THERE’S NO CRYING IN SPORTS JOURNALISM: A QUALITATIVE STUDY ON REPORTER BURNOUT

By Eduardo Gonzalez

Theory

I used S.E. Hobfoll’s conservation of resources theory as a basis for my qualitative research. The theory focuses on people’s “resources” and how they work in people and how those resources affect people socially (Hobfoll & Lilly, 129). “Hobfoll’s COR theory contends that individuals build up resources to assist in dealing with stressful situations” (Reinardy, 90). This theory has been used many times by many researchers. One of those researchers states people store “resources” to help them get through high-stress moments” (Reinardy, 90). The “resources” are anything the person values. People use their “resources” to help them work through tough situations. For this reason, people try to save these resources and use them sparingly, in order to have resources available when they are truly needed (Ojedokun, O & Idemudia, ES, 108). Journalists say the stress usually comes from job demands and job resources (Ojedokun, O & Idemudia, ES, 107). The theory plays on a strong relationship between burnout and engagement (Alarcon et al., 213).

There is one resource that may be valuable in minimizing burnout: optimism (Ojedokun, O & Idemudia, ES, 107). By having a positive mind and attitude, people can offset the negative emotions that could lead to burnout (115). The theory states people are forced to either adapt to a situation or cope with it to the best of the person’s ability (Alarcon et al., 213). The researchers defined coping as the act of minimizing that which causes stress (215). The Conservation of Resources theory’s foundation lies in saving and
protecting the resources each person has at his or her disposal (Hobfoll & Lilly, 130). It is up to the individual how he or she will adapt or behave in order to maintain a healthy balance and continue working in journalism.

**Literature Review**

**What are these emotions?**

Emotions are very powerful. People, events, and things one encounters every day affect them. However, people react differently to different things, therefore, their emotional responses to them will be different. In this study, I will focus on the effects of burnout in sports broadcast journalists. While sports journalists are people, they are a different breed. The emotions most fans experience during a game, do not necessarily apply to working journalists, since they have to remain impartial to produce fair and balanced work. A journalist, by definition has to remain impartial and fair, therefore the emotions fans experience throughout the game, mostly driven by outcomes, do not necessarily affect journalists. Still, other factors affect journalists emotions, to the point that some end up leaving the profession, as a result of burnout (Reinardy, 95).

Emotions are affected by the orbitofrontal vortex (OFC) (Kehoe, et al., 863). The researchers found that a wide range of factors triggered the OFC (Kehoe, et al., 867). This understanding of how emotions are triggered and where they come from will help understand how sports can trigger specific emotions in viewers by knowing and understanding the process the mind goes through when people experience different emotions.
**Men are from Mars and… Other differences when experiencing emotions.**

Men and women, for example, react differently to sports. Men tend to be more emotionally attached according to a study by Walter Gantz and Lawrence A. Wenner. They wrote, “Consistent with initial differences in interest, men more frequently reported feeling happy when their team fared well and angry when their team performed poorly” (Gantz & Wenner, 236).

As with emotions, the effects and causes of burnout depend on gender. Women experienced more burnout than men. Research shows that when talking about married couples, women experience more burnout than men (Pamuk & Durmus, 171). This shows there are differences in experiences that could lead to similar experiences regarding burnout when looking at it in different areas.

**When emotions take over.**

Mark Dechesne, Jeff Greenberg, Jamie Arndt, and Jeff Schimel focused their study on a theory known as “terror management theory.” It states that some people get really attached to their sports teams and act according to the team’s performance (Dechesne et. al., 814). For example, if the team is winning, the fan feels a sense of pride and glory. On the other hand, if the team is performing poorly, people fall into slumps and become sad or even fall into depression (Dechesne, et. al, 832).

Gender plays a big role in this (Ganz & Wenner, 234). Men and women differ greatly in how they view sports (Ganz & Wenner, 234). They also differ in their reasons for watching them (Ganz et al., 236). Men would watch sports to, among other things; enjoy the excitement it provides (Ganz & Wenner, 236). Women, however, would watch because they saw it as an opportunity to spend time with those who enjoyed watching
them (Ganz & Wenner, 236). It was more of a thrill-seeking experience for men, while for women it was more about having an opportunity to interact and mingle with others during the viewing experience. However, most of the time, women were doing more than one thing while they watched games, like cleaning around the house (Ganz & Wenner, 236). When working as journalists, however, they have to be focused throughout the entire game, with no emotional breaks when the game is close.

