even though much of the discourse around burnout in journalism has been focused on a professional context, it is also critical to address it from an educational standpoint. While some Generation Z individuals are currently finding their footing in the early years of their journalism career, there are still many others of this cohort who are in

school and getting ready for their first newsroom jobs. This makes it all the more imperative to examine how journalism students are being prepared for the stress and burnout that they will ultimately face in the industry. This sentiment was highlighted in RJI's study, with the authors saying it is "crucial" to incorporate burnout education in journalism curriculum (RJI & SmithGeiger Group, 2024, p. 15). Initial findings from RJI and SmithGeiger Group's (2024) study show only 6% of current journalists reported being exposed to information about burnout while they were in school, and just 37% of journalism students are learning about it right now. These numbers show a troubling discrepancy between the harsh realities of the industry and what is (not) being taught in classrooms. With Generation Z television journalists being the newest wave of employees, understanding what helped – and what didn't help – them with their transition from the classroom to the newsroom may provide insight into how educators should best equip current and future journalism students to tackle stress and burnout in their careers. Thus, the present thesis suggests an additional research question:

RQ5: What suggestions do Generation Z television journalists have for journalism and mass communication educators in preparing journalism students for stress and burnout in the workplace?

Chapter III: Methods

To best understand Generation Z television journalists' experiences with burnout, the researcher conducted semi-structured interviews with Generation Z local television journalists. Interviews are conducted to understand people's lived experiences (Lindlof & Taylor, 2019), making it an especially fitting methodology to fulfill this thesis' research objectives. While there are numerous valid and reliable survey instruments available to assess burnout (National Academy of Medicine, 2022) – including the MBI, which is considered the gold standard in this topic area (Williamson et al., 2018) – the goals of this thesis are less concerned with the generalizability of the findings that can be gained through quantitative methods. Rather, the researcher aimed to obtain a rich and comprehensive account of the journalists' experiences with burnout, which is best achieved through qualitative interviews (Creswell, 2013; Wimmer & Dominick, 2014). Furthermore, interviews can help "situate these numbers in their fuller social and cultural context" (McCracken, 1988, p. 9).

Using qualitative methods like interviews was also fitting for this thesis as they are better at approaching sensitive and personal topics in comparison to quantitative approaches (Elmir et al., 2011; Silverio et al., 2022). In this case, as Generation Z television journalists are asked to share their lived experiences with job burnout, discussions about potentially sensitive topics may arise, including stress and mental health issues. By conducting interviews, the researcher could build trust and rapport with the participants, helping them feel more at ease when sharing experiences of a sensitive nature (Lindlof & Taylor, 2019; Wimmer & Dominick, 2014). Additionally, while burnout is widely discussed, there is still ambiguity and debate surrounding the concept

and what it is (Heinemann & Heinemann, 2017). Thus, respondent interviews became particularly well-suited for this thesis as this type of interview can help clarify the meanings of common concepts (Lindlof & Taylor, 2019).

Sample and Recruitment

Following the Pew Research Center's classification of Generation Z members (Dimock, 2019), the study sample was limited to journalists who were 18 to 27 years old in 2024, which is the year this thesis is written. Specifically, this means that participants had to be born between 1997-2006 to be eligible for this study. Participants also had to be working in the U.S. at a local television news station affiliated with one of the four major networks: ABC, CBS, FOX, and NBC. As the specified age range includes college-aged individuals, the sample excluded student journalists and journalists who may be enrolled in an academic institution while working as these journalists may face additional academic-based stressors in their burnout experience, which is not the focus of this thesis.

One review of journalism burnout literature pointed out that past studies predominantly focused on reporters' experiences with burnout (MacDonald et al., 2016). There was also a lack of research looking at other types of roles that are still key to broadcast journalism like photographers (MacDonald et al., 2016). In response, the researcher included television journalists of varying roles in the sample. Looking at journalistic roles, popular dictionary definitions of journalists have largely fallen into two categories: (1) people who engage in journalism (Merriam-Webster, n.d.), or (2) people who collect, write and distribute news stories for various mediums (Cambridge University Press, n.d.; HarperCollins, n.d.). These definitions may be problematic when applied in a television news context as they may exclude a variety of roles that do not fit

those criteria. Therefore, during the recruitment process, the researcher allowed interested participants to self-identify as television journalists, as long as they fit the abovementioned age range and job criteria.

The researcher utilized snowball sampling to recruit participants for this thesis, which is a sampling strategy that “yields a study sample through referrals made among people who share or know of others who possess some characteristics that are of research interest” (Biernacki & Waldorf, 1981, p. 141). Snowball sampling is best used to access populations that are hard to reach (Lindlof & Taylor, 2019), making it an appropriate strategy for this study due to the difficulty in identifying people based on their age. As the researcher is a former journalist, the researcher utilized personal connections and social media as outreach tools. Recruiting through social media was also fitting for this thesis as Generation Z journalists fall into the adult age group (18-29) that uses these platforms most (Pew Research Center, 2021). Specifically, the researcher posted the study’s information on their public Facebook, Instagram, LinkedIn, and X pages as well as in several journalism-focused Facebook groups. Several participants also shared the study’s information with their own social circles. In qualitative research, the sample size of a study is determined based on the number of participants needed to achieve data saturation, or when new interview responses no longer add anything fresh or of significance to developed concepts (Krueger et al., 2001; Lindlof & Taylor, 2019; Wimmer & Dominick, 2014). The researcher recruited 25 Generation Z local television journalists for this study.

Data Collection

The interviews were conducted in person or through Zoom from March 4-21, 2024, depending on the participants' preferences. While face-to-face interviews are the ideal method for interviewing people (Lindlof & Taylor, 2019), the in-person preference may not be feasible for interested Generation Z television journalists who may live outside of the researcher's location. Thus, to accommodate these potential participants, having the option to conduct interviews through live video calls on Zoom allowed the researcher to still interact with participants "face to face" and pick up on non-verbal cues. (e.g., facial expressions, posture, gestures) that may enrich the participants' verbal responses (Archibald et al., 2019; Wimmer & Dominick, 2014). Using Zoom in qualitative data collection has also been found to be a useful tool in forming and maintaining rapport between researchers and participants (Archibald et al., 2019). All participants but one opted for the Zoom interview option.

The interviews were conducted in a semi-structured format. The researcher prepared and utilized an interview guide (see Appendix), which was approved by the researcher's university Institutional Review Board (IRB) before use. The guide had a planned list of questions, but the researcher could decide how the questions should be asked and ordered (Lindlof & Taylor, 2019). Following this thesis' research questions, the interview guide included questions addressing participants' background as a journalist, their experiences with stress and burnout in their job, and their recommendations for news managers and journalism educators to tackle burnout in the industry. The interview questions for this thesis were created as an expansion of an

interview guide used in an unpublished study conducted by the researcher on a similar topic (Siew, 2023).

In addition to using the interview guide, the researcher also had the opportunity to ask follow-up questions. This more informal and flexible approach allows the interviews to be customized to fit the participants' experiences (Lindlof & Taylor, 2019; Wimmer & Dominick, 2014). The duration of the 25 interviews averaged at about 1 hour and 3 minutes, with the shortest one lasting 31 minutes and the longest lasting 1 hour and 35 minutes.

Data Analysis

The interviews were audio and video recorded to ensure that the participants' responses are transcribed verbatim and non-verbal cues are noted for data analysis. The researcher used Microsoft Word and Zoom's built-in transcription features to first transcribe the interview recordings automatically. After the recordings were automatically transcribed, the researcher revisited the transcripts to manually correct any inaccuracies made in the text. To protect the participants' confidentiality, the interviews were de-identified during the transcription process. Each participant was assigned a unique identification code and a range of television market sizes that included the one they were working in at the time of the interviews.

The range of market sizes used in this thesis was based off the ranges set in a three-market-tier sampling strategy used in prior academic studies (Guo & Sun, 2022; Prakash & Wenger, 2020). While these three tiers were not used as a sampling tool in this thesis, the ranges were instead adopted to protect the participants' identity and maintain their confidentiality. As the nature of the research topic has to do with participants'

working experiences, using the ranges helped to provide context for the market size and conditions that the participants may be working in without revealing the exact market number at the risk of it being traced back to the participants. This thesis utilized Guo and Sun's (2022) three market tiers, which the authors break down as top 50 (1-50), second 50 (50-100), and below 100.

Table 1 outlines information describing the 25 journalists who were interviewed for this study at the time of data collection: the identification code assigned to each participant, their preferred pronouns, their job title, the market size (range) they were working in, the total number of television markets they had worked in so far, and the number of years of professional experience they had in television news at the time of the interviews (For most participants, this was their post-college experience.).

Table 1

Participant Information (as of March 2024)

ID	Preferred Pronouns	Job Title (On Paper)	Current Market Size (Range)	No. of TV Markets	Professional Experience in TV News
P1	He/him	Anchor/Reporter	1-50	1	5 years
P2	She/her	Breaking News Reporter	1-50	2	3.5 years
P3	He/him	Photojournalist	1-50	1	1 year
P4	He/him	Anchor	50-100	2	3 years
P5	She/her	Reporter	1-50	3	5 years
P6	He/him	Senior Political Correspondent	50-100	1	1 year, 9 months
P7	She/her	News Producer	50-100	2	3.5 years
P8	She/her	Multimedia Journalist (MMJ)	100+	1	1 year, 2 months
P9	She/her	Photojournalist	1-50	1	5 years
P10	She/her	News Producer	1-50	2	6 years

ID	Preferred Pronouns	Job Title (On Paper)	Current Market Size (Range)	No. of TV Markets	Professional Experience in TV News
P11	He/him	Photojournalist	1-50	6	7 years
P12	She/her	News Producer/MMJ	50-100	1	3 years
P13	She/they	News Producer	1-50	1	2 years
P14	She/her	Anchor/Reporter	50-100	1	3 years
P15	She/her	News Producer	1-50	3	4 years
P16	He/him	MMJ	1-50	2	10 months
P17	He/him	Photojournalist	1-50	2	2 years
P18	She/her	News Producer	1-50	2	5 years
P19	She/her	Assignment Editor	50-100	1	2 years
P20	She/her	News Producer	1-50	2	4 years
P21	She/her	News Producer	50-100	1	1 year, 9 months
P22	He/him	Sports Producer	100+	1	2 years
P23	She/her	News Producer	50-100	1	1 year, 9 months
P24	She/her	MMJ	50-100	2	3 years
P25	She/her	Executive Producer	100+	1	5 years

Note. The job title “Photojournalist” also refers to “Photographer” and “Photog” in this thesis.

The researcher analyzed the interview transcripts using thematic analysis to identify patterns and themes within the data that corresponded to the thesis’ research questions (Braun & Clarke, 2006; Maguire & Delahunt, 2017). Braun and Clarke’s (2006) six-step thematic analysis process was employed, namely becoming familiar with data, generating initial codes, searching for themes, reviewing themes, defining and naming themes, and producing the report of the analysis (p. 87). Prior to data collection, the researcher assigned each interview question to one of the five research questions of this thesis. With this knowledge, the researcher first read through the completed interview

transcripts and marked the participant's responses based on which research question it best answered while also cross-checking the codes with notes that the researcher took while conducting the interviews. These initial codes were copied and pasted from the original transcript file into a separate Microsoft Word document that corresponded to one of the five research questions. When appropriate, a code was occasionally organized under multiple research questions as the participants' responses were often complex and multi-faceted.

After the initial coding process, the researcher went through each of the five Microsoft Word documents and organized the codes into similar topics, thus creating themes and sub-themes. The researcher evaluated each theme to ensure that it was representative of the participants' experiences and made amendments when needed. To accompany direct quotes, each participant was referred to by their identification code, their job title, a range that includes their television station market size, and their preferred pronouns (e.g., P28, News Producer, Market 1-50, she/her). This was done to allow readers to easily understand some of the context behind what a participant was saying without having to flip back and forth to the participant table (Table 1).

After data analysis was completed, member checks were conducted to improve the thesis' validity (Creswell, 2013; Lindlof & Taylor, 2019). This process allows participants to provide feedback on how the findings resonate with them (Creswell, 2013; Lindlof & Taylor, 2019). While a common approach of member checking is letting the participants review interview transcripts to provide feedback on its accuracy (see Carlson, 2010; Forbat & Henderson, 2005), McKim (2023) recommends sending participants a copy of the findings instead, arguing that this approach is more meaningful. As the

participants are considered “experts” in their experiences, it is more beneficial and productive for them to provide their input on the findings rather than the transcripts, especially because the findings are what readers pay more attention to (McKim, 2023).

McKim (2023) further suggests adding a more structured approach to conducting member checks by sending questions to the participants to consider and reflect on when they are reading through the findings. According to McKim (2023), the questions should not only probe them about their general thoughts and the accuracy the findings but also ask if the participants want to remove anything from it. This allows the participants to identify any parts of their contributions in the findings that they want to make more anonymous or taken out to better maintain their confidentiality before the thesis is made available to the public (McKim, 2023), which is particularly important due to the potential sensitivity of this thesis’ research topic. McKim (2023) added that this approach will also help the researcher build trust with the participants.

Following McKim’s (2023) recommendation, the researcher emailed a copy of the participant information (Table 1), the findings and the conclusion of the thesis to the 25 previously interviewed participants in July 2024, which marked four months after the initial interviews were conducted. The participants were given up to two weeks to provide feedback to the researcher and suggest any changes they would like to be made to the thesis. Specifically, they were asked to answer the following four questions about what they read, which were formulated based on McKim’s (2023) suggestions for a more detailed member checking procedure:

1. After reading through the findings, what are your general thoughts?
2. How accurately do you feel the findings captured your thoughts/experiences?

3. Is there anything that could be added to the findings to capture your experiences better?
4. Is there anything that you would like removed from the final paper? What would it be and why?

The researcher sent the initial email plus three reminders via email and text to all of the participants. A total of 23 out of the 25 participants responded within the given timeframe. All of these participants shared that the findings accurately represented their experiences with stress and burnout. A few participants suggested for several details of their experiences to be modified or omitted from the final thesis to better protect their identities.

Researcher Reflexivity Statement

My experiences as a Generation Z member and former television news producer played an invaluable role in this thesis, particularly as I conducted interviews with the participants and analyzed the transcripts. Before pursuing my graduate studies, I had spent five years working as a journalist – four in student media, and one professionally in a mid-size television market right out of college. I remember experiencing the peak of my own burnout just three months into the first year of my “big girl job.” These experiences were what ultimately inspired me to pick burnout and the well-being of journalists as my primary research interests in my graduate studies. As I embarked on putting this thesis together, I knew that my prior experiences could function as a double-edged sword.

On the one hand, as each journalist shared stories about their stress and burnout at work, I was able to clearly understand what they were going through in their newsrooms by using what I knew about the industry as a framework. In addition, being a fellow

Generation Z member tremendously helped me with establishing rapport with my participants as I could easily understand and interpret these journalists' unique humor, mannerisms, and slang that are commonly used by my generation. On the other, I was wary that my past experiences could cloud my interpretation and deter me from uncovering something new about the phenomenon that was outside of my own experiences. However, at the time of writing this thesis, I had not been working in a professional television newsroom for two years. This, plus the limited years of experience that I had, meant that I knew enough to grasp the basics of the issue and the "lingo" in the industry but not sufficiently enough to feel completely informed about how it felt to be in a newsroom at this time. Oftentimes during my interviews, I felt like an outsider looking in, which I believe only made me more curious to learn about what all was out there.

Chapter IV: Findings

The themes that emerged from the Generation Z local television journalists' responses are arranged according to the five research questions proposed in this thesis. In order, the following sections address how the journalists define burnout, what their experience with burnout looks like, the job-related factors that contribute to and/or alleviate their burnout (i.e., job demands and job resources), and their suggestions for newsroom leadership and journalism educators in dealing with stress and burnout.

How Generation Z Defines Burnout (RQ1)

This section addresses this thesis's first research question, which looks at how Generation Z local television journalists define burnout. The thematic analysis revealed several themes (definitions of burnout), which are explained in more detail below. The themes are ordered from the most frequently referenced definition by the participants to the least.

For many of the Generation Z local television journalists, their definition of burnout was tied to a loss of motivation, interest, purpose and/or passion. As one participant summarized, burnout was when his work got to a point where "it's almost lost the sparkle" (P22, Sports Producer, Market 100+, he/him). This particular definition appeared the most often in discussions with the journalists, specifically being referenced by 14 of the 25 participants. For these journalists, they knew they were burnt out when they struggled to find meaning or joy in their work, which would eventually lead to "a complete and utter disdain for something you have to spend a lot of time doing" (P24, MMJ, Market 50-100, she/her). Many of these participants shared that working in

journalism is a significant passion for them but that would dissipate when burnout crept in, as one participant explained:

When you remove yourself from your job at the end of the day, you're like, "Oh, no, don't get me wrong. I love what I do; I just can't. I just physically can't bring myself to want to do it anymore" (P7, News Producer, Market 50-100, she/her).

The participants' definition of burnout was also often associated with exhaustion. Similar words and phrases, like "tired," "defeated," "drained," and "prolonged fatigue," were also used in this context. This was the second most referenced definition of burnout among the journalists, with 11 participants sharing that this was how burnout manifested for them. These journalists also emphasized that they were not only exhausted in a physical aspect but also mentally and emotionally, as one participant recounted: "...don't have any emotional or physical energy because you put so much into not just your job, but also trying to stay afloat mentally" (P2, Breaking News Reporter, Market 1-50, she/her).

For six of the participants, their definition of burnout was short and sweet: being overworked and overwhelmed. In this context, the journalists described being overworked to the point where their work started overwhelming every other part of their lives. Some participants shared that burnout was when their work took "top priority" in their lives, causing their work-life balance to suffer. For other participants, their work consumed their individual identity, as one participant recounted it as "Not being able to separate your work and your productivity from your value. And when... like you tie so much of yourself to the job, you kind of lose that bit of yourself" (P10, News Producer, Market 1-50, she/her). Similarly, one participant shared that his burnout was associated

with the anxiety of having to constantly think about his next task or story, which he described as “the Sunday scaries but every workday” (P16, MMJ, Market 1-50, he/him).

Some of the Generation Z local television journalists equated burnout to “being done” with the work and the job. The general consensus between the five participants who referenced this definition is that they had a mindset of being fed up with the job, using additional phrases like “over it,” “shut down”, and “turned off” when talking about their work. One participant also described it as “you can only give so much before you’re like done giving” (P17, Photographer, Market 1-50, he/him).

For a few of the journalists, specifically four of them, burnout was when they struggled to continue in their work, citing a need for a break or change. For some of these participants, it simply meant that one’s “capacity for work lowers” (P25, Executive Producer, Market 100+, she/her). In more extreme cases, burnout was defined as a “final feeling” or an “insurmountable obstacle” that prevented journalists from continuing in their careers (P1, Anchor/Reporter, Market 1-50, he/him). These participants said these feelings would push journalists to consider a change in career.

Burnout was also characterized as feelings of ineffectiveness or dissatisfaction with work. Four of the Generation Z local television journalists shared this sentiment, with one even comparing her experience of burnout to being like a “bald tire or dull knife” (P15, News Producer, Market 1-50, she/her). In this context of this definition, several of these participants also described burnout as being overworked at their jobs yet not feeling productive or accomplished. This was also often tied to feelings of being undervalued or underappreciated, as one participant shared: “I’m doing like so much

work like my wheels are spinning like so fast, but I'm not getting like any traction. I feel like my work's not very appreciated” (P19, Assignment Editor, 50-100, she/her).

Some of the participants linked burnout to negativity and/or negative emotions. Three journalists referenced this definition, saying they recalled feeling angrier and high-strung when they were burned out, which sometimes was exhibited in their interactions with other people in their lives. Several journalists also likened their definition of burnout to having depression, with three of the participants finding similarities between the two conditions. For instance, one participant said the “feeling of nothing, almost, at times” was the commonality she highlighted between burnout and depression (P20, News Producer, Market 1-50, she/her).

Moreover, a few of the journalists interviewed in this study defined burnout as “feeling stuck” and being “overstressed.” Though, these definitions were not shared by a majority of this sample; only two participants referenced each definition respectively. One participant also defined burnout as experiencing changes in oneself, saying burnout is “almost to the point where you're looking at yourself in the mirror, and you're almost unrecognizable to yourself” (P24, MMJ, Market 50-100, she/her).

Generation Z’s Burnout Experience (RQ2)

In response to RQ2, this theme encapsulates the Generation Z local television journalists’ experiences with burnout. When asked if they had experienced burnout while working in television news, 23 out of the 25 participants said, “yes,” often quickly and confidently. These participants either shared that they were currently going through it at the time of the interviews or had experienced it at some point in their career. As one participant shared, “I think [burnout] comes with the territory, sadly, at this point” (P23,

News Producer, Market 50-100, she/her). Another shared a similar remark, stating, “I do think burnout and journalism are pretty good friends” (P20, News Producer, Market 1-50, she/her).

When it came to the two participants who said they had not experienced burnout in their television journalist roles, one said that he didn’t feel it “on a big scale” and was still “pretty actively engaged” in his role (P3, Photographer, Market 1-50, he/him), while the other participant saw burnout as “a possibility” that he will need to eventually deal with in his career (P16, MMJ, Market 1-50, he/him). These two journalists had the smallest number of years of professional experience in television news among the 25 participants (see Table 1).

Nevertheless, all of the participants said they were no stranger to seeing burnout among journalists, with many sharing that they saw the impact firsthand as revolving doors in their newsrooms or the shrinking number of fellow classmates who were still working in journalism. To achieve a more holistic account of the Generation Z television journalists’ experiences with burnout, this section is split into several sub-sections addressing how burnout impacted the journalists’ lives at work and outside of work, the strategies the journalists reported using to cope with their stress and burnout, the reasons why the journalists perceived stress and burnout as different for this particular generation, and turnover intentions among the journalists.

Burnout Impact: At Work

Bare Minimum Effort. When they were experiencing burnout, 19 out of 25 participants reported resorting to doing the bare minimum at work. These journalists shared that they would feel too exhausted or demotivated to push themselves to be

creative or go above and beyond, saying that it felt like they were “just checking it off the list” (P21, News Producer, Market 50-100, she/her) or “I just need to get through this so I can go home” (P20, News Producer, Market 1-50, she/her). A senior political correspondent described the extent of this affecting his workflow with creating news packages:

nothing irresponsible to the sense of, you know, incorrect information, or anything like that, but, you know... Do I really feel like putting the extra time to spend the 5 minutes and try to find different video for this certain part of something where I could just grab something from earlier? That kind of thing. So, I think it's just probably a laziness increase because I didn't care, and I didn't have a stake in it. I didn't feel like, at least. (P6, Senior Political Correspondent, Market 50-100, he/him)

Several journalists said that their lack of effort and drive at work came from feeling undervalued or a lack of purpose at work, leading many of them to adopt, as one photojournalist described, a “What’s the point in trying hard?” mindset (P9, Photojournalist, Market 1-50, she/her). As a result of this, a breaking news reporter said that she would go into a cycle of despair because she would feel worse about not being able to do her best (P2, Breaking News Reporter, Market 1-50, she/her). Another anchor/reporter further explained his similar feelings:

there are thoughts that run through your mind like “the company really doesn't need me,” “this is a profit motivated industry that they're obviously not sharing with me.” So yeah, you're like, “I'm just gonna go in and do my job and come home.” (P1, Anchor/Reporter, Market 1-50, he/him)

Some of these journalists said that their bare minimum effort at work would impact the quality of their products. For instance, at the peak of his burnout and exhaustion, an anchor shared that he turned in a 41-second news package with two sound bites and three voice tracks because he was too tired to care (P4, Anchor, Market 50-100, he/him). A news producer added that her burnout shaped her show, in which she would copy scripts from other shows unapologetically because “I don’t have a choice” (P23, News Producer, Market 50-100, she/her). Additionally, an MMJ said that she would feel less motivated to “put in the work outside of work” when she was burned out, like contacting sources and setting up stories for the next day (P8, MMJ, Market 100+, she/her). Separately, an executive producer stated that she had to step back from additional digital responsibilities due to her burnout (P25, Executive Producer, Market 100+, she/her).

Negativity and Cynicism (Pt. 1). For 17 of the participants, they knew they were burnt out when they began experiencing negative emotions and cynical feelings at work. One news producer summed it up as becoming “the classic jaded journalist” (P18, News Producer, Market 1-50, she/her). These journalists recalled being very negative at work to the point of snapping at or being short with their co-workers and managers, which some said impacted their work relationships. One news producer shared that she had to seek out therapy to manage these behaviors at work (P20, News Producer, Market 1-50, she/her). An anchor/reporter shared that she would wake up “just ‘pissed at the world’ angry” when she was experiencing burnout while previously working as an anchor/reporter/producer at her station:

I would snap at my co-workers. People just wouldn't come up and talk to me because they were afraid that I was going to say something that was just rude to them, because I was tired. I became very resentful towards producing, because I wanted to be a reporter and an anchor, and so when I was producing, it would be extremely awful for everyone around me and myself. I'd be really depressed and really upset, and like I would literally- I told my boss to his face, I was like, "I would rather die than produce another show here. I can't do this anymore." (P14, Anchor/Reporter, Market 50-100, she/her)

Several journalists shared that their burnout manifested as sadness, often finding themselves crying at work daily. Others shared that they became more cynical and took on a more negative mentality of "I hate my job." An MMJ added that she knew she was burned out when she failed to react to the tough and traumatic stories that she would cover (P24, MMJ, Market 50-100, she/her). Either way, these participants said that their burnout would cause changes in their usual behaviors at work, which would sometimes prompt concern from co-workers in their newsrooms:

I love talking. I'm very bubbly. I'm very much an outgoing person. ... the week that I was speaking of, people, literally everybody, "Are you okay? Hey, are you doing okay? Hey, I just wanted to talk. I just want to make sure you're doing okay," and instant tears, you know. To the point where people were pulling me aside, talking to me, saying, like, "Hey, like I've noticed this in your behavior. It's so different than what, you know, we're used to." (P7, News Producer, Market 50-100, she/her)

Some of the journalists also shared that their burnout made them quieter or isolated at work, adding that they felt the need to avoid or dissociate from their work environments. A senior political correspondent said he would try to “shrink down enough so no one can see him” and avoid interacting with his co-workers (P6, Senior Political Correspondent, Market 50-100, he/him). A news producer added, “I just don't have the patience to deal with people. I don't want to engage in meaningful conversation. I just kinda wanna go in, put on my headphones and be left alone” (P10, News Producer, Market 1-50, she/her).

Dread, Tardiness, and Absenteeism. Eight participants also shared that they knew they were burnt out when they started dreading going to work and putting distance between themselves and their newsroom, be it physically or mentally. Physically, this presented as the journalists showing up to work late or being absent. Two journalists said that they would dread being at work so much that they would excessively use their paid time off (PTO) to travel home and be with their loved ones. One of these journalists added that he would also stay out in the field while reporting on assignments as much as he could because “I would do everything I can to be out of my newsroom” (P6, Senior Political Correspondent, Market 50-100, he/him).

Other journalists said that they felt that sense of dread affect them mentally as well. They shared often thinking about how they did not want to wake up or do their morning routine because they knew they had to go to work after. One journalist added she would occasionally imagine missing her exit to go to work and wishing she would not wake up so that she did not have to clock in that day (P12, News Producer/MMJ, Market 50-100, she/her).

Proficiency at Work Decreased. One journalist shared that, when she was burned out, she became overly cautious anxious at work, which resulted in her slowing down and second-guessing her decisions (P19, Assignment Editor, Market 50-100, she/her).

Burnout Impact: Outside of Work

Even though their burnout stemmed from their job, these Generation Z local television journalists often saw it impact their lives outside of their newsrooms as well. As one journalist expressed, “[burnout] bleeds out into every aspect of your life.” (P7, News Producer, Market 50-100, she/her).

Too Tired to Do Anything. When the journalists experienced burnout, 16 of them reported often being too tired or exhausted to want to do anything outside of work. As one participant described, “it’s to the point to where work is a hundred percent, and anything that’s not work is rest and recovery to be better at work” (P22, Sports Producer, Market 100+, he/him). Many of the participants shared that their time away from the newsroom was often spent in solitude at home, excessively sleeping or “couch rotting” or binge-watching television shows and movies. When they were burnt out, most journalists said they were also too tired to maintain a social life, which became even more challenging to preserve due to their hectic work schedules. A news producer recalled “sleeping all weekend or not waking up until I have to go back to work, which was worse. I did not have a life outside of work at that point, because I was too tired to have one” (P23, News Producer, Market 50-100, she/her). Some of these journalists said they became more introverted and, in a sports producer’s case, boring because their burnout made them less social.

For some, their burnout-induced exhaustion directly interfered with their ability to take care of themselves. These journalists said they would forsake their efforts to cook, engage in self-care, work out, partake in their interests and hobbies and even complete household chores and grocery runs. Some journalists also recalled experiencing that exhaustion mentally, even finding it difficult to be present and functioning during conversations with others.

Negativity and Cynicism (Pt. 2). Similarly to how they reported feeling in their newsrooms, the journalists' intense feelings of negativity and cynicism crept in into their lives outside of work when they were burnt out. Nine participants said they would carry their feelings of irritability, anger, and sadness toward work into their personal lives. Oftentimes, they recalled being extremely negative people or Debbie Downers when they were around their loved ones. Here's how one participant described her experience:

when I do get to be with [friends and family], I find myself very, almost – not dark – but I just feel like I'm a very negative presence, because I'm so stressed out, or burned out, or overwhelmed and exhausted from work and from the news cycle that it's- I'm not like a pleasurable person to be around. (P24, MMJ, Market 50-100, she/her)

Most of the participants also shared that their negativity and cynicism presented in their interactions with the people around them, sometimes to the extent of snapping at or lashing out against their friends and family. One journalist shared that she had to seek out couples therapy due to frequently taking out her anger from work on her husband (P18, News Producer, Market 1-50, she/her).

Health Impacts. Nine journalists reported experiencing changes to their health, both physically and mentally, when they were experiencing burnout. In a physical context, several participants – particularly women – reported changes in their weight, largely driven by a lack of activity and exercise and/or unhealthy eating habits that they picked up during their periods of burnout. One journalist also shared that her menstrual cycle was significantly disrupted because she did not have time to regularly cook or eat. Separately, one participant noticed that her eye would start twitching whenever she felt stressed out. The participants also saw burnout impact their mental health. For instance, several journalists said that their burnout exacerbated their pre-existing mental health conditions, including depression and anxiety. Some participants also compared what they were going through during their times of burnout to a “darkness” or depression-like (i.e., sleeping to cope, social isolation):

I think you can compare it to when people have seasonal depression for somebody who doesn't experience depression. ... Very much wanting to stay inside, not wanting to go out, not wanting to do things for yourself, not wanting to exercise, not wanting to make yourself feel better because you're just over it. (P7, News Producer, Market 50-100, she/her)

Personal Relationships Affected. Three participants said that their burnout would impact their personal relationships with their friends and family members. These journalists shared that their burnout affected their lives so much that those around them would notice a change in behavior or physicality in them. As a news producer described, “That feeling of helplessness and that feeling of inadequacy carries over into your personal life to the point where the people who know you personally and not just

professionally are like, ‘What's wrong?’” (P7, News Producer, Market 50-100, she/her).

A photojournalist added that his stress and burnout would leak into the conversations that he was having with his loved ones, saying that “all you do is talk about why this job isn’t great” (P11, Photojournalist, Market 1-50, he/him).

Always Thinking About Work. Two journalists shared that, when they were experiencing burnout, they could not stop thinking about work. A reporter shared that she was constantly thinking being at work even when she was not there (P5, Reporter, Market 1-50, she/her). Another news producer/MMJ shared that her thoughts about work and the news infiltrated her mind when she was around her loved ones and even when she was on vacation:

I was on going on vacation, and I was thinking like, “Oh, like, I have to go back,” like I was not looking forward to going on vacation because I had to come back. Like, I always joke that, “Oh, I need a “may-cation” that I may or may not come back to my work,” because it's so real. (P12, News Producer/MMJ, Market 50-100, she/her)

Coping with Stress and Burnout

The Generation Z television journalists were asked how they typically coped with the stress and burnout they experienced as a result of their jobs. Their coping strategies are arranged based on frequency in descending order, concluding with the journalists who reported not being able to cope.

Relying on Support Systems. Thirteen of the participants said that they relied on their support systems to cope with their stress and burnout. These journalists reported spending time venting and commiserating with their trusted co-workers and friends who

worked in the industry and were going through similar issues. Some participants even expressed that this helped them to build a “trauma bond” with their fellow journalists. Within the news industry, two participants shared that they found support through mentorship from experienced journalists who were not from their news stations, including former news managers and award-winning journalist Debra Alfarone’s Membership group.

These participants also shared finding support through people outside of the industry – family members, friends, church community – and even their pets. One participant shared that she found it important to have friends who were not from her work or in news due to the negativity and cynicism that plagued the news industry (P2, Breaking News Reporter, Market 1-50, she/her). However, trying to find support with non-news people can be challenging because they may not be able to fully grasp the gravity of what journalists see and do. One participant shared the first time he realized he “can’t bring this stuff home” after telling his father about a police standoff that he covered, which the participant found exciting and “a good content day”:

I remember telling my dad that story ... just the look on his face and slowly realizing what my job was. I was just like, “Oh, this isn’t... I’m not telling you this stuff anymore,” because he just looked kind of concerned. I think I learned a lesson that there was like, “We’ll separate that. Maybe, you don’t need to hear...”
(P3, Photojournalist, Market 1-50, he/him)

Regardless of who made up their support systems, these journalists found it important to find time to socialize with their loved ones when they could to maintain a

life outside of their newsrooms. For one participant, socializing also helped her to avoid thinking about the burnout and stressors she experienced at work.

Therapy. Seven participants said that they coped with their stress and burnout through therapy. This comprised of people who were already in therapy long before they started their newsroom jobs and people who started seeking out the resource due to their job. A few of the participants shared that they received therapy through their company's benefits. However, one journalist shared that the resource was not as accessible for him:

I remember, like during my onboarding process, and our [human resources] lady saying, "We do have therapy available." If I remember correctly, I went, and there was a huge wait list, and I thought to myself, "Okay. I'm just going to do this on my own." And I think there are more flexible options, like Better Help, which is what I use now. (P6, Senior Political Correspondent, Market 50-100, he/him)

Screen Time. Seven participants stated that they coped with their stress and burnout through watching television. These participants described their own television consumption as binge-watching, often turning to shows and movies of a lighter tone, or as one participant referred to as "fluff TV" (P23, News Producer, Market 50-100, she/her), like sitcoms and comedies, to decompress and relax. Several of these participants also added that they played video games and watched videos on TikTok as ways to destress and manage their burnout from work.

Exercise. Seven out of the 25 participants reported using exercise as a way to destress and deal with their burnout, saying that it helps to calm them down and blow off steam. This includes going on walks outside – or, as one participant described, "hot girl walks" (P20, News Producer, Market 50-100, she/her) – and going to the gym.

Establishing Work-Life Balance. Six participants shared that they coped with their stress and burnout by finding ways to maintain work-life balance. This was important for these journalists because, as one journalist summarized, “it takes you outside of work to where you can think about other things and work’s not all down your neck and breathing on you” (P4, Anchor, Market 50-100, he/him). Strategies ranged from the participants putting aside work phones to muting work notifications to avoiding watching news during their days off. The bottom line for these participants was to not do anything related to their job outside of their specified work hours and focus on activities that they enjoyed. Additionally, one participant shared that she would utilize her sick days just to take time away from her workplace:

I know when I'm starting to get to the point of burning out or really stressed out, and, you know what? I use them sick days. Might be calling out. Be pretending I have a headache sometimes. That's just what you need. (P14, Anchor/Reporter, Market 50-100, she/her)

A few of these participants also expressed that their ability to separate themselves from their work and newsroom was something that came with age, maturity and experience. As one participant stated, “I can now detach myself from my occupation in a way that I couldn’t as a young journalist. As a young reporter, I eat, sleep, breathe journalist. That was my identity” (P1, Anchor/Reporter, Market 1-50, he/him).

Hobbies. For four participants, finding time to participate in their hobbies (e.g., painting, reading) was important in coping with their stress and burnout. No matter the activity, these journalists prioritized spending time doing things that they enjoyed outside of work. But, one participant, whose hobby is painting, found it difficult to be creative

sometimes because she would expend her creativity and energy at work to produce her shows (P20, News Producer, Market 1-50, she/her).

Alcohol. A few participants, specifically three of them, shared that they would drink alcohol to cope with their stress and burnout. For most of these journalists, they said that their alcohol consumption was more of a casual nature, reporting having a glass or two on their own or with their friends.

Recharge Alone and Sleep. Two of the participants said they required time to recharge alone to cope with their stress and burnout. One participant shared that, amid the hectic news schedules, she needed the “slow moments to feel like myself” (P2, Breaking News Reporter, Market 1-50, she/her). The other participant expressed that having time alone helped him to check in with himself and identify his signs of stress and burnout, which he says is “the first step” in understanding how to alleviate it (P3, Photojournalist, Market 1-50, he/him). Separately, two participants stated that they would cope with their stress and burnout by sleeping or catching up on lost sleep due to their workload and schedules. As one participant summed up, “this schedule is already exhausting, and sometimes it’s just easier to just take a nap” (P13, News Producer, Market 1-50, she/they).

Dark Humor. Two participants reported using dark humor to cope with their stress and burnout. At the extreme, these jokes included references to death and suicide. One of the participants shared that she makes these jokes to cope with how her generation, Generation Z, is shaped by various key and tragic life events:

it's just the reality that we've gone through so much as Gen Z, and it's almost as if it's like, “What more? What else could there possibly be?” cause we've lived

through so many life events and tragedies, so... Yeah, I mean the 9/11 stuff, like COVID, and all these wars, and all that stuff, and we're all just thinking like, "Does this get any better?" (P12, News Producer/MMJ, Market 50-100, she/her)

While dark humor was a common coping mechanism for her, the second participant said she experienced two contrasting responses from management after she made suicide jokes at two different stations. At her current station, she recalled receiving a call from the station's human resources department, which was centered around providing her mental health resources and steps to find a therapist. She expressed feeling grateful for their genuine concern. However, at her previous station, she said was punished for the same act instead:

I was walking out of the booth, and I was talking to [co-worker], and I looked at him and said, "How fast do you think I'd have to drive my car into a wall for it to kill me?" [Another co-worker] reports me. I get in trouble! Instead of saying, "Hey, are you okay? You've been making a lot of jokes lately. Want to make sure that you're actually okay." No! It was, "You're making horrible jokes in this newsroom. You're gonna get written up." (P7, News Producer, Market 50-100, she/her)

Don't. Four participants admitted they do not or struggled to cope with their stress and burnout. From this group, two journalists shared that they both did not cope well, either because they did not know how to or did not want to. Another journalist expressed that he found it challenging to upkeep healthy coping mechanisms due to his burnout and exhaustion, saying he is "too tired to work on it" (P22, Sports Producer, Market 100+, he/him). Another participant shared that she found it difficult to do so as a

single mother: “I get off work. I pick up my daughter and got to take care of her as well, so I don’t really feel like I have too much time to decompress until the end of the day” (P25, Executive Producer, Market 100+, she/her).

Why It’s Different for Generation Z

Most of the journalists in this study recognized that their generation experiences stress and burnout unlike the journalists that have come before them. Their reasons for why are explained below.

The Industry Has Changed. Most of the participants mentioned that stress and burnout are different for Generation Z journalists because they are practicing in an industry that is completely different from the one their predecessors worked in. This theme emerged frequently as an overarching point to the participants’ arguments. The participants highlighted several changes in workload and resources that are unique to their generation of journalists. For instance, several participants stated that journalists their age are more susceptible to burnout due to the additional workload that was brought by the introduction of MMJ positions, which forced these Generation Z journalists to solely handle the workload of what used to be accomplished by multiple people or crews.

These journalists also pointed out that the current state of the industry allows younger journalists to be “thrown” into larger markets very early into their careers, which places additional stress and pressure on their generation of journalists. Because of this, the journalists remarked that journalists their age no longer have the opportunity to “get their toes wet and develop a better understanding of the business” (P1, Anchor/Reporter, Market 1-50, he/him) like older journalists would. Instead, they are forced to quickly adapt in an industry that these journalists say provides very little adjustment time or

leeway. Several participants recalled their own experiences of “being thrown to the wolves” (P3, Photojournalist, Market 1-50, he/him) as fresh journalists, facing a rude awakening of meeting exceedingly high expectations as fresh-out-of-college kids.

Outdated Pay. Many participants also shared that pay was a major factor to why Generation Z journalists experience stress and burnout differently than other generations. These journalists acknowledged that low pay has always been an underlying stressor for journalists, but that stress is particularly worse for Generation Z because it has not kept up with cost of living and inflation or the increased workload and demands that now comes with being a modern-day journalist. A news producer summarized her frustrations with the generational divide regarding this issue:

[Boss] got 20 years on me, and so when she was in her twenties, starting out, her rent was \$300. Mine is almost 3 times that, you know, and she was complaining the other day because all of these reporters keep quitting because they want more money, they want more money. I'm like, “Yeah!” It's not that we want more money. We need it to live. (P13, News Producer, Market 1-50, she/they)

The Internet, Social Media, and Technology. Several participants cited the digital age and social media as factors for why their generation experiences stress and burnout differently from older journalists, saying that these technological advancements have made the industry a different place than the one their older counterparts were practicing in. For instance, these journalists highlighted that older generations of journalists did not have to create content for multiple mediums due to the presence of social media, emphasizing that Generation Z's workload has only grown since then. Additionally, as the generation of digital natives, these journalists shared feeling an extra

pressure and expectation to be proficient in everything tech, social media, and web related.