Sports journalists can also feel the emotional toll of covering sports (Serazio, 158). They are, however, supposed to keep their emotions in check in order to remain impartial. However, journalists are human beings with emotions, as well, so this is not always easy. The daily grind of covering the emotional roller coaster that sports are can have its effect on them, especially since they have to be constantly checking themselves to remain emotionless and objective. This results in many sports journalists burning out eventually.

Herbert J. Freudenberger was the first to define burnout. He described burnout as a state in which people are physically and emotionally tired and are not motivated (1974). A study by Scott Reinardy found, “The results of burnout can lead to employee turnover, reduction in quality and quantity of work, and conflict in the home and work environment” (398).

Many journalists look for support to help combat negative emotions and avoid falling victim to burnout. One avenue some choose to attain balance and support is marriage. For some couples, marriage provides happiness, children, satisfaction of sexual desires, among other things (Pamuk & Durmus, 163).
Social scientists have found how powerful emotions are that now some journalists are adding emotional elements to their stories in an effort gain more readers. This practice, however, is not popular across the board:

The traditional ideal of dispassionate factual reporting is not congruent with the view of journalism as emotional-laden storytelling. The conflict between subjective emotions and objective reporting on emotions was resolved, on the one hand, by the rejection of ‘authorial’ emotions (journalists’ own emotions) and ‘artificial’ emotions, as discussed earlier, and, on the other hand, by rejecting journalists’ influence on the emotional effects of reporting” (Pantti, 178).

This was the case in New Orleans, when the professional football team, the Saints, won the Super Bowl in 2009. The city was just four years removed from one of the biggest natural disasters in the country, Hurricane Katrina. Many people, including fans, reporters, and athletes, had lost everything because of it. Morale around the city was low.

**More than just sports.**

Due to the storm, the Saints had to play their home games in a Baton Rouge and San Antonio because the Superdome, which is where the team played, was being used as a shelter for people, and had been damaged by the storm. Michael Serazio discusses how the mind deals with bad memories and traumatic situations. These memories can also be looked at collectively, as the article notes is the case of New Orleans residents with Hurricane Katrina (170).

Serazio explains that the success of the New Orleans Saints in the years following the storm helped fans move past those negative memories by creating positive new ones. To many, the Superdome served as a temporary home as they worked to rebuild their own houses. With the recent success the Saints have enjoyed, even winning the Super
Bowl in 2010, the Superdome has now become a “positive” place, rather than a negative one (160).

Method

This case study examined how sports reporters handle their workload and the stress that comes with it. I visited the sports department of a television station in a mid-sized market in the Midwest and conducted field semi-structured interviews. I interviewed 8 reporters. The interview participants include reporters currently in the industry, as well some who have left due to burnout. The interviews allowed me to better understand how journalists feel in the newsroom and how each journalist handles the stress that comes with the job (Davies, 3). I conducted my research as I was completing my professional project. I stayed at the location conducting interviews until I had reached saturation in the answers provided, which resulted in data. Once I noticed no new data or themes were emerging, I stopped interviewing people and began analyzing the data more in depth.

The interviews with reporters who work for traditional media outlets were semi-structured, since I had a set of questions I asked them, but it also allowed room for additional questions came up during the actual interview (Tracy, 140).

The semi-structured interviews facilitated the data collection process by allowing me to effectively paint a clear picture of what the newsroom environment was like. This will also help me better understand the newsroom, the reporters and the stress they experience (Everbach, 482).

The interviews took place either in any available room in the newsroom or in the place the participant suggested. I took notes during the interviews in order to be able to
preserve the rich detail of the answers provided, which later assisted me when writing the results and analysis.

In order to respect and ensure the participants’ confidentiality, I kept the field notes, transcripts, recordings, and any other data collected during the process in a safe, locked location. The transcripts were redacted to not include details that could lead to a journalist being identified. This resulted in trust from the participants, who likely felt more comfortable with the process and more at ease to answer as truthful as possible when answering questions during the interviews. I also assigned codes for each participant. Those involved in the study were assigned letters so that their identities remain confidential to any who read the final report.