Similarly, the journalists shared that social media has forced them to curate their appearance as public personalities online, which is not a job requirement previously experienced by older journalists at their age. On top of this adding to their workload, one participant said that her generation of journalists are also forced to grow up quicker into “professional adults,” which only adds to their stress (P2, Breaking News Reporter, Market 1-50, she/her). Moreover, the Generation Z journalists said that the internet has only given rise to alternate news sources and citizen/vigilante journalists, which the participants identified as sources that journalists from older generations did not have to compete with or work to verify.

These journalists also shared that their generation of journalists now faces an additional expectation to keep up with the 24-hour news cycle to be successful in the field. A news producer emphasized that this is a major reason why burnout is worse for Generation Z journalists:

I feel like we're just constantly exposed to stimuli and information, and so when you put yourself in a workplace where you have to be almost chronically online in a sense, because you have to go and look at the story and get background and do research and then you write it, like that's so much stimuli at once on top of the fact that I feel like broadcast in general is very overstimulating. That I can see why, like our generation is so burned out so quickly. (P20, News Producer, Market 1-50, she/her)

At the same time, these journalists said that stress and burnout is worse for their generation because the age of social media has given them a bigger sense of imposter syndrome. As one journalist summarized, “We have this ability to see how everyone else in our industry that's our age is doing and compare ourselves” and the salaries and work conditions of other jobs by simply scrolling through LinkedIn or Instagram (P2, Breaking News Reporter, Market 1-50, she/her). Another participant shared that this could take a toll on one’s confidence and self-esteem:

I see someone I follow on Facebook or on Instagram, too, and she looks like she's thriving. She's going to her next market. And it's like- it's hard seeing those pictures, you're like. “Oh, that's great, you know. She's thriving,” and then you realize, like I haven't done anything in my life remotely close to that... and like pictures say a lot of stuff. Like it makes them look like they're very happy. I don't know what challenges she's going through, but it's just it's sad to see someone else thrive when you're like literally sinking. (P12, News Producer/MMJ, Market 50-100, she/her)

Distrust, Hostility toward Media. Current anti-press rhetoric and attitudes were another reason why the Generation Z journalists believed that stress and burnout are different for their generation of journalists. These journalists pinpointed the negative public sentiment toward the press and media as a stressor that is uniquely experienced by their generation. They argued that, while journalists of all ages are now subject to a disparaging public perception of the profession, these older journalists did not have to deal with being treated with hostility and disrespect when they were first starting out as journalism was still seen as a noble and respectful career back then. Additionally,

combining this with the presence of social media, these journalists shared that it is also easier for journalists now to be targeted and criticized publicly online.

Pressure to Prove Themselves. The Generation Z journalists added that their generation experiences stress and burnout differently because they are under a greater pressure to prove themselves in their workplaces. As the younger journalists in their newsrooms, many of these participants shared that they were undermined more due to their age and lack of experience. This was particularly challenging to deal with for journalists who were in more commanding roles that required leadership in some way, like news producers and assignments editors. These journalists shared that they were not taken seriously in their newsrooms as they were still being perceived as a kid, often hearing their older co-workers poke fun at their age or question their qualifications to work in bigger television markets. Outside of their age, these journalists also reported having to frequently combat stereotypes about their generation, like assumptions that Generation Z is lazy, soft, weak and complainers, to which the journalists strongly disagreed with.

Mental Health and Self as Bigger Priorities. The participants shared that Generation Z journalists experience stress and burnout differently due to their generation making mental health a bigger priority. The journalists often compared this to the older journalists' "suck it up" mindset, saying that they have seen a generational shift with how journalists respond to their burnout, as one news producer explained:

I think that they did experience burnout to some degree, just because news has always been a demanding industry, but they've never really talked about it, and they've never expressed it, and they've never wanted differently. They, I think,

just has been like "This is how it is, and so I'm just going to put my head down and work through it." (P10, News Producer, Market 1-50, she/her)

The participants acknowledged that their generation of journalists are more vocal about mental health issues and advocate for their well-being more than older journalists have in the past, adding that Generation Z is less tolerable of enduring poor work conditions. As one anchor/reporter pointed out, saying that this generational barrier could impact the future of the industry if Generation Z's concerns are not taken seriously:

I think that our generation is a lot more brave, just a lot more like confident in knowing what our worth is, and although they may not like it, they kind of just have to deal with it, because at this point in the industry, it's backfiring on them. People are not going into the industry. People are leaving the industry very fast. So like, if they want to be ridiculous and pay \$14 an hour, then they are not going to get the results they want, and those results are gonna be people leaving or people just not respecting them in the way that they are demanding respect. (P14, Anchor/Reporter, Market 50-100, she/her)

Concurrently, several journalists expressed that Generation Z journalists experience stress and burnout differently because their generation struggles more with their mental health and with managing stress than past generations. Some of the participants attributed this to the numerous, often traumatic, life events that Generation Z has had to live through thus far, including the 9/11 attacks, school shootings and, most recently, the COVID-19 pandemic.

Turnover (Intentions)

All of the 25 Generation Z television journalists are no strangers to seeing turnover in the industry, from watching their own newsrooms lose journalists or their friends and colleagues leave the business. One participant described often seeing numerous journalists leave the industry for the public relations field, or what several participants referred to as the “dark or evil side”: “I’ve seen photographers do that. I’ve seen reporters do it, and I’ve seen a lot of producers do it, and I’ve seen that in every market that I’ve worked. Not just at my station, at multiple stations” (P11, Photojournalist, Market 1-50, he/him). Another participant shared that, despite only having worked there for a year and 10 months, he was the most tenured news reporter at his station due to high turnover in his newsroom (P6, Senior Political Correspondent, Market 50-100, he/him). Plus, one participant said he saw eight photojournalists leave his station in just a year, yet no new hires were made to replace the missing positions (P17, Photographer, Market 1-50, he/him).

When asked if they felt any intentions to change their jobs or careers while experiencing burnout, a majority of participants – 22 out of 25 – said, “yes.” These journalists stated that they thought about leaving their jobs “all the time,” ranging from every day to every other month. The participants also shared that they were considering opportunities within and outside of the news industry. Several of the journalists reported actively looking for jobs, especially those who neared the end of their news contracts, often finding themselves browsing open positions on LinkedIn and Indeed.

Their reasons for their intentions to leave their jobs varied from wanting better pay, hours and work conditions to seeing their own peers leave the business to desiring a

job that was less stressful. As one participant shared, “I love news, and I would love to stay in news. I just don't know how sustainable that really is” (P10, News Producer, Market 1-50, she/her). Another said that she became a member of a “TV to PR” Facebook group preemptively, in case she needed to leave the industry in the future:

because I don't know how I could handle the burnout as a parent in the future, and so that is a huge part of trying to also have a plan B, because the burnout and the schedule and the emotional toil, while taking care of and trying to be all of that support system for a family. I don't know how people do that to be honest... if I can barely do now. (P2, Breaking News Reporter, Market 1-50, she/her)

Despite the overwhelming feelings of burnout and wanting to leave, many of these journalists expressed that they were planning to stay put for now because, at the end of the day, they still loved the news and journalism and said this was still a major passion and dream for them. One journalist shared that while he was considering moving to a different station, he does not foresee himself leaving the news business anytime soon: “I haven't really burned out on the job; I'm so passionate about the job, but I've burned out on some of the places I've worked” (P11, Photojournalist, Market 1-50, he/him). Another participant expressed that she couldn't imagine working in a role outside of news, a sentiment shared by several journalists:

I was like, “Oh, my gosh! My life would probably be a lot less stressful if I just worked in [public relations] or I was a [public information officer] or I did marketing,” but then I was like, “I don't think I would be nearly as... It wouldn't be as rewarding or fulfilling.” (P8, MMJ, Market 100+, she/her)

Several journalists shared that, because they still considered themselves new to the industry, they were determined to stay until they could not handle the stress and burnout anymore. Others shared that they felt like they could not abandon the sense of community and relationships they built through their jobs. On a less optimistic note, one journalist said she would likely stay in news because she was unsure if other non-news jobs would truly have better work conditions, saying “Is the grass greener? Probably not” (P19, Assignment Editor, Market 50-100, she/her).

Out of the remaining three journalists, two of them said they had not yet experienced turnover intentions – one shared that he knows he will not stay in the same market forever and was optimistic about working at the national level one day (P3, Photojournalist, Market 50-100, he/him); the other expressed she has not yet experienced those feelings, likely because she is still new to the industry (P21, News Producer, Market 50-100, she/her). The last journalist shared that he has not had the time to think about leaving his job or career due to his excessive workload (P22, Sports Producer, Market 100+, he/him).

What Hurts and Helps Them: Job Demands/Resources (RQ3)

Following this thesis’ third research question, the Generation Z local television journalists were asked to identify the job demands and job resources that played into their burnout experiences. This section will first address the participants’ job demands, then job resources and, finally, conclude with the personal resources involved in their burnout experiences.

Job Demands

This section encompasses the aspects of their jobs that the 25 participants found contributed to their stress and burnout, and drained and exhausted them at work. The journalists' conversations about their job demands often overshadowed their job resources available. As one participant described, "I think this job is very set up to cause burnout, especially in younger people" (P3, Photographer, Market 1-50, he/him). Many of these journalists shared that, while they were passionate about their jobs, these demands of their job made it difficult for them to continue fostering that spark for it, as a news producer described: "I don't hate news. I don't hate my job, necessarily. I just hate those contributing factors of burnout that it's hard for me to love the job" (P20, News Producer, Market 1-50, she/her). Table 2 displays the themes corresponding to the participants' job demands in their burnout experience in descending order of how often it was highlighted by participants. More thorough explanations of the themes and sub-themes follow.

Table 2

List of Job Demands

Theme	No. of Participants
Doing More with Less	25
Issues with Management	18
Inability to Take Time Off	15
Traumatic and Tough Topics	14
Work Hours, Shifts and Schedules	12
Contractual Nature of TV News	8
Lack of Job Autonomy or Creativity	8

Isolating Nature of Job	7
Unpredictability of News	7
Lack of Newsroom Diversity	6
Toxicity and Egos in Newsrooms	5
Meeting Market or Client Expectations	4
Pressures of Being a Public Personality	4
Anti-Press Rhetoric and Attitudes	3
Physical Labor	2

Doing More with Less. All 25 of the Generation Z local television journalists cited their high workload coupled with the lack of resources as a major contributor to their stress and burnout, often describing it as “doing more with less.” Generally, these journalists felt like they were having to meet extremely high and unrealistic workload and expectations without having sufficient resources to do so. Additionally, the participants stated that their modern-day workload had increased when compared to journalists of the past, sharing that they were now having to, among other things, juggle responsibilities of multiple roles, plus create content for more than one medium at a time (e.g., broadcast and digital/web) and for an increasing number of shows a day. As one journalist exclaimed, “We can’t do more! We don’t have the resources to do more. We just don’t have that” (P10, News Producer, Market 1-50, she/her).

Low Pay. One of the (missing) resources that was often cited by these journalists was the pay, with 16 of the participants saying that this was a major contributor to their stress and burnout. Whether it was in a television station or freelancing work setting, the journalists expressed that what they were paid did not match up to the workload they had or the effort that they put in, using terms like “inadequate,” “unfair” and “insufficient” to

describe their compensation. In addition, one MMJ felt that her pay was too low considering she paid thousands of dollars to pursue higher education for her job (P24, MMJ, Market 50-100, she/her). The low pay rate in news made the journalists feel like they were not valued at work, or as one participant said, “it makes us feel like we're not wanted. We're just replaceable little cogs in the machine” (P13, News Producer, Market 1-50, she/they). This made it hard for the journalists to find purpose or feel passionate about what they were doing, as one participant shared:

because journalists aren't lazy. We're happy to work hard. Some of my most memorable, positive experiences are after really long, hard days, so the effort isn't necessarily... it's not something we're afraid of, but the reward time after time after time after time... it's not enough. (P1, Anchor/Reporter, Market 1-50, he/him)

The discrepancies between the effort and reward varied throughout the sample. An anchor/reporter shared that she was only making \$15 an hour while producing, anchoring and reporting at the same time, which are roles typically held by three people (P14, Anchor/Reporter, Market 50-100, she/her). A sports producer said that his station did not allow him to clock in for overtime pay despite working 50 hours a week consistently and asked him to mark down his hours instead (P22, Sports Producer, Market 100+, he/him). An assignment editor – who also had line producing, web/digital and editing duties – stated that she only received a 50 cent raise even though her job responsibilities tripled in just a year (P19, Assignment Editor, Market 50-100, she/her). One MMJ even found the industry's low pay to be ironic when she was assigned to cover

the 2023 United Auto Workers strike, where workers went on strike for better pay and benefits, saying it only added insult to injury:

all of us reporters were like “Where the f—’s our union?” We’ve got our own big three: Scripps, Nexstar and Gray. And [UAW workers] telling us what they’re making, saying, “This isn’t survivable. This isn’t enough,” and we’re making less than them! And we are covering how inflation is higher than ever, and people are not being paid living wages, and we’re making less than these people? (P8, MMJ, Market 100+, she/her)

Many of these participants shared that their low pay caused financial strain, forcing some to live paycheck to paycheck, which only added to their stress and burnout. Two participants disclosed that they and other television journalists they knew had to pick up two jobs to compensate for the lackluster pay rate. A photojournalist said he knew co-workers who lived in “sketchy areas” to afford a place to live in their television market (P11, Photojournalist, Market 1-50, he/him). Several journalists added that their financial stress was only exacerbated when their already low pay was stretched between their student loan and credit card debts on top of their day-to-day expenses. One anchor shared he struggled to afford the basic necessities at times, which also interfered with his abilities to work:

Cause if you can't focus on what you're going to eat at night, how can you focus on anything else? I was live at a tornado, EF3, and I remember I had 89 cents in my bank account, and they were giving out free pizza to the victims, and, boy, that pizza looked so good. However, you gotta play your part. You know that's

not for you. These people just lost everything. You have to be mindful of that.

(P4, Anchor, Market 50-100, he/him)

The journalists' financial uncertainties from their low pay not only made it challenging for them to afford their ideal lifestyles at the present, but also plan for their lives in the future. Here's what one participant described:

making the amount of money that I make now, if I made that 10 or 15 years ago, that'd be a lot different than making it now, so it's kind of not worth it to suffer through. It feels like I'm never gonna- I can't buy a house or have a family or anything. It's like feels like more of a struggle now, and there's no reward for all the work that we have to do. (P17, Photojournalist, Market 1-50, he/him)

Insufficient Staffing. A lack of staffing and manpower was another factor that played into the journalists' burnout, to which 13 of the participants cited as a significant job demand. They stated that the main reason for their understaffed newsrooms was high burnout and turnover rates that pushed journalists to leave their newsrooms or their stations collapsing roles to save costs. Either way, as one journalist put it, "we have a high workflow because we don't have staffing like we used to" (P8, MMJ, Market 100+, she/her).

Many of these journalists shared that their less-than-ideal newsroom staffing levels led to their burnout because they were asked to fill in for missing positions and cover other journalists' slack. Oftentimes, this meant that the journalists were working more than the typical five days a week, doubling/tripling/quadrupling up on role responsibilities, and/or producing more stories or shows than usual. A photojournalist said, to make up for the low staffing levels in his newsroom, he and a fellow

photojournalist were required to come in on their days off to work on mandatory overtime, and if they tried to oppose the order, they would be coerced and guilt-tripped into saying, “yes” (P11, Photojournalist, Market 1-50, he/him). In the most extreme circumstance, a sports reporter worked 14 days in a row during the Super Bowl due to a lack of manpower in his department. By the end of that stint, he recalled being so exhausted that he “was nodding off at my desk, and head against the window driving into work cause I couldn’t hold it up” (P22, Sports Producer, Market 100+, he/him). Another anchor shared that his managers would constantly assign him to cover the work of another co-worker to make up for their reduced proficiency and efficiency:

it really upset me because assignment editor was sitting with assistant news director, and they were trying to find some content for the weekend. They were like, “Oh, can the weekend morning anchor do this package?”, and they was like, “No, the weekend morning anchor isn't really that fast so they probably shouldn't do a package”, basically cause they were fearful of them missing slot. So, in my head I was thinking, “Because you suck at your job, let's have [P4] and do it”, that's what they say. Because they suck at their job, I have to do more work? (P4, Anchor, Market 50-100, he/him)

Some of the journalists also shared that the staffing that was available in their newsrooms was not fairly distributed, with those working on the weekend and overnight shifts seeing the biggest lack of resources compared to dayside and nightside shows. A news producer described her experience producing on the overnight shift with reduced manpower. Oftentimes, she found herself needing to choose what stories to cover in order

to preserve her limited resources, which added another layer of stress to the stress she already deals with as a news producer:

it almost feels like [the workload] triples on the overnight shift because we just don't have the same resources as dayside does. I mean, it's frustrating because, "Well, why did we miss this? Well, because we don't have 3 other people just sitting there waiting to go and film something." Like, I have one photographer, and if he's on the other side of the city, that's it. We're not getting it. (P13, News Producer, Market 1-50, she/they)

Several journalists – particularly MMJs – shared that they were exhausted from trying to fulfill the high workload and endure the unsafe conditions as a one-man-band. A senior political correspondent said he was sent to set up his live shots alone in the middle of the night, which was particularly dangerous in his high-crime television market (P6, Senior Political Correspondent, Market 50-100, he/him). Moreover, as one MMJ recalled, in the one year she was with her station, she could count the number of times she was paired with a photojournalist on one hand:

I've had photographers tell me during live shots, "Oh, it's because you're good, and they know you can handle it by yourself and do good videography, so they don't want to... They'll have the photographer do something else. Like, they don't want to waste a photographer on you since you *can* [emphasis added] do it on your own." I keep saying just because I can does not mean I should. (P8, MMJ, Market 100+, she/her)

In addition to losing manpower from journalists leaving, one executive producer shared that a big contributor to her burnout was losing experienced talent and having to

“start from scratch almost every time” (P25, Executive Producer, Market 100+, she/her). With her television market being of a smaller size, having reporters who arrived straight out of college was the norm, but her additional stress and burnout came from needing to hire and train these new hires, often back-to-back due to high rates of turnover in her newsroom. At its peak, she shared that her management team had to train four new reporters within the span of a month which, on top of her regular responsibilities, caused her to burn out. In a freelancing context, one photojournalist shared that he used to freelance for an extremely small stringer company with only four or five people. Due to the low staffing levels, he recalled having to function as the photojournalist for multiple news stations, which led to him burning out due to typically working for seven days in a row and a lack of work-life balance.

Not Enough Time. Eight of the participants also identified the time pressures and deadlines of television news as factors that led to their burnout. While the strict deadlines were not surprising to these journalists, they expressed feeling frustrated and stressed from being expected to tackle their high workload in a short amount of time, often calling it unrealistic. For example, an anchor/reporter said that, even though her day started at 9 a.m. “just like everyone else,” she was expected to be live in the station’s 4 p.m., 5 p.m., 6 p.m. and 10 p.m. shows with different content for each report (P14, Anchor/Reporter, Market 50-100, she/her). A news producer shared that she only had six hours to produce two hours of news at her station (P20, News Producer, Market 1-50, she/her). An anchor recalled that he was required to turn in two VO/SOTs – or voiceover/sound on tape, which are considered shorter news stories – and two different news packages during each eight-hour work day while working as an MMJ (P4, Anchor, Market 50-100, he/him).

Similarly, a photojournalist stated that he and his reporter were required to turn in two stories a day while only being given around four hours to work on each one, adding that he felt discontented because “there’s not enough time to do a good job, and I would rather do one good one than two half-good ones ... I care that I have enough time to do it right” (P17, Photojournalist, Market 1-50, he/him). A breaking news reporter said she would often work overtime to finish her assignments, saying that she felt like a failure when she was unable to complete everything on time (P2, Breaking News Reporter, Market 1-50, she/her).

Separately, a reporter shared that her stress stemmed from having to stretch her time between her day-to-day reporting assignments and extra investigative projects because she aspired to be an investigative reporter (P5, Reporter, Market 1-50, she/her). A sports producer described going through a similar situation himself, saying that his time and efforts had to be split between his station’s daily newscasts as well as a sports special on the weekends (P22, Sports Producer, Market 100+, he/him).

Other (Lack of) Resources. Five journalists said that the increasing demand for content and stories in shows were what led to their burnout. Four of them, who worked in news producing roles, said it was oftentimes stressful to find sufficient content to fill up their shows due to new shows being added by their station, competition for content with other producers, a lack of non-news segments to help fill their news hole (e.g., sports, weather), having to produce more than one show a day on their own, and the uncertainty of reporter packages making slot – or getting into the show – on time. One news producer even shared that her station required her to meet a requirement of 25 stories per hour-long show she produced (P20, News Producer, Market 1-50, she/her). In addition, an MMJ

shared that he found it draining to come up with a new story every single day (P16, MMJ, Market 1-50, he/him).

A senior political correspondent added that degrading equipment needed for television news at his station was a factor in his burnout because it made it more difficult and stressful for him to finish his reporting assignments. He stated several instances of this happening, including his station's 25-year-old cameras breaking, his lights dying, his company-required virtual private network (VPN) having technological issues, and his editing software crashing. As he described, all of this "falls on top of each other" and created additional stress for him to deal with while being under a strict deadline (P6, Senior Political Correspondent, Market 50-100, he/him). He also realized that this obstacle was something that his print colleagues did not experience. On a similar note, an MMJ recalled a stressful situation where her SD card was suddenly corrupted, erasing all of her interviews and b-roll that she spent hours gathering for a story that day (P8, MMJ, Market 100+, she/her).

Separately, a few participants in this study also shared that they were working at co-owned stations, also known as duopolies. While their workload and coverage doubled, these journalists reported not receiving pay, staffing or support to compensate for their increased duties, thus leading to them burning out.

Issues with Management. In reflecting on what caused them to burn out at work, 18 out of the 25 journalists in this sample cited management as a major reason. Generally, several participants simply described their issues and conflict with management as being led by "poor" and "unprofessional" people or facing "mistreatment" by managers. A news producer added that a primary contributor to why

she was burnt out was having managers that were not sufficiently trained to manage or lead people. She shared that every direct manager that she has had in her career so far has been a first-time manager, which caused a lot of conflict and tension:

I've had issues with each person, because I'm not the kind of person that lets people push me around and be disrespectful, and I feel like there's not a lot of training when it comes to management, especially in news. They don't send an [executive producer] off to leadership courses before they take a job ... Just because you're good at your job doesn't mean you're ready to manage people, and that I find that that happens a lot with especially [executive producers], because that's the next step. Just because this person's good at their job, are they going to be good at managing people? (P7, News Producer, Market 50-100, she/her)

Lack of Support and Care. Of these journalists, 14 highlighted having unsupportive management as a reason for their burnout, saying that they felt they could not rely on their managers for help. Some of these journalists reported not receiving enough support from their managers in the form of training or guidance. These participants said their managers failed to prepare them sufficiently for their new roles, which left them to fend for themselves amidst a chaotic news environment. As one participant recalled, “It builds us, but it wasn't a very positive experience to remember. We were really like freaking out like chicken with our heads cut off” (P12, News Producer/MMJ, Market 50-100, she/her). In addition, an anchor/reporter said that, because she could not rely on her managers, she was “forced to rely on myself and do things that I shouldn't have to deal,” which included making her own schedule every

single week because her manager would not do it (P14, Anchor/Reporter, Market 50-100, she/her).

These journalists also felt unsupported when their managers did not act on feedback or take their concerns seriously, with some saying they were used to this behavior in their newsrooms. A photojournalist recalled trying to tell her male chief photojournalist about the worries she had about working with a hostile co-worker at a previous news station, to which he replied, “[P9], yeah, I’m going to tell you what I would tell the male photographer. You just need to grow a pair and get over it.” (P9, Photojournalist, Market 1-50, she/her). A news producer said that she remembered seeing the newsroom concerns brought up by her and her co-workers brushed off and ignored by management:

I’m watching my coworkers get frustrated with unprofessional management. And then when they’d say,” Hey, I’m burnt out. I’m overworked. We need to hire more people,” or “Hey, I don’t agree with this choice that you did,” and they don’t care. It’s like, “Oh, hey, we’re not even people to you anymore. We’re just here to do the job.” (P23, News Producer, Market 50-100, she/her)

Two journalists shared that they felt the lack of managerial support from the way their management failed to show care and grace while they were experiencing emotional distress from covering tougher stories. For instance, an MMJ shared that she experienced a “lack of care” from most of her managers when she was experiencing panic attacks in response to traumatic content at work, saying “At the end of the day, what they care most about is getting the story. They don’t care about me” (P24, MMJ, Market 50-100,

she/her). An anchor shared a similar experience after witnessing a state execution, which made him feel underappreciated at the station:

It was an extremely long day, and then I just went home ... and I had a colleague at another station, who was witness to the same execution at the state penitentiary, and he received a check-in call from his news director, and they actually sent a little care package to his house, and none of that happened for my employer. So, I definitely felt emotional stress that just from the event that I had went through, but also an additional sense of disengagement that, like, “Hey, my employer doesn't really care about me in what I have done for the company today”. (P1, Anchor/Reporter, Market 1-50, he/him)

Disconnect Between Employees and Management. Ten journalists in this study highlighted the disconnect between them and their managers as a contributor to their burnout. One way this disconnect emerged was from differing viewpoints on the expectations versus realities of a news product. For example, one MMJ, who was assigned to report on a court case, shared that she was expected to produce a VO/SOT on the case's verdict based on her news producer's request. However, just 45 minutes before she was slotted to report live, her managers and newsroom called back, angry, expecting a full package instead, which was not something that was previously communicated with her. This, on top of the long two weeks she spent covering the same case solo, was her breaking point: “I literally could have started crying right in that moment. I was just thinking about something like, ‘I can never do enough’” (P8, MMJ, Market 100+, she/her).

Some of the participants also expressed frustration when reporting to managers who had a different role from them. For example, one of the MMJs in this study stated that all of her managers were former producers who did not have any experience outside of producing. This made it challenging for her to meet their expectations for work since they “would expect the absolute world out of reporters” and did not understand the realities of her capabilities in her role (P14, Anchor/Reporter, Market 50-100, she/her). A news producer experienced a similar situation with having managers that did not have producing experience, saying that this gap in skill set made it difficult for her to advocate for herself and her shows:

when I have managers that don't know how to produce at all, and they're asking me questions about things, and I'm telling them, “This is not something that you want to go down this path. This is not going to be marketable for our station in the long run. It will make you easy money right now, and that's fine, but in the long run it will not,” and they do not listen, or they do not care, or they make decisions without consulting producers at all. (P23, News Producer, Market 50-100, she/her)

One photojournalist shared that the disconnect between him and his management was of a more physical manner, explaining that he only was only able to meet his executive producer and other co-workers in person after a year into his job because his station's photojournalists were not allowed in the building due to a COVID-era policy. That policy was only lifted recently under a new general manager. Because of this, this photojournalist remarked, “It seems like they treat photographers as second-class citizens sometimes” (P11, Photojournalist, Market 1-50, he/him). Another photojournalist

expressed a similar sentiment about the divide between “inside building people versus outside building people,” saying that “people don’t get what they’re sending us out to either. At all” (P17, Photojournalist, Market 1-50, he/him).

Additionally, with this sample being from Generation Z, some participants shared that they felt frustrated working under managers who were older due to the generational differences between them. These journalists shared that their frustration came from the lack of the understanding and relatability between their generation and others due to differing leadership styles and beliefs about ideal news practices. An MMJ added that her managers would often dismiss the realities of her abilities and need for resources to complete a reporting assignment as a one-man band because they did not work in her role when they were her age. In sum, this disconnect between management and their employees, while possessing varying dimensions, added to their stress and, ultimately, burnout at work. One journalist stated this disconnect drives a wedge between journalists and their managers, in which it makes the managers seem out-of-touch toward the realities of practicing news as “the little people” in a newsroom:

They lose sight, I think, of what it means or what it meant to be in the trenches, to be doing the job, and I often feel like there’s no grace from them. They’re not empathetic to burnout or to what the people on the floor are actually doing. (P10, News Producer, Market 1-50, she/her)

Lack of Positive Reinforcement. Six of these journalists also pinpointed the lack of positive reinforcement and/or feedback from their management as one of the primary reasons for their burnout. They described often receiving overly critical feedback whenever a mistake was made, no matter how big or small. Yet, they failed to hear from

their managers when they had a win at work or went above and beyond for a task. As one participant summarized, “when you're constantly only ever hearing about the stuff that you've done wrong, it's hard to remember that you are doing good” (P13, News Producer, Market 1-50, she/they). Additionally, an assignment editor shared she rarely received feedback at all in her more hidden, behind-the-scenes position when compared to journalists in front-facing roles, like reporters:

people could tell them like, “Wow! Great story.” But no one ever thanks the assignment editor for giving them the contacts for that story, or setting things up for them, or finding and pitching the story. There's really like no internal thanks. (P19, Assignment Editor, Market 50-100, she/her)

Inability to Take Time Off. Fifteen journalists said that they felt their stress and burnout worsen when they could not take a break or time off from their work, which they said inhibited them from establishing a sense of work-life balance. Apart from the lack of staffing in their newsrooms (as previously addressed in the “Doing More with Less” theme), many of these participants attributed the need to keep up with the 24-hour news cycle as another major reason for why they could not catch a break. As one photojournalist summarized, “the news doesn’t sleep, people don’t sleep, so you’re constantly having to grind for that” (P3, Photojournalist, Market 1-50, he/him). Some of these journalists said that they felt pressured to keep up with work even while they were away from their newsrooms or risk facing disgruntled managers when they returned to work. As one journalist described, “I have Teams and my Outlook [on my phone] because, if I miss something for a couple of days, it’s like, you know, daggers that I didn’t dedicate my entire free time to it” (P24, MMJ, Market 50-100, she/her). Several of

the participants shared similar sentiments, finding self-care tips to “unplug” unrealistic for their profession, as one news producer explained:

something that a lot of people say is, “Oh, well, when you leave here, do not look at your emails” ... “It is not your job to work when you're off the clock.” Be so f— for real. In the world of journalism, be real with me. Don't act like I'm not having to look at my phone 24/7. If I want to be successful in this field, I have to keep up. I have to, you know, read all my emails. (P7, News Producer, Market 50-100, she/her)

Some of the news producers in this group shared that they found it more difficult to find work-life balance because, unlike on-air journalists who had the luxury of having a work phone, their newsroom did not provide them one or they did not have the money to afford one out of their own pocket. Every single thing related to their work had to be stored on their personal phones. This, coupled with the expectation that they must constantly keep up with the news cycle, exacerbated these journalists' stress and burnout. Other journalists added that they found themselves often working past their fixed work hours to catch up on tasks or prepare for the next day, as one anchor/reporter explained:

It's really hard to have any sort of work life balance, because when you're off the clock, you're still looking for story pitches, or you're driving back from wherever you were live from, or you're answering back emails from the day that you haven't had a chance to, because you were grinding on editing. (P14, Anchor/Reporter, Market 50-100, she/her)

Other participants added that they struggled to take time away from work because their newsrooms explicitly did not allow them to. A news producer shared that her news

director emailed her newsroom requiring all employees to be reachable by managers by phone unless they were on PTO, adding that instructions on how to allow contacts to bypass a phone's "Do Not Disturb" system were included in that email (P7, News Producer, Market 50-100, she/her). Additionally, several journalists reported having their time off requests denied by management. The news producer shared that her station's management told their employees that PTO was a privilege not a right. She added that if employees were denied their PTO requests and decided to take time off anyway, they would be written up and potentially fired for "work abandonment." A senior political correspondent said that management would limit his PTO usage to certain months in the year because employees are not allowed to take off during ratings periods (P6, Senior Political Correspondent, Market 50-100, he/him).

Despite PTO being a benefit all of these journalists had, they reported frequently facing pushback from management whenever they did request to use it, including hearing snarky or guilt tripping comments. Separately, several journalists shared that, if they were fortunate enough to actually have their days off, they felt that were still not able to truly rest and recharge because those days were spent toward running errands or completing chores.

Traumatic and Tough Topics. Many of the journalists, specifically 14 of them, acknowledged the traumatic and negative nature of the news events they would cover as significant contributors to their stress and burnout. An anchor/reporter described the dark subject matter that journalists have to encounter at work as the most persistent stress that journalists are confronted with on a daily basis (P1, Anchor/Reporter, Market 1-50, he/him). None of these journalists found this surprising, as one journalist summarized,

“we're all dealing with everybody's worst trauma cause that's what working at a news station is. You deal with the world's ugliness every day” (P23, News Producer, Market 50-100, she/her). However, they still acknowledged the impact that it took on them, as one participant explained:

The news is like this, like it does come with the job. But you'll get like a really, really, really hard story every once in a while that's like, “Okay, why am I doing this? Like, I could be doing anything else and not have to listen to this, not have to deal with this, not have to see these photos and things like that.” (P13, News Producer, Market 1-50, she/they)

When covering news stories of a traumatic and tough nature, the journalists who worked in the field described feeling emotionally distressed from having talk to sources moments after a tragedy to make slot. As one journalist described, the act of “prying” made her “feel like the bad guy, and you feel like you're hurting somebody a little bit by asking them to talk to you when they've just had a loved one who's passed away” (P2, Breaking News Reporter, Market 1-50, she/her). In recalling their experiences with this, several of the journalists argued against the norm of this conduct in the business, saying that it was unethical, went against their personal ideals and values of practicing journalism and caused more stress and anxiety when they had to do it. These journalists also strongly voiced their stance against the “if it bleeds, it leads” model of television news where stories about death and destruction are prioritized in news coverage, with one journalist saying that these traumatic incidents are being normalized and “pushed and fed” to viewers (P15, News Producer, Market 1-50, she/her). Despite only having been in the industry for three years, an MMJ shared that the “popularity” of covering these types

of stories has made her desensitized to them, which she said greatly contributed to her burnout (P24, MMJ, Market 50-100, she/her).

Furthermore, the journalists, particularly those who worked behind-the-scenes in news producing positions, described themselves as filters, tasked with sifting through “the raw, the unfiltered, the unedited” gore and violence to make it appropriate for television consumption. As one journalist remarked, “somebody had to cut those out” (P7, News Producer, Market 50-100, she/her). They recalled experiencing the tragedy second-hand by watching raw footage of a scene, reading through affidavits and listening to stories unfold explicitly from law enforcement scanner traffic. These journalists often mentioned that covering such stories that involved young children affected them significantly more than other stories.

Two journalists stated that the subject matter of several news stories took a bigger toll on them mentally and emotionally because of an indirect personal connection to a story. An executive producer recalled crying and having a panic attack at work when her newsroom was covering an accident that killed two children, which she said did not happen before in the five years she worked as a journalist, because she was reminded of her young daughter (P25, Executive Producer, Market 100+, she/her). An MMJ shared that she struggled with stories where she was assigned to talk to family members of deceased people – or what she referred to as the “dead family member beat” – because her family member had recently died in a motor vehicle crash (P24, MMJ, Market 50-100, she/her). She added that she asked her management team to remove her from covering those stories to take care of her well-being. Both journalists reported having managers who were supportive and helped them when they were going through this.

Several journalists disclosed that they sometimes found it difficult to find time in the day to unpack and process the graphic and violent stories that they saw at work and their emotions toward it due to the constant need to keep up with the 24-hour news cycle, which often meant that it all would build up and eventually erupt into a stronger emotional reaction or trauma response. Two participants added that they found it difficult to “turn off the news” and avoid seeing such stories outside of work because there is increased access to it through social media, causing them to feel helpless about the tragedy and negativity in the world around them and feel more burnt out. Moreover, a news producer said one of the biggest reasons for her burnout was the struggle between balancing reacting to traumatic and tough subject matters in stories as a journalist before reacting as a person, to which she explained, “I find myself reacting as a person and taking things to heart more” and that it is just a human response that these stories weigh heavily on journalists (P20, News Producer, Market 1-50, she/her).

Work Hours, Shifts and Schedules. Twelve participants cited their work hours, shifts and schedules as what drained and exhausted them at work. These journalists used words like “crappy,” “crazy,” “rough,” “long,” and “ridiculous” to describe the hours they were working. The schedules varied in this sample. Several participants reported feeling physically and mentally drained from working during the overnight hours, which they say made it difficult for them to get a consistent and full night’s sleep. Other journalists reported working weekend shifts, which they found draining because they would often miss out on seeing their family and friends, as one participant described:

it doesn't seem like a big deal to like work weekends at first, and then, you know, kind of looking back on that period in my life and realizing there was a lot of

things I missed, or additionally, I had to take off more PTO to be able to go to things with my family and my friends than I would have had to if I just had like a “9-to-5” normal job. (P24, MMJ, Market 50-100, she/her)

Most of these journalists shared that they worked “flip flop” schedules, where they were on up to three different sleep schedules every week. For example, a news producer/MMJ shared that she was working a shift that required her to produce the 6 p.m. show on Fridays and then come back in at 2 a.m. on the weekend. During this time in her career, she shared that she spent most nights taking cat naps or staying awake out of fear of missing her alarms (P12, News Producer/MMJ, Market 50-100, she/her).

Additionally, a breaking news reporter described working “normal” 9-to-5 hours during the week and the graveyard shift on weekends. She stated the inconsistent work schedule meant that she would not get enough sleep most nights, which weighed on her physically and mentally, a sentiment shared by other participants who had similar schedules:

Your tank is not full of energy, no matter what you do. I joked to people during that time in my life that I was shaving years off my life because of my schedule, and I really think that was probably true. (P2, Breaking News Reporter, Market 1-50, she/her)

Some of the journalists reported taking jobs with a “worse” schedule for the sake of working in a television market that was closer to home, but their “flip flop” schedules prevented them from seeing their loved ones. These journalists reported not seeing their family for up to months at a time, even though they were the reason the participants worked at their stations. Moreover, due to the inconsistency in their schedules, several participants reported not having set days off each week, which they said made it difficult

to make plans around. A sports producer found it rare for him to have two days off back-to-back, saying, “if you’re like, ‘Hey, what are your normal off days?’, like I couldn’t tell you. Put a gun to my head. I don’t know, because they usually shift around” (P22, Sports Producer, Market 100+, he/him). Another anchor/reporter described struggling with this too:

I never had the same days off every week, so I could never plan anything. I could never go to the doctor when I needed it. I couldn't even make therapy appointments or psychiatry appointments because I was like, “I don't know when I'm gonna be off, so beats me!” (P14, Anchor/Reporter, Market 50-100, she/her)

The sports producer in this sample added that the inconsistencies of his schedule stretched beyond his day-to-day. He shared that, because of the way sporting events are arranged, he and his team would be subjected through a “constant grind” from August through April because “there’s always something that could be going on” before finally finding some relief during the “downtime” in the summer (P22, Sports Producer, Market 100+, he/him).

Contractual Nature of TV News. Eight of the participants identified the contractual nature of the television news business as a reason for their stress and burnout. One journalist expressed that it was because this made him feel powerless about his position at work and his career:

the contract really almost makes you feel like you're drowning, that you can't escape and, really, that your career is not necessarily up to you as an individual ...
If your employer, you know, for some reason, didn't want you to work there

anymore, they would have no problem letting you go. (P1, Anchor/Reporter, Market 1-50, he/him)

Several of these journalists also shared that, even though they were extremely burned out from their work, they could not leave their jobs to manage it because they could not afford to break their contracts early. They expressed feeling trapped because their newsrooms were not even paying them enough to afford their buy-out rate, which was typically in the thousands. Even if the journalists could pay off the buy-out amount, they feared not being able to find another job in television news due to non-compete clauses in their contracts and the risk of being blackballed in the industry. As a whole, the journalists felt they did not have a choice but to stay in the job that was the source of their stress and burnout and avoid a no-win situation for them and their early careers.

Some of these journalists also shared that the contractual nature of their jobs forced them to stay with their station even though they were unsatisfied with their work conditions. For instance, several participants shared they were made promises about their workplace that they only realized to be untrue after they signed their name on the dotted line. Two journalists said they were, as one of them described, “sold a station that doesn’t exist” (P20, News Producer, Market 1-50, she/her) and were let down by the station’s true culture and operations. Two other journalists shared that they ended up in newsrooms roles that carried twice or thrice more responsibilities than what was on paper in their contracts: P19, who signed on as an assignment editor, reported having to additionally line produce, cover digital/web news coverage and function as a video editor on top of her typical duties. P22, who was hired as a sports producer, disclosed that he was tasked with extra MMJ and anchoring responsibilities.

These broken promises also included promotions in the journalists' newsrooms. For example, a news producer shared that she re-signed her contract with her station on the condition that she would be moved from a weekend shift to a better dayside shift. Despite receiving constant reassurance that the promise would be upheld, she was passed over on the opportunity twice due to the station losing two producers. At the time of her interview with the researcher, more than a year had passed since she initially re-signed her contract, and she was still stuck on her weekend shift. She shared that this burned her out to the point that she was considering breaking her contract to leave, saying, "you don't jerk somebody around like that with their hours" (P18, News Producer, Market 1-50, she/her).