While conducting the interviews, came across some information about the participants’ mental or emotional state. In order to ensure the employees job security, I did not publish any names, nor did I force anyone to talk about anything they did not wish to share. I did not limit my interviews to those at the station I did be doing my professional project in. I expanded my pool by requesting access and permission to interview other sports journalists in the area. I also informed the participants that they were in control of the interview and were not obligated to answer all of my questions, especially those they were uncomfortable with.

If there were any questionable actions observed or answers during the interview, I addressed them with the participant in order to clarify any misunderstandings. This helped achieve the overall goal of the research, which was to help present the truth, make a contribution to knowledge, and address the problem of burnout in sports broadcast journalism. As far as the data goes, everything remains anonymous, and no names were
used. Reporters were assigned a “code” pertaining to a letter in the alphabet, known only to the researcher, in order to ensure their privacy. This code was used during the interviews. No one was ever in danger during this investigation.

Once I gathered my data, I coded it. I went through the transcripts to find themes that came up. I then divided the themes into groups. This allowed for fairness when evaluating and analyzing the data. Only data of the same theme was compared, which allowed for fairness, since they were judged and evaluated using the same criteria. This also helped paint a better picture that was essential for the “results” section. In an effort to be fair, I also grouped the interviews. To help answer my research questions, I will base the coding on specific words sports broadcast journalists’ say during the interviews.

During the data collection process, interview responses were be coded accordingly. I used green ink to circle positive comments from the participants and red ink to circle negative comments. I used blue ink when the comments were neither positive nor negative. I mainly used blue ink when the participants were explaining something. This allowed for a more effective approach when I wrote the results and analysis. I paid attention to key words in responses like “excited,” “anxious,” “sad,” among other similar words that pointed to emotional effects that could lead to burnout (Gantz, W et al., 111).

The interpretation of the data was based on my prior experience in the field of sports journalism and my education in the field. I have a bachelors degree in journalism and worked two years in a television station in the south, which have provided a wealth of experiences and understanding of different situations. They were also based on the interviews conducted with the participants. The data was grouped into common themes
that come up in the research. All of the conclusions and analysis were based on the fieldwork conducted and the literature read during the process. This data helped answer the key questions posed in the introduction. The research and results aimed to answer why sports reporters are affected emotionally by their jobs and why some experience burnout and ultimately leave the field. The data was also be determined by constant repetition of results. Once there was saturation, I knew the data was more reliable, since it had been repeated throughout the research. I looked for trends and similarities in the research in order to effectively and efficiently answer the research questions. The themes observed or identified in the interviews helped paint a better and clearer picture of what led to emotional and psychological effects on sports broadcast journalists.

This study obviously did not look into everything that affects sports broadcast journalists’ emotions. Since this study was conducted over the summer, I had considerably less time to gather data and analyze it. The lack of time also hindered my opportunities to dig deeper into some of the findings. This obligated me to focus on the main issues that came up during the investigation, and not so much on the ones that are not as common in the participants.

The method I used, semi-structured interviews, also presented limitations to the study. I was subject to the words spoken only when I was present. Also, people behave differently when they know they are being observed and interviewed. I had to be extremely patient and careful not to rush to judgment when I found something of value using this method. I had to take time to explore it and see if there was a pattern, if it was an anomaly or if the person truly thought in a way the data suggests. This can be
especially tricky since the subject matter was something people may have a hard time or concerns talking about.

**Granting anonymity.**

This research relied solely on semi-structured interviews with reporters of traditional media in a major-market city in the Midwest. To ensure the privacy of those people who were interviewed as part of the research, I assigned a letter to each reporter. I also redacted parts of the interview transcripts that could lead to a reporter being identified.