In addition, these journalists shared that they also felt trapped in their jobs because, as one participant described, other job options or opportunities are "basically nonexistent or, at least, it is portrayed to be non-existent in the broadcast TV industry" (P1, Anchor/Reporter, Market 1-50, he/him). A photojournalist, who has worked in television news for seven years since starting right out of high school, added that he felt it would be difficult to jump to other careers because "there was not much else he knew how to do," whereas other Generation Z television journalists who were still new to the industry had a lesser burden on them if they chose to leave (P11, Photojournalist, Market 1-50, he/him). A news producer said that she felt forced to come back to news, even though she felt more satisfied working at a non-news job because of external pressure from fellow journalists and family members (P7, News Producer, Market 50-100, she/her). Moreover, another news producer said that she felt confined in terms of the

limited number of corporate media and news organizations that she could work with and compete against within local news (P13, News Producer, Market 1-50, she/they).

Lack of Job Autonomy or Creativity. Eight Generation Z television journalists pinpointed a lack of job autonomy and creative control at work as a major driver for their burnout. Generally, these journalists felt passionate about being creative in their storytelling as it “keeps that spark alive,” as one participant described (P11, Photojournalist, Market 1-50, he/him). Being micromanaged with how they produced a story or show limited the journalists’ creativity at work, which they found to be particularly draining and what led to their burnout. The lack of job autonomy these journalists experienced in their newsrooms emerged in different ways.

Three journalists said that their lack of job autonomy stemmed from being forced to tell news stories in a specific way that fit a “mold” or “brand” of stories required by their stations. This was enforced not only by newsroom-level management; a news producer added that her shows were also directly shaped by her news station’s corporate company because she worked at their flagship station (P10, News Producer, Market 1-50, she/her). These participants shared that they found this particularly stressful due to the existing scarcity of content and because the company’s policy directedly conflicted with their personal news ideals. Similarly, two participants shared that they felt limited in their storytelling because their newsrooms prioritized quantity over quality, often making them cover stories that the journalists deemed as less impactful for their communities or worthy of their limited time just to check a box off. For instance, an anchor/reporter shared that, even if she had her own story pitches, she would still be typically assigned to

report live on stories that she felt did not require a live presence, or as she described, going “live for the sake of being live” (P14, Anchor/Reporter, Market 50-100, she/her).

Additionally, an anchor said that he not only felt frustrated and burnt out because management did not allow him to cover the stories he wanted to report on but also upset when they would regularly reassign his rejected story pitches to other reporters to cover instead (P4, Anchor, Market 50-100, he/him). Another photojournalist shared that her burnout came from a lack of creative freedom when she was assigned to reporters who did not possess a similar creative vision for a story or skillset as hers. This made her feel demotivated and question the bigger purpose of her contribution at work:

The reporter that I was with was not the strongest writer, and so I was getting frustrated with that, and I was starting to get a little bit more burned out because I'm like, “The few times we get to be creative... What's the point in going above and beyond? Because I know when I get the script, it's not going to be anything like what I pictured.” (P9, Photojournalist, Market 1-50, she/her)

Isolating Nature of Job. Seven journalists shared that the isolating nature of their job played into their burnout experiences, which they attributed to the several norms of working as a television journalist in the U.S. One such norm was how television journalists had to move around states and television markets to be successful, to which some of these journalists say made it difficult to find a supportive community, especially if they ended up thousands of miles away from friends and family. A news producer, who jumped more than 60 market sizes, also said that she experienced significant culture shocks when she moved to her new station's city, which she described as “jarring, like I almost don't know where I fit in or anything” (P20, News Producer, Market 1-50,

she/her). Moreover, as one MMJ shared, with moving to new states came the added stressor of journalists having to learn about the new community that they had to cover (P16, MMJ, Market 1-50, he/him).

For some journalists, the isolating nature of job was more intensely experienced by specific roles. For instance, a breaking news reporter and photojournalist said that they felt isolated at work because they spent most of their work hours in their cars driving to news stories alone. The breaking news reporter also shared that, while there were other reporters at her station, her isolation worsened because she was the only reporter there with her particular job title and breaking news as her beat (P2, Breaking News Reporter, Market 1-50, she/her).

Unpredictability of News. Seven journalists said that the unpredictability of working in news contributed to their burnout at work. For instance, several participants experienced covering major breaking news events week after week, which they said drained them significantly. One MMJ shared that her station/market had to cover a school shooting, major state elections and a winter weather event all within the span of two weeks, adding she still felt burned out from the “very go, go, go, go, go” period of news coverage and dreaded something like this happening at work again (P24, MMJ, Market 50-100, she/her). Other journalists chimed in saying that the always-changing news cycle made it hard to predict what each of their shifts would look like. As one photojournalist who worked on a weekend shift described, “it’s either slow weekends where you have to scramble for content or there’s too much going on, and I have no time to get anything done” (P3, Photojournalist, Market 50-100, he/him).

These participants also shared that their stress stemmed from having to deal with an unpredictable workflow that is driven by the unpredictability of the news cycle. They described having to deal with “many moving parts” and people to achieve their end product, which would sometimes make it challenging for them to complete their assignments on time. For instance, several news producers in this group said that they struggled with the chaos of trying to incorporate a breaking news story thrown into their set show suddenly, which was draining on top of their already tight deadlines and high workload. For the reporters and MMJs whose news stories relied heavily on talking to people, the uncertainty of an interview taking place in time for their deadlines was a significant stressor. Several of these journalists described having scheduled interviews change their minds at the last minute, which left them scrambling to find a solution or face the repercussions for it from management. One MMJ recalled her frustrations with a recent experience:

the other day, this dad last minute decides that, after saying that he wants to do an interview with us- Like, it turns out like our competing station told this guy not to. He's like, “We're just gonna give like [competitor] the exclusive,” and this is like after I showed up at his house ... And this is [after] talking with him all day. This is after 45 minutes of this man saying, “Let's talk off the record first.”

Background, taking notes like in his home. And so, this is totally out of my control, right? ... But then there are, you know, like additional repercussions for that, not working out, and so that adds a lot of stress and like burnout. (P8, MMJ, Market 100+, her)

Lack of Newsroom Diversity. Six journalists expressed that their stress and burnout worsened due to a lack of diversity – in race, gender, age, etc. – in their workplaces. Some of the journalists in this study who identified as minorities shared that they were often the only minority in their workplaces, which led them to experiencing the added pressures of being the “token” and the face of their communities in their newsrooms and even for their viewing audience. Oftentimes, this meant having to constantly correct inaccurate news coverage in their newsrooms. Other times, it meant tirelessly advocating for their communities to be covered or leading sole coverage of their communities. As one news producer/MMJ explained, this was extremely draining for her to do: “I’m burned out sometimes during Hispanic Heritage Month, when I’m the only one doing it. I’m doing all the content for it, or I’m lining up certain things, or I’m doing all these other crazy things that I have to organize. And I’m the only one that knows these people, or I know of the people, or I communicate with them, and so it’s a little difficult” (P12, News Producer/MMJ, Market 50-100, she/her).

Two journalists, who are Black, said that their stress and burnout arose from the lack of sensitivity and respect toward news stories that covered issues affecting their communities, particularly stories about gun violence and police brutality against Black people. One of these journalists shared that her previous newsroom, when covering shootings involving Black people, prioritized using videos of the shootings in full, including the parts showing the death of the person, which took a toll on her (P15, News Producer, Market 1-50, she/her). Another shared that he felt uncomfortable and shocked when he heard a former co-worker dismiss story pitches to cover the murder of Ahmaud Arbery, who was shot and killed by three white men while jogging in 2020:

we were talking about getting, you know, just local reactions to this happening and stuff, and the former evening anchor, she goes, “Well, why do we need to do this again? We already did it for George Floyd,” and the way me and the other Black person looked at her, and then she was like, “Okay, well, we’ll just talk about this offline,” talking to the news director. (P4, Anchor, Market 50-100, he/him)

This journalist added that the stereotypes and microaggressions associated with his race also played a major role in his burnout experience. He recalled having to be extra cautious with what he said or how he worded things, because he was afraid it would be misconstrued as him being angry, rude, lazy, or complaining. For instance, while asking questions about a former anchor whose position he was taking over, he shared that his news director took his query as confrontational, accusing him of being “hostile” and “aggressive.” He stated that this grossly misrepresented his conduct that day, saying, “In my head, I’m thinking, ‘I’m not yelling at you. I’ve not raised my voice. I’ve not done any of that. Hostile? Like I’m saying my point,’ and I feel like, if it was anyone else, it would have got a pass” (P4, Anchor, Market 50-100, he/him). The microaggressions also stretched beyond this journalist’s newsroom, in that he described receiving several calls and messages from viewers identifying him as “little Black boy.” In contrast, they referred to his white counterpart by their names.

The lack of diversity was also a major contributor to burnout for two journalists in the context of gender. For example, an anchor/reporter, who described her station as a boys’ club, said that she often found herself “fighting harder to be respected, to be given the same stories as my male counterpart” while being the only female on-air journalist

there for a period of time (P14, Anchor/Reporter, Market 50-100, she/her). Her frustrations came to a peak in the wake of the Supreme Court overturning *Roe v. Wade*, when news stories of women's rights and abortion were frequently assigned to male reporters at her station:

most of the time, it was a boy reporter who was doing those stories, and he pronounced gynecology like "gene-e-cology" on air, and that was probably the best argument point I ever had of why I should be reporting more and especially on those stories. But that really resonated with my burnout because, every day, I became resentful of my co-workers, because I was like, "I could do that job, and I could do it better. I wouldn't say 'gene-e-cology.' I know what a gynecologist is." (P14, Anchor/Reporter, Market 50-100, she/her)

A news producer shared that her source of stress and burnout came from the age and generational differences between her and other journalists in her newsrooms. As a young journalist in her early twenties, she felt a substantial pressure working in a well-established news station that was more than 70 years old. Additionally, she reported feeling frustrated when trying to suggest new ideas or approaches in her work to her veteran counterparts. As she described, "everyone else is so set in their ways ... you're pushing on a boulder by yourself, and it's just not going to budge" (P13, News Producer, Market 1-50, she/they). She added that the lack of diversity with age in her newsroom is also a reason why she doesn't personally watch the news:

because I don't want to hear the news from somebody who's my dad's age. I want to hear it in a way that I understand. I want to see it from the people that I have to continue to grow up with. I think the diversity in the newsroom struggles because,

yes, while I work with people who are my age and people who are up to 30, 40 years older than I am, they're all so stuck on this like pre-COVID routine, and I just don't think that they recognize that the world has changed. They're just not caught up yet. (P13, News Producer, Market 1-50, she/they)

Toxicity and Egos in Newsrooms. Five participants said a reason for their burnout at work was their newsrooms, which they described as toxic work environments. These journalists shared that their stress stemmed from workplace politics and dealing with egos in their newsrooms, like managers picking favorites, tension between news anchors and arguments breaking out between less experienced and more experienced journalists. One MMJ said that, even though it was demoralizing to be around toxic personalities in her newsroom, there was not much that she or others could do to change it because these individuals were in positions of power or had seniority, which made it difficult to challenge their behaviors (P24, MMJ, Market 50-100, she/her). A photojournalist described his toxic work environment as going through a cycle of mental abuse at work from constantly ping-ponging between good and bad days at work and wanting to stay and leave his workplace:

I covered some spot news a couple of weekends go coming into my Friday, and I was like, “Oh, this is awesome,” like I felt really good coming to the weekend. I was like, “Yeah, let's go have a good weekend, and we'll be back at it all Wednesday, and let's try to-,” and then I come back Wednesday, and then just a bunch of crap happens. Managers talking down to me and stuff, and getting mad about stupid things, and just all that kind of thing, and then just burn me back out. (P11, Photojournalist, Market 1-50, he/him)

Meeting Market or Client Expectations. A few participants highlighted the extra pressures of meeting certain expectations on top of their daily expectations in their television markets as a contributor to their burnout. For instance, two journalists said they felt more stress at work because they were striving to meet higher expectations while working in bigger markets as younger, less experienced journalists. One reporter added that she felt the extra pressure from returning to her hometown market (P5, Reporter, Market 1-50, she/her). Similarly, one photojournalist shared that a big contributor to his burnout was the added stress from having to meet his clients' expectations as a freelancer. Oftentimes, he described having to go "above and beyond to make them happy," including responding to emails past normal work hours, solving crises overnight and staying late to cover news stories, all while working on salaried pay (P11, Photojournalist, Market 1-50, he/him).

Pressures of Being a Public Personality. Eleven of the 25 Generation Z local television journalists worked in roles that required them to be in the public eye. Four of these on-air journalists expressed that a significant contributor to their burnout was dealing with the pressures of being a public figure/personality. To summarize it, one participant described it as having celebrity status "with none of the celebrity reward or resources" (P1, Anchor/Reporter, Market 1-50, he/him). One such resource that these journalists said did not have was sufficient pay, as highlighted earlier in the "job demands" section, which put a strain on them financially to keep up with their "socialite" public persona. For instance, one anchor/reporter discussed this financial burden is particularly heavier for women in such roles:

especially in this industry, where the girls are expected to wear expensive dresses, and have expensive makeup, and have their hair done and their nails done, and everything. You assume that you're going to be making enough money to afford those things. (P14, Anchor/Reporter, Market 50-100, she/her)

In addition to the financial pressures of maintaining this public persona, these journalists also experienced additional stressors with having to curate their appearance. This included the more superficial pressures of having to stay physically attractive for the role, which some journalists say could also take a toll mentally. Moreover, they highlighted the unspoken obligation to build a whole other “clean” persona for the sake of the job, which creates an extra burden for the journalists to watch what they say or do online and offline.

Several of these on-air journalists also shared how their public roles automatically makes them target of ridicule and harassment from people offline and online, which further adds on to their stress and burnout. An MMJ said she would receive messages online from viewers and random strangers criticizing her appearance simply over a dress she had worn (P24, MMJ, Market 50-100, she/her). An anchor/reporter shared that the worst email he had ever received was one “telling me to kill myself before someone else did” (P1, Anchor/Reporter, Market 1-50, he/him). While news organizations are encouraging these journalists to maintain their public persona, this journalist argued that the added stressors and pressures of being a public personality is often felt solely by the individual:

whenever you're on the other side of things, you're being ridiculed, or you're being harassed, often it feels isolating like you're the only one dealing with this,

because at the end of the day, if someone is threatening harm or disparaging you, it is *you* [emphasis added], not your company. (P1, Anchor/Reporter, Market 1-50, he/him)

Anti-Press Rhetoric and Attitudes. Three journalists in this sample identified the current anti-press attitudes and mentality from the public as significant factors in their burnout experiences. These journalists pinpointed this as a job demand unique to their generation of journalists (as previously discussed in under the findings for RQ2). A breaking news reporter said that this sentiment would sometimes inhibit her abilities to report on a story, for example, because people no longer want to participate in interviews for stories anymore (P2, Breaking News Reporter, Market 1-50, she/her). A photojournalist added that feeling like the public does not care for or actively hates what he and other journalists are passionate about can be detrimental for one's mental health (P3, Photojournalist, Market 1-50, he/him). In addition, a news producer expressed that she felt the anti-press attitude on a more personal level, sharing that she would constantly receive remarks from her family members that "constantly railed me over my career choice" (P18, News Producer, Market 1-50, she/her). No matter where – or whom – the anti-press feelings came from, it generally took a toll on these journalists and increased their chances for burnout, as one participant summed up: "Every day is like you're having to prove yourself that you're like telling the truth, and that's so deeply in your character, then it pulls from you emotionally, more than you would ever think from a job" (P2, Breaking News Reporter, Market 1-50, she/her).

Physical Labor. Two photojournalists explained that the physical aspect of their jobs contributed to their burnout experiences. They shared that their roles were usually

physically demanding due to the cameras and heavy equipment they lugged around every day and all of the “running and gunning” they had to do to quickly travel for various stories. While being a photojournalist was something both of these participants were passionate about, they said that the demands of their particular roles still wore them out and exhausted them physical and mentally.

Job Resources

In contrast, this section covers the aspects of the job that the 25 participants said helped reduce their chances of burnout, and engaged and motivated them at work. The corresponding themes are displayed in Table 3, starting from the theme that was mentioned by the highest number of participants.

Table 3

List of Job Resources

Theme	No. of Participants
Community Impact	12
Support from Newsroom/Co-Workers	11
Job Autonomy and Creativity	8
Positive Reinforcement and Feedback	8
Supportive Management	7
Fun, Lighthearted News Stories	5
Reduced Workload or Added Resources	5
“Peek Behind the Curtain”	4
Resources for Mental Health and Burnout	4
Role or Shift Change	4
The Thrill of Working in News	3
Taking Time Off	2

Community Impact. One of the most frequently mentioned factors that motivated the Generation Z television journalists and combatted their burnout was the ability to make an impact on their community with their work. In fact, this was highlighted by twelve of the journalists in this sample. Some of their favorite community stories that these journalists talked about – often excitedly – included call-to-actions to help victims of natural disasters, raising awareness on issues/needs through community givebacks and highlighting standout individuals in their communities. One reporter even shared that her news story helped to change a law in her state. As this journalist summarized, these participants found it motivating and rewarding “when you actually create change from your stories or just seeing the potential of the fact that one of your stories could create change” (P5, Reporter, Market 1-50, she/her). A news producer added that covering positive stories about the community helped to connect her back to her greater purpose of being a journalist:

it makes me really feel like, “Oh, we're really showing the community what their town is like, and what you know it feels like. Oh, that's the purpose of local news,” you know. This is why I'm here. This is why I'm doing what I'm doing. (P25, Executive Producer, Market 100+, she/her).

While most of these journalists shared that seeing the community impact of their work greatly helped to offset their burnout, one MMJ said that this was not the case for her because “it's so rare that you actually get to do those kinds of stories because it's not what people want and what like stations want” (P24, MMJ, Market 50-100, she/her).

Support from Newsroom/Co-Workers. Eleven participants identified the people that they worked with in their newsrooms as major factors in reducing their stress and

burnout at work. Through all of the stressors and less-than-ideal work conditions they faced, these journalists said that the friends and relationships they made at work was a silver lining of their jobs and made their day-to-day more enjoyable and bearable. The journalists added having this “camaraderie” and “shared kinship” with their co-workers made the moments of struggle and burnout with feel a little less lonely, with some participants referring to this as a “trauma bond.” One photojournalist described the friendships he had within the television news industry as unique in comparison to other professions:

I think another thing that separates this business from like another like normal job is that we're all in the s— together. We all understand what's going on. We all understand the stresses of this job, and I think that's also why it's really easy to build, like, camaraderie between coworkers that way. (P3, Photojournalist, Market 1-50, he/him)

These journalists added that they were also able to find support from their co-workers in terms of managing their high workload, with many of them sharing that they were able to lean on their fellow journalists for help with tasks and assignments. One journalist said that she liked how her co-workers would hold her accountable for mistakes and encourage her to improve (P14, Anchor/Reporter, Market 50-100, she/her). Additionally, an anchor shared that what helped him most at his previous station was having a co-worker who acknowledged his efforts and advocated for him. He described an instance where his meteorologist used his employee review to highlight problems that the anchor was going through:

He said, “You know, everything's fine on my end. However, I hate how I see [P4] on the weekends. I see him running around, coming in and out, doing this and this and that.” The fact that he did that during his employee review, that made me feel like, “Dang. There's hope.” (P4, Anchor, Market 50-100, he/him)

While most of the journalists shared that they felt that “family connection” with people on the “lower level,” one photojournalist shared that he felt the sense of camaraderie from “the top down,” which included his general manager and direct managers.

Job Autonomy and Creativity. In thinking about the aspects of their jobs that kept them engaged at work, eight participants said that having job autonomy and the space to be creative in their work helped to keep them motivated. These journalists said that being able to cover topics they had an interest in or showcase stories in their own styles kept their passion for the job alive. For example, a senior political correspondent shared that getting to focus on political stories as his beat “has only helped decreased burnout. It has only been a positive for my work, for me, personally, for me, mentally, for my output. It’s something I’m passionate in, I have an interest in. I’m yielding a better product overall” (P6, Senior Political Correspondent, Market 50-100, he/him). Another anchor/reporter shared a similar sentiment, saying that she felt the most connected and satisfied with her job when she was given the creative freedom to work on telling stories about her community, even if it did not end up being the most hard-hitting news of the day: “Sorry, the community cares about some fourth grader getting an award. They don't care about the fourth homicide of the year, you know. So, I think when I'm given the

opportunity to actually do things that matter to me and that I know matter to other people actually makes a difference” (P14, Anchor/Reporter, Market 50-100, she/her).

Several news producers in this group shared that their motivation came from having the creative freedom to put their own personal spin on their shows and segments. As one participant said, the opportunity does not often arise, but when it does, it’s “definitely the bee’s knees” (P15, News Producer, Market 1-50, she/her). Another news producer stated that the most fulfilling part of her job was incorporating new ideas and techniques into her shows and executing them, which she found even more satisfying than completing a show. She added, “Watching your creativity be applauded and welcomed are very encouraging parts of the job” (P7, News Producer, Market 50-100, she/her).

Positive Reinforcement and Feedback. Eight journalists emphasized receiving positive reinforcement and feedback about their work as factors that kept them motivated through the stress and burnout at their jobs. As one participant shared, “I know it’s like silly. Of course, I don’t *need* [emphasis added] that to do my job. At the same time, it makes me want to do well for them, not just myself, and that’s so motivating to me” (P2, Breaking News Reporter, Market 1-50, she/her). These participants highly valued hearing from the people they worked with in their newsrooms, particularly from their managers, because it made them feel valued and appreciated in their workplaces. One photojournalist recalled not only receiving positive reinforcement from his direct managers but also his upper-level managers (i.e., general manager), which he said helped reduce his burnout significantly at a station he used to work with. A news producer described a manager-driven initiative in her newsroom to anonymously celebrate the

successes of their journalists through “win jars,” where employees can write compliments on sticky notes and place them in mason jars or on the desk of a co-worker they wanted to recognize. She added that her news director encouraged for the practice to occur daily:

And who doesn't love to come to work and find a little sticky note ... I think last week or the week before, I came to work with the sticky note on my desk that says, “You find so much amazing content for the morning show. Good job!” It was anonymous like, and that's a win, that's encouraging, and that makes you want to do better. (P7, News Producer, Market 50-100, she/her)

Outside of their newsrooms, the journalists, particularly those who worked in more visible roles (e.g., reporter, MMJ), said that hearing back from the people who were in their stories or their community/viewers were important to them in curbing their burnout. As a news producer/MMJ highlighted, knowing that her work made a difference in her community and that people valued her work and the news was “when it actually feels good” (P12, News Producer/MMJ, Market 50-100, she/her). These journalists acknowledged that receiving positive reinforcement and feedback from viewers was a rare occurrence, but when it did happen, it meant the world to them, as an MMJ concluded:

It's really rewarding. I feel like, you know, the work that we do is important, and I feel like it that matters in that aspect. And not that this happens all the time, but getting positive feedback or somebody saying, you know, reaching out, being like, “Thank you for doing this story, cause XYZ.” Like, that's also really rewarding and makes me want to keep doing it. Like, I know there's a purpose behind the pain, if you will. (P8, MMJ, Market 100+, she/her)

Supportive Management. Seven participants said that having supportive and understanding managers helped reduce their burnout at work. These journalists stressed that being able to have open conversations with their managers about their ups and downs at work – particularly about their workload – were vital to their abilities to manage their stress. Several of the participants added that what helped them was having managers who were mindful of their work-life balance and ensured that they were not overworking themselves. A reporter shared how her managers looked out for her after she returned from an overnight reporting trip:

we didn't get back to the station until like a Friday morning at like one in the morning, and I had to be at work at 9 a.m., so I was tired, but I wasn't gonna complain about it. When I came in, my boss was like, "Hey, as soon as you're done with your stuff, leave," and like I was like, "Oh, okay." But like, I've always had that thing like, "Oh, you need to stay your full shift," and so I was still there like an hour after I started. My boss was like, "What are you doing here? You need to go home. Like, go take care of yourself and go to sleep," which is, it was wild to me. (P5, Reporter, Market 1-50, she/her)

Additionally, a breaking news reporter said that she felt more supported having a female management team, saying "I felt that women leadership could understand and have more empathy for when I was struggling" (P2, Breaking News Reporter, Market 1-50, she/her).

Fun, Lighthearted News Stories. Five participants shared that being able to work on news stories that were of a more fun and lighthearted nature kept their spirits up through their experiences with burnout at work. The types of "good news" varied in this

group, ranging from stories about baby animals at the zoo to new happenings in their city to sports events in their vicinity. Two journalists added that doing these stories helped them get to know the areas they were living in and build a sense of community in places that they did not originally live in.

Reduced Workload or Added Resources. Five journalists shared that having their high workload reduced and/or receiving additional resources for it helped them stay engaged at their jobs. Two participants specifically referenced receiving better pay and benefits as a motivating factor. Additionally, two participants said that they were able to reduce their burnout because they were not required to turn in a new story every single day and were provided more time to dedicate toward their assignments. Similarly, a news producer shared that her current schedule at her station allows her more days to function as an associate producer and help with shows, thus decreasing the intensity of her workload (P15, News Producer, Market 1-50, she/her).

“Peek Behind the Curtain.” Four journalists stated that what helped them manage their stress and burnout at work was the unique “behind-the-scenes” perspective that their job as a journalist gave them. For instance, three of these participants said that they felt fulfilled at work when they could meet interesting people and form relationships through the stories they reported on. A senior political correspondent added that he found it “cool” that he was able to get to know his state’s lawmakers in a more casual and friendly way through his particular role, even finding time to bond over sports with them (P6, Senior Political Correspondent, Market 50-100, he/him). These journalists felt excited knowing that their job gave them a more intimate perspective of the places they

lived in and communities they covered. A news producer explained why she felt this perk of the job helped keep her engaged at work:

it gives me a view of the city that I live in that other people don't really get to have. That I get to like peek behind the curtain at the inner workings and take a bird's eye view of the place where I live that I think other people don't have, so I think that's really interesting. And feeling like you're in the room where it happens, to quote "Hamilton," that you have a part in like history happening and that someday, decades from now, some history student might be pulling up an article that you wrote to help their project on whatever event is happening. (P10, News Producer, Market 1-50, she/her)

Resources for Mental Health and Burnout. Fourteen out of the 25 journalists reported receiving some form of resource/support for their mental health and burnout at work (This is explained in more detail in the "Suggestions for Newsroom Managers" section of this findings chapter). Out of these participants, four said that these resources significantly helped them mitigate their stress and burnout. The common thread with these journalists' experiences was having managers who were knowledgeable about mental health and vocal about it in their newsrooms. They shared that their managers would often have open conversations about stress, burnout, trauma and mental health care in their newsrooms, encourage their employees to seek out help if they needed it, and regularly send out mental health resources to employees, like research-backed self-care tips and reminders about the employee assistance program (EAP). As one photojournalist stated, the actions taken by their managers to have and share these resources seemed

thought-out and “looked like it was an effort, you know. They made it seem like it was well-intentioned and that they cared” (P11, Photojournalist, Market 1-50, he/him).

These journalists also said that they felt supported at work when their managers took steps to prioritize their mental health and safety. A photojournalist shared that his management team was respectful of journalists’ boundaries when it came to covering stories, like making sure employees who were parents were not assigned to stories involving the deaths of children (P3, Photojournalist, Market 1-50, he/him). Several journalists added that their management would check in often with them or bring in therapists, especially in the aftermath of a traumatic news story in their community or unsafe situation or death in the industry (several participants brought up the February 2023 shooting that killed a Spectrum News 13 reporter and critically injured a photojournalist in Orlando, Florida).

Role or Shift Change. Four participants said that changing their roles or shifts at work helped maintain their motivation at work and, most times, temporarily kept their stress and burnout at bay. For instance, one journalist shared that being promoted to an anchor position at his former station temporarily helped reduce his burnout until he was eventually overworked while in that new role (P4, Anchor, Market 50-100, he/him). A photojournalist said that she just moved to a weekend shift to have the flexibility and creativity in covering stories she was passionate about. She shared that she did not have in her previous nightside shift, which she highlighted as a major contributor to her stress and burnout (P9, Photojournalist, Market 1-50, she/her). In addition, a senior political correspondent said that shifting from a general assignment news beat to a political one helped “quell” the burnout and fatigue he experienced from having to door knock and

interview families who experienced a tragedy (P6, Senior Political Correspondent, Market 50-100, he/him).

The Thrill of Working in News. While this was a contributor to several participants' burnout, three participants identified the fast-paced, "go, go, go" nature of news as factors that reduced their burnout, saying that they liked working in this environment. More specifically, a news producer pinpointed breaking news as why she loved her job, saying that it "keeps you on your toes" (P13, News Producer, Market 1-50, she/they). One of the photojournalists said that he preferred this environment because he worked well under that pressure and it motivated him to work quickly and efficiently (P3, Photojournalist, Market 1-50, he/him).

Taking Time Off. Two journalists shared that being able to take time off from work helped alleviate the stress and burnout from their job. One MMJ said that his news station gave him and other employees the flexibility to take PTO days with no questions asked (P16, MMJ, Market 1-50, he/him). A senior political correspondent said that the more predictable political cycle made it easier for him to plan and take time off during periods in the legislature that he knew would be slower or inactive (P6, Senior Political Correspondent, Market 50-100, he/him).

Personal Resources

Even though personal resources were not explicitly addressed in this thesis' research questions or interview guide, these factors relating to the self still appeared in discussions with some of the 25 Generation Z television journalists. For these journalists, their personal resources played a role in their stress and burnout experiences, particularly with preventing them from taking the step to change their careers and leave the industry.

The personal resources that the participants identified are ordered in Table 4, arranged in descending order based on the number of participants who mentioned it..

Table 4

List of Personal Resources

Theme	No. of Participants
Optimism for the Future	7
Personal Goals	5
Self-Efficacy	4
Resiliency	3
Religion	1

Optimism for the Future. Seven journalists said that they were able to keep themselves motivated past their burnout by focusing on the better things to come their way. Three of these journalists described being focused on the next big thing in their careers. For example, an anchor/reporter stated that he was holding on to the possibility that he could be promoted to a main anchor position at his station (P1, Anchor/Reporter, Market 1-50, he/him). A photojournalist shared that he was able to fend off his burnout because he knew that his current position “is not forever” and that he was looking toward working with a national news outlet one day (P3, Photojournalist, Market 1-50, he/him). While battling burnout at his previous station, another anchor said that he would focus on getting his career to a “greater” place in the future, telling himself, ““Hey, this industry is a passion of yours. It’s a love of yours. Do not give up on it yet. It could be greater,’ and now I’m seeing greater” (P4, Anchor, Market 50-100, he/him).

Some of these journalists said that they focused their optimism on a smaller, daily scale. Four journalists said that they would try to deal with their stress and burnout by looking forward to “the little things,” like an upcoming pay day, free food (aside from the typical election night pizza) at the station, and watering and growing a plant at their desk.

Personal Goals. Five participants shared that focusing on their personal goals and motivations was what kept them going in their journalism careers so far. An anchor said that he was focused on constantly improving himself and his skills as a journalist, adding that he would often watch other news stations for inspiration (P4, Anchor, Market 50-100, he/him). Separately, three of these journalists focused on their reasons for becoming journalists in the first place. While all three had different roles, they all had one greater mission in common: making an impact on their communities and holding people accountable through their work. A senior political correspondent shared why this was important for him:

I do as much as I can to remove myself from that [burnout] situation and be like, “Okay, this is not for me. Do it for the couple dozen people that might see your story tonight. Maybe they're really interested about this, and they can't be here.” So, that, the overall mission. I'm feel very lucky to be able to ask those questions, too, right? To seek out those answers is exciting. (P6, Senior Political Correspondent, Market 50-100, he/him)

Self-Efficacy. Four journalists said that they leaned back on their knowledge and beliefs that they each had what it took to be an asset to their newsroom, organization and community to alleviate some of the stress and burnout they were experiencing. For instance, one news producer said that she felt motivated knowing that she was more adept

and savvier at finding news content as a younger journalist compared to the other producers at her station (P18, News Producer, Market 1-50, she/her). Similarly, an anchor/reporter said that his “God-given ability” and talent to uniquely navigate political stories was a reason why he stayed in television news amidst his burnout (P1, Anchor/Reporter, Market 1-50, he/him). An anchor said that he felt driven in his role because he could see himself improving in his skills and viewed himself as an asset to his community (P4, Anchor, Market 50-100, he/him). Moreover, a senior political correspondent said that he focused on telling himself that he was “adequate” for his job (P6, Senior Political Correspondent, Market 50-100, he/him).

Resiliency. Three journalists discussed having resilient thinking as a way they powered through their stress and burnout. This varied from giving themselves grace with mistakes to having self-determination to continue their news careers until they could not take it anymore to telling themselves the world was not ending to focusing on what they could control, as one journalist added, “no matter what management says” (P8, MMJ, Market 100+, she/her).

Religion. A breaking news reporter shared that her religion significantly helped her deal with her stress and burnout at work. As a Christian, she was determined to showcase her faith – specifically its “big pillars” of “caring and loving for every type of person” – in her work ethic and to connect with the people she would meet through her role:

I want my work to show that I have a lot of high morals and ethical practices and let that really speak for itself ... I think the love that I feel God has given me really helps me understand people that are so, so different than me. In breaking

news, I cover a lot of homicides. I cover a lot of really sad places and really sad people, and a lot of them are people that I would never interact with in everyday life. And so, I feel that's an opportunity for me to share God's love to someone I normally wouldn't have been in contact with. (P2, Breaking News Reporter, Market 1-50, she/her)

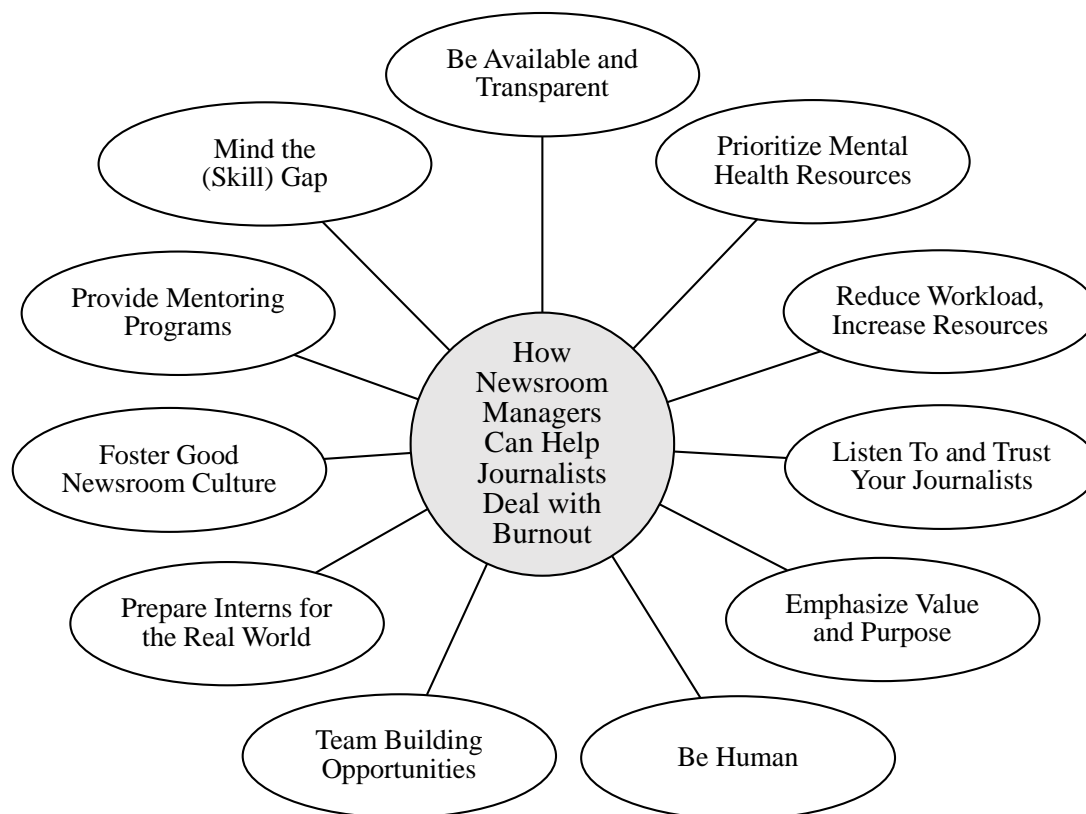
Suggestions for Newsroom Managers (RQ4)

Despite how common it was for the journalists to experience stress/burnout plus cover stories that are traumatic or devastating, many of them struggled to pinpoint resources from their organization that effectively helped them navigate these issues. Specifically, only 14 out of the 25 Generation Z television journalists said that their current organization and/or newsroom provided some sort of resource for them to deal with their burnout and support their mental health. The most frequently mentioned types of resources these journalists reported receiving from their newsrooms included EAP, a limited number of free therapy/counseling sessions through company benefits and having managers who were cognizant of mental health and burnout in the industry. Less commonly, some participants also mentioned being provided webinars about stress and burnout, a work coach, news producer training classes and free subscriptions to a meditation and sleep app. These journalists also recalled occasionally seeing their newsrooms bring in therapists to talk to them after covering a tough/traumatic story or experiencing a tragedy in the industry. However, nearly half (6) of these 14 journalists felt that the resources their newsrooms did provide were lackluster and that more can – and should – be done. One news producer summarized her thoughts upon reflecting on the stations she has worked with thus far:

There's really nothing that either station did consistently that aimed to boost morale and reduce burnout. ... but as far as boosting morale consistently, or aiming to decrease burnout on a regular basis, no ... I don't think I've ever heard anybody proudly say, "My station does this, this and this to help us as staff, or help us as editorial, or vice versa," you know. Like, I don't really see that. So, the answer is, in short, no. In long, meh, sometimes. (P7, News Producer, Market 50-100, she/her)

Many of the journalists acknowledged that most of the issues that contributed to their burnout are part of a bigger, institutional problem. As one participant described, "the problems almost seem too big for a 30-minute slideshow from [human resources]" (P1, Anchor/Reporter, Market 1-50, he/him). Additionally, when asked what they would do as managers to help deal with stress and burnout among journalists, several of the participants joked that they would change the industry as a whole. Some journalists also recognized that there is only so much on-the-ground managers could do and that the issue could be better dealt with on a corporate level.

Nonetheless, all of the journalists still provided recommendations for managers to better deal with stress and burnout in their newsrooms, specifically sharing strategies and resources that they felt they personally would implement as well. Though their approaches may vary, their bottom line was to take measures to "make it somewhere where people actually want to come to work" (P11, Photojournalist, Market 1-50, he/him). Figure 1 illustrates the suggestions for managers that emerged from the conversations with the 25 participants.

Figure 1*Coding Tree – Suggestions for Newsroom Managers****Be Available and Transparent***

Eleven journalists vouched for managers to be open and available to journalists to reduce stress and burnout in their newsrooms. These journalists often used phrases like “open channel of communication,” “genuine safe space,” and “open door” to describe how they would ideally want to reach their employees as managers. The participants longed for a relationship with their managers where they could be vulnerable and upfront about the struggles that they were going through and the help they needed without being judged or criticized for it. A photojournalist pitched the idea of recreating university office hours in a newsroom setting, where managers can mark off set times in a day

where they would be available (breaking news permitting) to have conversations with employees (P9, Photojournalist, Market 1-50, she/her).

The journalists also suggested for managers to be transparent about the decisions they made regarding news gathering/production processes, especially those that involve their employees. Some of the journalists recalled being left out of the loop on decisions that directly affected their workflow and, when they questioned management about it, they were shut down and dismissed. A news producer supported this strategy, saying that “it would go a long way instead of just a dictatorship” (P23, News Producer, Market 50-100, she/her).

Checking In with Your Journalists. To be available to employees, the participants shared that managers could have check-ins with journalists to help them with their stress and burnout. Eight journalists of these shared that it was not only important to check in with employees on the tougher days (e.g., covering more traumatic events) but also on the regular, mundane days. As one journalist explained, “knowing that being validated from your employer would be a big step” in curbing burnout (P1, Anchor/Reporter, Market 1-50, he/him). The journalists said that managers should consider making check-ins regularly or scheduled as a way to truly get to know their journalists and be up to date on their well-being. As one news producer advocated, managers should be “very deliberate” about checking in with their employees, going “deeper than the surface of, ‘Oh, how are you today?’ But like, ‘How are you doing? How can I help?’” (P21, News Producer, Market 50-100, she/her). Another two journalists highlighted that it would be particularly important for managers to check in on journalists who are not originally from the television market. An executive producer, who

shared that she tries to do this in her newsroom, described why she is advocating for other managers to keep a closer eye on these journalists:

they move to a town where they don't know anybody, and so, in a sense, I feel like it almost contributes to burnout, is there's nothing keeping them here. There's nothing to do outside of work for them, or like nobody to hang out with. (P25, Executive Producer, Market 100+, she/her)

Prioritize Mental Health Resources

Considering the high stress and traumatic and tough stories that television journalists often experience, the Generation Z television journalists advocated for managers to make mental health a priority in their newsrooms. This was a remedy for stress and burnout cited by eleven of the participants. Most commonly, these journalists stated that television newsrooms should have free therapy/counseling available for all journalists. As one journalist exclaimed, “this is trauma that is being thrown at you because of your workplace. Your workplace should have some responsibility in helping you deal with that” (P23, News Producer, Market 50-100, she/her). Several participants suggested having a therapist on-site in the newsroom, especially during distressing situations, with one journalist comparing this service to a school nurse (P20, News Producer, Market 1-50, she/her).