**Results**

**Factors Leading to Burnout.**

After interviewing eight sports journalists whose fields include radio, television and print, there were trends and similarities that suggest the previous point. There were five themes that showed up during the interviews, which shed light on why burnout happens in journalism:

- low salaries;
- quality of the product is down; the schedule, which includes working holidays, leads to people in the industry to miss events with friends and/or family;
- schedule, working holidays, time away from family;
- the feeling of always being ‘on,’ due to recognition and social media, which could lead to “mean tweets;” and finally,
- a lack of understanding and/or support from management.
All of the participants provided answers during the interviews that fit into a number of the themes, which shows the participants were not experiencing just one factor that could lead to burnout. Some participants were more passionate about their answers, as demonstrated by the language used and the tone. It is important to note that of the eight journalists interviewed for this research, three are no longer sports journalists.

**Low Salary.**

One of the factors that came up during multiple interviews is the salary reporters and/or anchors are making today. One of the questions I asked all eight participants was if there was anything he or she would change about the industry. Five out of the eight journalists interviewed said low salaries could play a role in a journalist burning out.

Reporter D said,

> Well, I think, you know, when you get into it and you’re young, you know that you have to operate almost like a starving artist and when I started out in (REDACTED) I made $13,5000 a year and I really pushed hard for that extra $500 and it wasn’t even until I got my second job in (REDACTED) that I was able to pay all of my bills. So, you know, from the standpoint of getting started and the grind of it, even back then, you know, still shooting your own stuff, you know when you go in, you’re working to climb that industry ladder, in a sense, to get to a point where you’re working with a team, on a day-to-day basis, to collaborate to tell the best story possible.

One of the journalists interviewed said that while the amount of work asked of journalists has increased, the pay has not. He said the pay is not commensurate to the amount of work being done by journalists.

> “And that’s the big thing that– I wouldn’t say the grind. The lack of reward for the grind. That’s what I would say is the issue,” Reporter E said.

Reporter E went on to say,

> The juice has to be worth the squeeze, man and the juice is not even close to be worth the squeeze. And, so the unfortunate thing is usually– it’s probably better to
find out the first time you stand in front of a camera at (REDACTED) that you can’t do it, as opposed to actually being able to do it, because inevitably, it’s like a pyramid, and as time goes on, only so many people get to play the game and even if you’re one of the top people you’re still, when it’s all said and done, replaceable unless you tangibly drive revenue to the entity. That’s the only thing that matters.

One participant, Reporter F, said the low salary has caused him to lose motivation to do his job. The participant said he was in the process of making a video to get viewers ready for high school football and for the coverage the station offers. However, the participant said he was lacking motivation because of all the added duties he now has and is not getting paid more to do his job.

When asked about things he would change about the industry, the first thing the participant mentioned was the salary.

Reporter G compared journalism to acting when it came to the salaries.

It’s a really challenging industry. I mean it’s— It’s like acting. There’s a lot of people that want to do it and there are very few jobs and so the leverage is on the side of the employer, which is why most of the wages are very low, particularly for entry-level jobs, which is why they can ask you to do so much. It’s because it’s supply and demand. They have all the leverage because they know they can just replace you with someone who is cheaper and probably, maybe not quite as good, but close. There’s a steady supply of labor that’s cheap and that’s good. There’s a lot of cheap, good people out there who are willing to do it for not a lot of money and so they know that. It’s not that they’re bad— It’s not that the people in the industry are bad people, it’s just that they know that that’s the way the industry works. They have the leverage.

Reporter E went on to elaborate on the leverage and offered advice to aspiring journalists.

That’s the thing that I would want to say to anyone who’s out at (REDACTED) right now. You know, not to fucking humble them, that’s not what my goal would be, but to make them aware that unless you drive a tangible amount of dollars to the bottom line of the entity for whom you work, you are replaceable. And then, therefore, when the time comes and your contract’s up, you have no leverage, and that’s the biggest issue I have with television.
Reporter E went a step further and offered some thoughts on the journalism industry when asked how to avoid burnout as a journalist.

“I don’t want to give you a happy ending because I don’t believe there’s a happy ending. It’s a bad industry. That’s, that’s– The way to avoid burnout is to justify your paycheck and then some by driving revenue to your employer because I assure you your employer is not sitting there going, ‘Gosh, you know, that was a really nice nat sound pop right in between the nat sound and the b-roll. That’s not the way it works.’”

Reporter F said the low salary causes him to lose motivation when doing the job, as was the case when he said he was not motivated to create a video to get viewers ready for the coverage the station will provide.