Other journalists also suggested bringing in therapy dogs or, at the least, having a hotline that journalists can call to receive mental health support with no strings attached. However, one participant shared that she was afraid of using her company’s confidential employee assistance line, stating that she was worried what she said could be used against her after seeing something similar happen in an episode of the television show

“Suits.” She remarked, “I know they say it’s confidential, but I don’t want to do therapy with corporate. That scares me” (P8, MMJ, Market 100+, she/her). One journalist suggested possibly incorporating mental health days into employee benefits without it impacting PTO (P7, News Producer, Market 50-100, she/her).

Generally, these participants wanted managers to be more upfront and open about the availability of mental health resources at their stations. That could mean having more conversations about it with employees or sending links out to resources regularly. One news producer shared that managers/stations should make sure that these resources were made more obviously accessible, going beyond the brief mention of employee benefits during new hires’ onboarding processes. She explained the only time she was told about these resources was back when she was first hired, but now she was too scared to ask someone where to find it because “I don’t want to be seen as weak”:

I don't wanna have to go and hunt through different websites that I have access to find them. I want a button on Workday that's like “mental health resources,” and you click it, cause it's 2024. People have mental health issues, and that's okay.
(P13, News Producer, Market 1-50, she/they)

No matter the approach, the main message from these journalists for managers was to have measures in place to support the mental and emotional well-being and health of their employees. One journalist shared that this was particularly important for television news employees because they are often there to witness everyone’s worst day: “But when we're dealing with our own problems and watching the world's worst problems, our problems feel like, ‘Can we even be upset with our problems anymore?’” (P23, News Producer, Market 50-100, she/her).

Reduce Workload, Increase Resources

Ten journalists called for managers to reduce their workload or increase resources as ways to manage burnout at work. Several journalists shared that, as managers, they would want to host periodic meetings with employees to regularly assess how the workload is and making changes accordingly. The changes suggested by these journalists varied, from tackling staffing levels to pay and benefits to time constraints.

In an ideal world, many of the on-air journalists in this group advocated for stations to eliminate the MMJ/one-man-band model of news production. They called for field journalists to be sent to stories with at least one other person (e.g., photojournalist), citing workload and safety concerns as major reasons. If taking the model out completely was not an option, several participants suggested not making employees MMJ every day of the week at the very least. On a similar note, the journalists called for newsrooms to replenish staffing levels, especially keeping in mind the increased demand for news and content now.

Another resource that these journalists wanted to see increase was pay (and benefits), with four journalists spotlighting this as a solution for burnout. The participants argued that increasing their pay would make the enormous workload and numerous stressors that they had to deal with every day more worth it. As one participant put it, “I think people would be a lot more willing to put up with bulls— if they were paid for it” (P7, News Producer, Market 50-100, she/her). Moreover, the journalists felt that having more time to work on stories and assignments would help reduce their burnout significantly. Some of them pitched implementing more “work days,” or setting aside days in a week for reporters to solely focus on working on their stories, and shifting away

from churning out dayturn stories to encourage quality over quantity. In addition, some journalists suggested the idea of adopting four-day work weeks, which would allow employees more time to rest and recharge and foster better work-life balance.

Listen To and Trust Your Journalists

Eight journalists said that managers can help reduce stress and burnout in their newsrooms by listening and trusting their journalists. As a whole, the journalists recommended for managers to “truly listen” and assume the best intentions with their employees. Several of these participants shared that a major contributor to their burnout was their managers not taking their concerns seriously. For instance, one participant felt that his boss thought he was lying about his bereavement, saying “there’s no coming back from that” (P4, Anchor, Market 50-100, he/him).

A few of the journalists also shared that their managers often did not take their concerns regarding safety in the field seriously. In one instance, a photojournalist recalled being sent with a reporter to interview a family whose house exploded. Despite the duo urging their management to withdraw their crew because they were being treated with hostility and aggression at the scene, their pleas seemed to fall on deaf ears:

[the family] surrounded our car, and then they screamed at us, and they wouldn't let us leave, and then they are telling us to leave, and then the one dude had a gun under his shirt and pulled it out and was telling us to leave. And so, then we left, and we thought we were being followed for 30 minutes, and we called our management, and they asked if we got a video to prove that that actually happened ... my reporter is just like sobbing ... they told us we had to go back

cause we needed a live shot, we needed video. (P9, Photojournalist, Market 1-50, she/her)

In addition, some of these journalists called for newsroom managers to truly listen and be receptive to any problems or issues highlighted by employees, instead of letting it “go in one ear, right out the other” (P11, Photojournalist, Market 1-50, he/him).

Unfortunately, many of the journalists in this sample said they were used to their managers asking for feedback but failing to take corresponding action in response.

Moreover, an assignment editor added that managers should be proactive over reactive to problems brought up by their employees (P19, Assignment Editor, Market 50-100, she/her).

A part of listening and trusting journalists is also respecting their boundaries at work. As two journalists shared, this can be done in several ways. Most importantly, these journalists said that, if they were managers, they would avoid contacting and/or asking journalists to come into work on their days off. As an MMJ asserted, it should not be an employee’s responsibility to find solutions to situational problems in the newsroom:

I don't see work as your entire life, and I want to do everything I can to ensure that you don't feel like work is your entire life, and that you, the boundaries you have are being followed, and that as an employee, it's not their job to fix a lack of staffing or a schedule error like as a manager. (P24, MMJ, Market 50-100, she/her)

Moreover, this MMJ added that managers should listen and respect their journalists’ boundaries in terms of the types of news stories that they are comfortable

with covering. As previously discussed in the “job demands” section, she shared that what helped her with her stress and burnout was having a news director who was mindful about assigning her to talk to family members of deceased people due to a personal trauma she experienced:

she listened, and I never had to do it again unless it was I wanted to, and anytime there was any sort of emotional story, I would get a text from her that morning like “We're planning on having you cover...” (P24, MMJ, Market 50-100, she/her)

Emphasize Your Journalists' Value and Purpose

Six journalists said that managers should emphasize journalists' value and purpose at work as a potential strategy to curb burnout in newsrooms. These journalists shared that they felt burnout creep in when they did not feel valued or lacked a sense of purpose at work. Suggestions for managers in this context ranged from providing positive reinforcement or feedback to celebrating employees' wins and successes to reminding employees of the importance and value of their jobs as journalists to creating welcome gifts for new hires. One journalist shared that this was particularly important now due to current anti-press attitudes (P11, Photojournalist, Market 1-50, he/him). No matter the method, these journalists just want to know “what you're doing here is important. We do value you” (P1, Anchor/Reporter, Market 1-50, he/him).

Be Human

To help journalists deal with their stress and burnout, five participants called on managers to be human and understanding towards them and the nature of the job. As one participant summarized, these journalists' main plea was for managers to adopt a “people

over product” mindset and recognize that “We’re not robots. We’re not going into work, churning out a product and not feeling anything. There is an impact to everything that you, as a manager, says, that you, as a manager, do, and there can be grace” (P10, News Producer, Market 1-50, she/her). These journalists also asked for managers to remember that, since journalists are human, mistakes and imperfections can happen and to provide leeway for when things do not go as planned. One journalist added, “I don’t need the news director to be a therapist, but I just need them to understand I’m a person” (P13, News Producer, Market 1-50, she/they).

Team Bonding/Building Opportunities

Four participants stated that a potential way to relieve stress and burnout among journalists is for managers or newsrooms to host team-bonding/building activities with their employees. Some suggestions included hosting outings for journalists and managers on the same shift, community dinners and even elementary school-style pizza parties. While these journalists did recognize that some may groan and moan at the thought of participating in a company-mandated get-together, they ultimately expressed that that this can help journalists build and strengthen their relationships with each other, thus fostering rapport and a sense of trusted community within the newsroom. As highlighted in the “job resources” section, support from co-workers helped most of the journalists reduce their stress and burnout. The journalists also added that these activities could help managers get to know their employees beyond just their name and face. A photojournalist argued that managers should have a deeper, more personal connection with their employees because it is vital in helping them manage their stress and burnout:

I think when you actually know people over time, you kind of understand what kind of stress load they can take, you know, versus other people so. You know, when you have that disconnect, you might just load them up with a bunch of stuff and not even realize it's overwhelming to them versus somebody, you know. You can be like, "Okay, I'm not gonna give this person that much stress." (P11, Photojournalist, Market 1-50, he/him)

Prepare Interns for the Real World

Several of the participants in this study said that their first exposure to day-to-day news operations in a real-world environment was through their internships with news organizations. However, some also shared that their internship experiences did not adequately train or prepare them for the realistic daily expectations and stress/burnout that followed in their first jobs. As one participant expressed, "nobody's going to be mean to the news intern. And the news interns, all they're doing is printing scripts and running this and that. They're not getting the brunt of it" (P7, News Producer, Market 50-100, she/her). Another journalist shared a similar sentiment, calling on news organizations to try and foster a more "honest" newsroom environment for interns to experience so that they are better prepared for the realities they will eventually face:

But I think even in those internships, people weren't honest about it. They didn't want to crush your dreams, you know. You got a little intern, and you don't want to be like, "Hey, kid, this f— blows. Don't do this." Like, you wanna foster that like curiosity and the excitement that they have, but I think we should be more honest about it. (P10, News Producer, Market 1-50, she/her)

Additionally, a news producer/MMJ shared that she was only still in the business because she “gave news a second chance” after experiencing an unhelpful and toxic internship experience. She recalled coming out of that experience as “I thought I literally was in hell, because I felt like no one liked an intern, no one wanted me to help. I was nothing. I felt like no one cared about my future” (P12, News Producer/MMJ, Market 50-100, she/her). Her reminder to news managers: “Why do you have interns if you’re not gonna help them succeed and help them prepare for their next career?” (P12, News Producer/MMJ, Market 50-100, she/her)

Foster Good Newsroom Culture

Two journalists expressed that having a positive and healthy workplace environment is important to curbing stress and burnout among employees, thus calling on managers to do what they can to focus on their newsrooms’ culture and morale. One journalist described his previous newsroom’s culture as “so bad” that it drove him to avoid his newsroom for four months and eventually leave the station (P4, Anchor, Market 50-100, he/him). A photojournalist added that a good newsroom culture is representative of how managers treat their employees and make them want to come to work because “Nobody wants to go to work. Nobody wants to have to go to work. But when you get burned out, it kind of becomes ‘I *have* [emphasis added] to go to work,’ not ‘I *get* [emphasis added] to go to work’” (P11, Photojournalist, Market 1-50, he/him).

Provide Mentoring Programs

Two journalists stated that instilling mentorship programs, where veteran journalists are paired with early career journalists, could help alleviate journalists’ stress and burnout. As these journalists described, having an expert who is approachable in their

corner can help newer journalists navigate the ups and downs of the industry and ensure that they are not on their own or feel abandoned in doing so.

Mind the (Skill) Gap

Several participants in this study expressed feeling more stressed out when transitioning into their first television news jobs because their educational background was not broadcast-centric. For instance, a senior political correspondent described his first few months on the job as “horrible” due to the growing pains he felt from jumping from a print-focused education to working in a television news job (P6, Senior Political Correspondent, Market 50-100, he/him). Despite being more than a year into his position, he said he still found it challenging to adapt to the high, fast-paced demands of a television journalist. An anchor/reporter shared a similar experience, saying that none of her university professors had any experience in television news; most of them had careers in print journalism (P14, Anchor/Reporter, Market 50-100, she/her).

Suggestions for Journalism Educators (RQ5)

This section addresses what the Generation Z local television journalists believe educators could do to better prepare journalism students for stress and burnout in the workplace (RQ5). All but one of the 25 participants reported receiving some form of higher education (i.e., college, university, trade school) in journalism, mass communication, communication and/or media studies. Several of the study participants graduated during the COVID-19 pandemic and acknowledged potential shifts in their education from typical curriculums (e.g., no internships).

A majority of the journalists who attended an institution (13) said they did not learn about stress, burnout, or, particularly, how to cope with it when they were in school.

Some participants even shared that the first time they heard about job burnout was through social media platforms or pop culture (e.g., movies, memes). Among the journalists who did recall learning about it in school, only seven journalists reported learning about or, at the minimum, being made aware of stress and burnout through their journalism classes. The remaining four journalists recalled learning about stress, burnout, and/or coping strategies outside of a journalism-focused context, including from extracurriculars, classes from other departments and coping with life in general.

Despite the variation in learning experiences, many of the participants indicated that, if and when stress and burnout were brought up in their classes, it was often acknowledged, but there was no action to follow. As one participant summarized, “How to cope? No. That it that will exist? Yes” (P2, Breaking News Reporter, Market 1-50, she/her). Numerous participants shared that their professors and/or invited journalists who spoke in their classes would typically indirectly introduce the idea of stress and burnout through vague anecdotes of their experiences in the field. One participant shared these discussions about stress and burnout would “just be like a footnote of their lesson” (P14, Anchor/Reporter, Market 50-100, she/her). Another participant recalled encountering this when she was in school too:

I remember a lot of, you know, guest speakers or professors or whatever saying, “Everyone pays their dues. Everyone goes through it. It'll be okay. You'll get through it,” without ever really actually talking about what *it* [emphasis added] is. Definitely, a lot of talk and not a lot of, “How do you actually get through it, and how do you actually deal with it?”. (P24, MMJ, Market 50-100, she/her)

Many participants echoed this sentiment, saying their classes made them well aware of the prevalence of stress and burnout in the field, but they were hardly provided any accompanying advice or strategies to manage it. As one participant described, “it just kind of is like, ‘dot dot dot,’ and I just have to figure out the rest of the sentence myself” (P13, News Producer, Market 1-50, she/they). For some participants, their in-class discussions about stress and burnout among journalists made it seem like an unspoken expectation that automatically comes with being a journalist. For example, one journalist said, “it’s just like you’re expected to be prepared to be stressed” (P5, Reporter, Market 1-50, she/her). Another participant compared it to being a member of an exclusive club:

it's almost like, if you're in the club, you get it, which isn't a good mentality, but like news professors, they would just kind of be like, "Yeah, I mean, that's news for you", and you're like, “What does that mean?” (P2, Breaking News Reporter, Market 1-50, she/her)

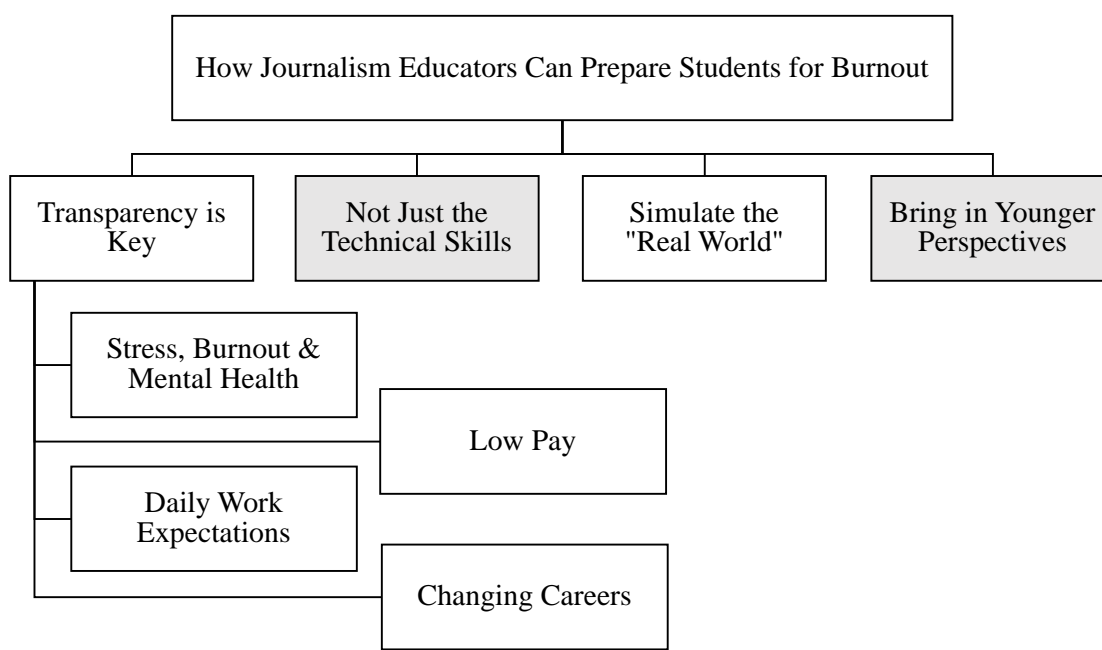
However, several participants did acknowledge the potentially large burden that would be placed on educators with addressing stress and burnout among journalists in the classroom. For instance, some participants said it would be challenging to teach students how to cope with stress and burnout because coping strategies would differ based on each individual’s preferences. Others saw burnout as a “structural problem” of the journalism industry, and the responsibility for solving this issue should not solely fall on educators. Several participants added that much of working as a journalist is “trial by fire” and students will learn the most on the go. One journalist argued, “College can only do so much to prepare you. They cannot prepare you to speak with a grieving mother, you

know, who just lost their kid. They can't prepare you for burnout and the workload” (P4, Anchor, Market 50-100, he/him).

Regardless of their educational experiences, all of the Generation Z local television journalists strongly advocated for stress and burnout to be discussed in school more frequently and in depth, with many saying that it has not been focused on enough now and back when they were in school. Upon reflecting on their own educational and work experiences, the 25 participants were asked to provide recommendations to journalism and mass communication educators on how to better prepare journalism students for the stress and burnout they will inevitably encounter in their first newsroom jobs. Figure 2 illustrates the key themes and sub-themes that emerged from the participants’ suggestions in a coding tree.

Figure 2

Coding Tree – Suggestions for Journalism Educators



Transparency is Key

When asked about what educators could do better to prepare journalism students for stress and burnout the workplace, many of the journalists – specifically 18 of them – underscored the need for transparency about the realities of working as a journalist.

Stress, Burnout, and Mental Health. Most frequently, the participants advocated for educators to be more transparent about the job’s impact on journalists’ stress, burnout and mental health. Many participants said it was imperative for educators to have open conversations with students about managing stress and combating burnout, even suggesting dedicating at least an entire class period to this topic. This means going beyond indirectly referencing these topics as an expectation of working in journalism, as one journalist explained:

I think just having the conversation about burnout in general and warning people about the realities of what it is. I think it's kind of glossed over, and it's like, “Oh, yeah, it's a stressful industry. It's a fast-paced industry,” but actually talking about what that means, and what are the factors that are gonna go into burnout, and what to do when you feel that way. (P10, News Producer, Market 1-50, she/her)

The journalists expressed that these discussions about stress, burnout and mental health in journalism are important to destigmatize these topics, which is especially needed due to their prevalence in the industry. As one participant shared, journalism students should be reassured that it’s okay not to be okay:

I think just encouragement like, “You probably will experience burnout at some point, but don't feel ashamed of feeling that. Don't be ashamed of feeling that way, because it's fairly typical.” It could probably happen in any industry, but I

feel like, especially in journalism, it's bound to happen. (P25, Executive Producer, Market 100+, she/her)

Similarly, several participants also emphasized the need to openly talk about the availability of mental health resources. This includes guiding journalism students on finding mental health resources, be it on their own or through their company, and normalizing seeking out professional help when needed. One participant also suggested that educators could bring in a mental health professional who is familiar with the ins and outs of journalism to talk to students about what they might experience in their jobs, especially for those who may go into roles that are based in the field, like reporters and photographers (P15, News Producer, Market 1-50, she/her).

Low Pay. The journalists in study also often recommended for educators to be transparent with students about the pay that comes with being a journalist. Some of the participants said they were aware and expectant of the lower-than-usual rate in the industry, but not of the stress and “real-life implications” of living and surviving with it. One participant shared she wished someone “was real” with her about the financial situation of working as a journalist, even suggesting that it would have been helpful to have a journalist walk through their taxes to truly visualize that real impact (P7, News Producer, Market 50-100, she/her). Regardless of the method, the journalists felt being transparent about pay in journalism was essential in curbing burnout and sustaining the longevity of the industry, as one journalist explained:

There would be a less “burnover” rate because people wouldn’t be getting into the industry without knowing that they're not going to make that amount of money. And that's kind of sad where it's like, “Well, then, there should be less people

there,” but then it's like, “Okay, but then you're also not like making people suicidal,” so... (P14, Anchor/Reporter, Market 50-100, she/her)

Daily Work Expectations. Alongside pay, some of the participants advocated for educators to be transparent about the day-to-day expectations and work conditions of a journalist. This includes talking to students about the daily stressors and pressures, less-than-ideal work schedules, and emotional and physical toll they could face in their jobs. Several added that it was also important for educators to teach students about the safety and security measures they need to keep in mind as journalists working in the field. One participant shared why addressing this in school was imperative:

you're thinking like, “Is my safety okay?”, because with news, you don't realize how many people don't like them. You don't realize how many people are very vindictive to people in news, because they're easily targeted because we have a lot of stuff with us. You're only one person, and people are just... They view you as the enemy, and sometimes people who are going through something will lash out, and will put your safety at risk, even in broad daylight. (P12, News Producer/MMJ, Market 50-100, she/her)

While the participants do not intend for these conversations to steer students away from becoming journalists, they argue having these “real conversations” is highly beneficial in ensuring that these future journalists are not blindsided by the burnout-inducing stressors and harsh realities of the industry.

Changing Careers. Considering the high burnout and turnover rates in television news, one participant suggested that it would be valuable for educators to be transparent about the process of considering career changes as a journalist. This participant shared

this was a path she was exploring herself, and yet it was not an option she learned about in school, despite how common she finds it to be in the profession:

I've come to realize a lot of reporters leave the industry, even, you know, not just recently, in the past few years, but 15, 20 years ago. I feel like I was almost sold this idea that like, "You're gonna be in this career, and you're gonna pick it, and it's a super noble career, and everyone sticks with it for life, and if you don't, we don't talk about people who leave because they're just quitters." ... I think there's a lot of shame and a lot of guilt and a lot of pressure, which I think has just made burnout even more. (P24, MMJ, Market 50-100, she/her)

Not Just the Technical Skills

To further prepare journalism students for stress and burnout, six of the Generation Z local television journalists emphasized that educators should not only teach students the technical skills of being a journalist but also about navigating the industry as newcomers. For instance, many of the participants said they were proficiently trained in putting content together, but that was not always enough, as one participant shared:

Most people who come into this, they know how to write a package, they know how to do an interview. But it's like, "OK, what do you do when you see your first dead body? What do you do when you miss slot and you cost the station money? Like, what do you do with all these other things?" (P3, Photographer, Market 1-50, he/him)

Several participants also shared that they wished they knew more about the business side of working in news, like moving up in market sizes, navigating contracts

and handling negotiations. For instance, one journalist shared that news contracts were never talked about when she was in college:

I had no idea that, every place, you had to sign a contract. ... I had no idea what I was doing when I signed my first contract. If I did, I probably wouldn't have signed it for \$14/hour. But because I didn't have anybody to reach out to in school, and they didn't talk about that in school, I was just like, "Well, this must be normal." I think there just needs to be more transparency about the entire process and of what the actual career is like. (P14, Anchor/Reporter, Market 50-100, she/her)

Alongside this, the journalists recommended for educators to teach journalism students how to advocate for themselves in the newsroom and in front of management, especially with setting healthy boundaries at work to prevent burnout. One participant added that it would be helpful for educators to teach journalism students on responding to critiques from management in a productive manner:

educators should encourage young adults to ask those questions. You're not challenging management by asking them to clarify why they didn't like it, and that's been one of my biggest things is, you know, news director says, "I don't really like how we did this today." Okay, why didn't you like it? ... It's not a challenge. I just want to know how I can fix my stuff to be better for the company overall. (P13, News Producer, Market 1-50, she/they)

Simulate the "Real World"

To better prepare journalism students for stress and burnout in the industry, four of the participants suggested re-creating real-world news environments in school, saying

that this could help students be better equipped for the deadlines that come with the fast-paced newsrooms they will eventually work in. As one participant explained, “having however many weeks to do an assignment isn’t really the same as doing it every day” (P17, Photographer, Market 1-50, he/him). Some of the participants in this study reported having and working on student newscasts at their institutions but felt that it did not truly reflect the high-pressure realities of the industry. While recognizing the challenges in finding sufficient time in a limited curriculum to do this, one participant shared the idea of hosting mock days throughout the semester for students to practice executing day-turn stories and getting used to that workflow (i.e., writing, shooting and editing in one day):

maybe like an experiment where you, a couple times throughout the semester, have a full day block of time where you show up, you get your story, you have to make it. You do that at the beginning of the year, and you're like, “Wow, that was really hard,” but drop out if you don't want to do it, I guess. And then, like halfway through do the same thing, and then at the end do the same thing. (P17, Photographer, Market 1-50, he/him)

To further help journalism students transition into the industry more seamlessly, one participant also suggested including curriculum requirements for students to job shadow a journalist working in roles/positions that they may be interested in pursuing. This participant shared that this could help students get a better understanding of the day-to-day operations and figure out if their desired role is “a good fit or not” (P19, Assignment Editor, Market 50-100, she/her). In addition to this, the participant shared that educators should also consider establishing mentor connections between journalists in the field and students, saying that this could help the student not only navigate career

goals and workplace expectations but also start networking with industry experts before coming into their first jobs.

Bring in Younger Perspectives

Three of the Generation Z local television journalists expressed feeling a disconnect between what they learned in school and what they experienced in the workplace because their professors had not worked in the industry recently. One participant even shared that, when she was in school, all of her professors had not worked in day-to-day news for at least a decade (P9, Photojournalist, Market 1-50, she/her).

Another participant, who worked as an MMJ, also shared that many of her professors had already left the business when MMJs became more common in newsrooms, making their “good old days” no longer relevant to what she would eventually go through after college (P8, MMJ, Market 100+, she/her). In terms of stress and burnout, one journalist shared that having educators or mentors who were closer to her age was important because older generations of journalists have coped with issues differently from people her age, and they may not be able to provide strategies or advice that would fit her generation’s needs (P7, News Producer, Market 50-100, she/her).

Chapter V: Discussion

This thesis set out to examine job burnout among Generation Z (18-27 years old) journalists working in local television news, two intersecting populations of journalists that are understudied in the research context of burnout in journalism. The findings show that, while there are various similarities in the ways these young journalists and the journalists who have come before them experienced burnout, much of the participants' discussions point toward a burnout experience that is unique to their generation and the current state of the industry they are working in. The discussion is organized following this thesis' research questions, first addressing the Generation Z television journalists' definitions and experiences with burnout, followed by the job demands and job resources identified in their burnout experiences, and then the recommendations for newsroom managers and journalism educators. This section concludes with the limitations of this study and possible directions for future research in this area.

Defining and Experiencing Burnout

Consistent with prior research, Generation Z's own definitions of burnout lined up with industry-standard characterizations of the phenomenon. Exhaustion, negativity and cynicism, feeling disconnected from work, and a sense of reduced effectiveness and proficiency were all themes that emerged from discussions with the participants, which supports the major components of burnout in established frameworks, namely the World Health Organization's (2019) and Maslach Burnout Inventory's three dimensions of burnout: exhaustion, cynicism and inefficacy (Maslach & Jackson, 1981; Maslach & Leiter, 2016; Maslach et al., 2001). Diverting away from more "classic" definitions of burnout, the participants' understanding of burnout also involved describing the stressors

that led to their burnout, like “being overworked and overwhelmed” and being “overstressed,” as well as the impact of burnout, including turnover, or what some of the participants described earlier as a “final feeling” that prevents them from going forward in their career, prompting a need for a break or change. The variation in the participants’ definitions of burnout suggests that there is still some ambiguity around the concept, reinforcing Heinemann and Heinemann’s (2017) claims that the way burnout is researched does not always match what is used in public discourse.

With 23 out of 25 Generation Z television journalists in this thesis saying that they were burned out, this thesis reaffirms the trend of younger and less experienced journalists being more at risk for burnout (Cook et al., 1993; Filak & Reinardy, 2011; Reinardy, 2006, 2011; Thompson & Chedraoui, 2023). The ways that burnout impacted the participants’ lives also matches what prior studies have discovered. For instance, many of the journalists said that burnout impacted their mental health negatively and exacerbated existing mental health conditions, which follows findings from Maslach et al. (2001) and Salvagioni et al. (2017). On an occupational level, the participants reported being more absent from work when they were experiencing burnout, which is what Salvagioni et al. (2017) identified as an occupational consequence in their systematic review of job burnout literature. Additionally, a majority of the Generation Z television journalists in this sample reported experiencing turnover intentions as a result of their burnout, echoing a pattern from decades-long research that burnout can trigger turnover intentions among journalists (Cook & Banks, 1993; Ivask, 2017; Jung & Kim, 2012; Liu & Lo, 2018; Reinardy, 2008, 2011).

While burnout has affected journalists for generations, the Generation Z television journalists argued that their generation of journalists experience it differently than their predecessors, with many of them emphasizing that, because the industry and working conditions have changed, their job stressors have changed too. These journalists cited the MMJ model, social media obligations and current anti-press attitudes and hostility as some of the reasons to why their cohort of journalists are going through burnout differently in comparison to older journalists at their age. To the researcher's knowledge, these factors have not yet been thoroughly examined in studies about burnout among journalists. Additionally, these journalists affirmed that mental health is a bigger priority for their generation, acknowledging the older generational "suck it up" mindset is just not enough for them to endure the typical less-than-ideal work conditions of a journalist. These unique characteristics that set these Generation Z journalists apart from other generations calls for further examination into their cohort's experiences with burnout.

Generation Z and the JD-R Theory

Looking at the findings in the context of the JD-R theory of burnout, both job demands and job resources played a role in the Generation Z television journalists' experiences with burnout. It is valuable to note that the frequency of job demands (15) being highlighted by the participants exceeded the total number of job resources mentioned (12). Among these journalists, increased workload coupled with reduced resources and issues/conflict with management were the most cited job demands. Seeing the impact of their work on their communities and receiving support from their newsroom colleagues were most frequently mentioned factors under job resources.

Looking at job demands, or aspects of the job that exhausted and drained the journalists (Demerouti et al., 2001), much of what was mentioned by the participants echoes what has been found in prior journalism and non-journalism studies, including high and heavy workload, a lack of autonomy at work and interpersonal conflicts (Bakker et al., 2023; Chan et al., 2015; Ivask, 2017; Liu & Lo, 2018). In terms of the aspects of the job that kept the participants motivated and engaged at work (Demerouti et al., 2001), feedback, relationships with colleagues and managers and job autonomy were some of the job resources that emerged both in this study and in past research (Bakker et al., 2023; Chan et al., 2015; Ivask, 2017). Additionally, these journalists shared that they felt exhausted as a result of an overload of job demands and disengaged from work when they did not receive sufficient resources at their jobs, thus confirming the health impairment and motivational processes of the JD-R theory (Bakker & Demerouti, 2007, 2014).

While there were several similarities reported, this thesis offers some findings that are new to research on job demands and job resources and how they factor into burnout in journalism. Community impact, which was one of the job resources highlighted most often by the participants in this thesis, was not previously identified as a job resource in other journalism-centric studies that utilized the theory in similar manner as this thesis (see Chan et al., 2015; Ivask, 2017). The findings of this thesis also showcased several job demands – like anti-press rhetoric and attitudes and meeting expectations in bigger markets as younger journalists – that are unique to the current state of the television news industry and have not yet been discussed in journalism-centric burnout research. Thus,

this creates a strong argument for more studies examining burnout among journalists to adopt the JD-R theory as a theoretical framework.

Additionally, according to the JD-R theory, personal resources, or employees' resiliency-related self-beliefs, can help reduce their chances of experiencing burnout (Bakker & Demerouti, 2014; Bakker & de Vries, 2021; Hobfoll et al., 2003; Schaufeli, 2017a). A few participants in this sample did highlight the important role that personal resources played in their burnout experiences, particularly with helping them quell their turnover intentions, thus confirming what the theory's authors found. Yet, personal resources were not a factor that has been explored in studies that examined burnout among journalists using the JD-R theory thus far. Considering that these personal resources often helped these journalists decide between staying in or leaving the industry, future journalism-focused studies should consider exploring the role personal resources could play in journalists' experiences with burnout.

Moreover, as of April 2024, the Federal Trade Commission announced a new rule that would ban noncompete agreements for most employees in the U.S. (Federal Trade Commission, 2024; Rugaber, 2024). While the rule is expected to be challenged in court (Rugaber, 2024), it would be valuable for scholars interested in researching burnout among journalists to keep an eye on this developing case considering the contractual nature of television news was highlighted as a job demand by the journalists in this thesis.

Recommendations to Fight Burnout

Generally, the journalists in this thesis advocated for conversations around stress and burnout to be normalized and discussed more in newsroom and educational settings, but they also provided specific recommendations for newsroom leaders and journalism

educators to help curb burnout in the industry. In a newsroom context, most of the participants struggled to identify specific resources or strategies that effectively helped them to manage their stress and burnout. They called on managers to do more to support journalists, especially because they perceived stress and burnout to be a commonality of working in this profession. These journalists acknowledged that, while there are limits to what managers can realistically do to solve this industry problem, there are still steps, even inexpensive ones, that they can take to make a difference, like conducting regular check-ins with employees or providing positive reinforcement/feedback regularly. These journalists emphasized that feeling valued and appreciated at work can go a long way in keeping their stress and burnout at bay.

Based on the participants' suggestions, beyond increasing pay, benefits and staffing, newsroom leaders should consider incorporating a more staggered schedule in their newsrooms where reporters and MMJs can have more days in a week to focus on working on and perfecting a news story rather than making them turn in a new story every single day. As some of the participants shared, not having enough time to work on and complete their stories was a stressor that contributed to their burnout. Managers should also conduct at least weekly or biweekly one-on-one meetings with their employees to assess their workload and check in on their well-being. As having a support system at work was a major job resource for these participants, managers can also consider hosting more team bonding activities and implementing a "buddy system" or mentoring program for journalists to get to know each other in a more casual way and form camaraderie with their fellow co-workers.

In an educational context, most of the participants highlighted the major need for educators to be more transparent about the realities of what it means to work as a journalist now, with many sharing that a big contributor to their burnout was not being sufficiently prepared for the daily expectations of their jobs. As Cook and Banks (1993) reported, the type of journalist who is at-risk for burnout “found journalism to be much different from what was expected” (p. 116). Most of these journalists also shared that the topics of stress and burnout were often glossed over in classes, leading some to only learn about it when they were already working in the industry. While these journalists acknowledged that the problem of burnout cannot be solely solved by education, they expressed that at least giving journalism students a heads-up of the “real world” ensures that they are not blindsided coming into their first newsroom jobs.

Following the participants’ suggestions, journalism educators, perhaps those teaching media ethics, capstone courses and/or television news classes, could consider incorporating days into their curriculum dedicated to having more transparent and honest conversations about what it is like to work in television news. This includes talking about the daily stressors television journalists could encounter, the signs of burnout to watch for and the ways that journalists can receive support and help for their mental health. Educators could also bring in current television journalists who are closer in age to their students to talk about their experiences with burnout and meeting day-to-day expectations. Additionally, educators should also teach journalism students about how to best navigate contracts and negotiations with management, which could potentially be achieved through partnerships with newsrooms and broadcast companies and/or university career centers/services. Furthermore, it may be valuable for educators to create

assignments or projects in a semester where students can practice turning in a story within a limited number of hours to get them used to the tighter turnaround times in the industry.

Limitations and Future Research

This thesis has several limitations that could lead to opportunities for future research. First, the research chose to utilize snowball sampling via personal connections and social media (e.g., Facebook groups) to recruit participants due to the difficulty in identifying and selecting people based on their ages. Although generalizability was not the primary objective for this thesis, the use of this non-probability sampling strategy does limit the perspectives represented in the findings. Additionally, sampling participants through the Internet may have created a self-selection bias in this thesis.

This thesis focused on television journalists who were working at local news stations affiliated with a network in the U.S., which excluded television journalists who were working with cable news programs (e.g., Spectrum News) and freelancers. Future studies should take into account these journalists' perspectives as they may experience unique stressors that differ from those who work for networks (as briefly touched on by the one journalist in this sample who had prior freelancing experience in television news). The researcher also chose to exclude Generation Z local television journalists who were working at a news station and enrolled in an institution simultaneously due to added academic stressors they may experience, which was not the scope of this thesis. However, this thesis' sample of participants included many Generation Z journalists who started working at a local news station in a "professional" capacity before graduation. Additionally, this thesis did not consider the perspectives of student journalists, who still

play a vital role in covering their communities. Thus, future studies should explore the burnout experiences of these two groups as well because they are still important subsets of television journalists. After all, burnout does not discriminate, and these varying experiences should be included.

Additionally, the interviews and findings of this thesis only represent a snapshot of the Generation Z local television journalists' experiences with burnout. Due to the ever-changing nature of the news cycle and journalists' day-to-day at work, their experiences with stress and burnout will fluctuate and evolve too. In the four months since the interviews were conducted in March, one participant said during the member checks that, while he still felt passionate about his job, he reported feeling burnout more intensely since sharing his initial experiences with the researcher (P3, Photojournalist, Market 1-50, he/him). Since her interview, another participant shared that she chose not to re-sign her contract with her news station due to the work conditions that led to her burnout there but has decided to give television news one more shot at a different station (P23, News Producer, Market 50-100, she/her). Thus, with the changes in burnout experiences demonstrated by these participants in the short amount of time since the initial interviews, scholars should consider conducting longitudinal studies to examine burnout and how it impacts journalists over time to capture a more holistic visualization of journalists' experiences with burnout.

Chapter VI: Conclusion

This thesis, to the researcher's knowledge, is the first attempt to examine burnout among Generation Z journalists, specifically those working in local television news. The findings of this add a new perspective to the important but limited research area of burnout in journalism. Decades of prior research demonstrated that younger journalists are at risk of experiencing burnout, and this thesis echoed that pattern, showing that burnout indeed affected most of the Generation Z television journalists in this sample despite them only being in the early stages of their careers. A majority of these journalists also expressed having turnover intentions when they were burned out and considered looking for opportunities within and beyond television news.

While burnout has affected journalists for decades, qualitative data derived from 25 interviews show that this generation of journalists experience burnout differently from how journalists in the past have due to major changes in the television news industry. Factors like the integration of the MMJ model of news, outdated pay, the digital/social media age, and mental health being a bigger priority for Generation Z were cited as several reasons to why this generation of journalists experience stress and burnout differently. When these journalists' stressors on the job change, their experiences with burnout change too.

Using the JD-R theory as a framework, the findings show that an increased workload paired with a lack of resources (i.e., pay, staffing, time) and issues with management were major contributors to burnout for the participants. In contrast, seeing their work make an impact on their communities and having supportive newsroom colleagues helped to keep the journalists motivated and engaged at work most. When it

came to what can be done to minimize burnout among journalists, the need for transparency was a key theme, with the Generation Z television journalists advocating for newsroom managers and journalism educators to normalize conversations around stress, burnout and mental health for both practitioners and students.

The findings of this thesis do provide a sliver of hope for the future of the industry. Despite the numerous daily stressors these television journalists face and how burnout plagued this sample, these Generation Z local television journalists were still passionate about their duties as journalists and committed to making a difference in their communities. However, that passion alone is not enough to guarantee their dedication to staying in the industry for years to come, as these journalists underscored that they would consider other career opportunities in pursuit of prioritizing their well-being, no matter how fulfilling television news may be. Thus, this thesis illustrates the urgent need for professional and educational interventions to alleviate stress and burnout among the industry's youngest journalists. Generation Z television journalists represent the future of the profession, and action needs to be taken to ensure their longevity. If not, who else is left?

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Appendix

Interview Guide

1. Please state your job title, the market size you are working in, and describe your typical day-to-day duties.
2. How long have you worked in your role with your current organization?
3. How long have you worked as a TV journalist?
4. Tell me a little about your backstory. Why did you decide to become a journalist?
5. How do you define burnout?
6. Have you experienced burnout in your role as a TV journalist?
7. Could you describe a time when you felt burnt out while working as a TV journalist? (e.g., recent or memorable experience)
8. When you were experiencing burnout, how did it impact your life at work? Can you provide some examples?
9. When you were experiencing burnout, how did it impact your life outside of work? Please provide some examples.
10. Are there any parts or characteristics of your job that you think contributed to your burnout? How so?
11. Are there any parts or characteristics of your job that you think helped reduce your chances of burnout? How so?
12. In thinking about your experiences at work and with burnout, what are some aspects of your job that you find physically/mentally draining?
13. In contrast, what are some aspects of your job that you find engaging or motivating?

14. While you were experiencing burnout, did you feel any intentions of changing jobs or careers?
15. From your perspective as a Gen Z member, do you think your generation of TV journalists experience stress and burnout differently from your older colleagues (e.g., millennials, Gen X)? Why or why not?
16. A recent study from UNC-Chapel Hill found that about 7 in 10 journalists working in local news experienced burnout. How does this resonate with you?
17. What do you think are the top three causes of burnout among journalists? Please walk me through your thought process as you pick them.
18. How do you typically manage or cope with your stress and burnout?
19. In thinking back to the times before you started working as a journalist, do you recall learning about stress and burnout and/or how to cope with them in school/college?
Could you list a few examples?
20. Have you ever received support from your organization in dealing with stress and burnout? How?
21. If you were a manager or employer in a TV newsroom, how would you help journalists manage their stress and burnout?
22. Is there anything else that you would like to add?