Reporter A had a different outlook when asked what he would change about the industry.

“Well, I mean, other than tripling my salary, no, not really, you know, because, I mean, first of all you don’t really have the ability to change anything anyway, you know, so we’re talking hypotheticals.”

Reporter E said journalists today are replaceable with cheaper and younger talent applying for jobs. When he was a journalist, he noticed a trend in his paycheck, especially after being at a certain company for a while.

“I don’t know if I realized the replaceability so much as when time came for raises, the raises were so miniscule,” Reporter E said.

All of the journalists interviewed said their job responsibilities have changed throughout the years, mainly to respond to the digital revolution. Reporter F said the importance of having a presence on the web and social media sites has seen his duties increase and change, but one factor has not: his salary. He said he now works longer
hours, produces more shows each week, makes his own graphics, and has to continue managing the high school football website. He also manages all the social media accounts for the sports department.

**Quality of the Product is Down.**

As Reporter F said, sports journalists now have more job responsibilities than before. The main reason for the added tasks is the need to fill the website with content. Another reason is to feed the social media outlets news organizations now have, like Facebook, Twitter, among others. The participants interviewed said journalists now have to do more than just put a package together or write a story. Reporter B said that with all the added tasks, what used to be the original task of writing a story or producing a package, is taking a hit in terms of quality.

I think it gets frustrating because you spend so much time doing that stuff that you don’t get to do the real job as much anymore and we’re so tied into the immediacy of it all that I think your work can suffer long-term, the quality of your work, because you just don’t have time.

Reporter C echoed those sentiments.

The most frustrating part for me now is seeing what the product is. That’s what’s frustrating to me because I want it to be better. I think it should be better. I think a station that would invest in a way– I think they should invest into putting a good newscast on the air and really, you know, you have to have enough people to really do it. I think they’d blow the doors off any other station because– It would take time. People aren’t just going to switch over right away, but I think they would, because everybody, all the stations are doing the same thing, which is not enough people and a mediocre product.

Some of the participants said they are now devoting some of their time to new social media outlets, which reporters say companies are interested in since they engage with the audience. Reporter B said:

“There’s no expertise on my end, but if I spend a lot of time doing that, I’m taking away time from what my real responsibility is and I’m spending less time on the
writing part of it and more time fussing around with my camera or my phone and at the end of the day I’ve just got a very average video and a less-than-average story, where it should be more time and commitment spent to what I’m really there to do, so I wrestle with that a little bit during the season or whenever I’m doing that kind of stuff.”

Another issue brought up by a participant was the gradual evolution into reporters doing more on the job in an effort by stations to save money on salaries. Most reporters now serve as what is known as “one-man bands,” meaning they shoot, write and, edit their stories. The participant said splitting a reporter’s focus in all the added tasks results in the quality of the overall product taking a hit, hurting the audience in the end.

“(…) due to salary reductions and the fact of the matter is, is that they’re asking, you know, people to be, in my mind, less collaborative with their story-telling because the expectation is– Is that someone does it all and I think in some instances, you know, that may be fine, but I don’t think that that should be the overall model because I think you lose the ability, as a reporter, to truly focus on the story-telling when you’re shooting and to, you know, think that we can be an expert in all things. I think it just waters down what the potential product is because there– There are photographers out there with, with an eye for telling a story through video and you know, those are the guys that you want to work with because they make you better. They make the story better. They make the experience better for the viewer.”

One-man bands seem to be the trend in news at the moment. Stations seem to accept a drop in quality in exchange for more manpower to cover stories. An added factor is the need for speed when cranking out news and content to the audience. Social media and the Internet have changed the dynamics of the news industry to the point where the audience is actively seeking out information by going online and social media outlets instead of waiting for the news to come on at the scheduled times each day. Reporter A said it’s just the nature of the business today and it can only get worse.

So, you know, I don’t think the business is going to change. I think, you know, if anything, it’s– Technology is going to cause it to speed up even more. The downside of that is that I think that it’s at the expense of thoughtful reporting. You know, you’ve got to feed the beast every day. So, if you have a story idea,
but it might take two or three days to pull it all together, you know, sometimes the news managers aren’t as interested in that, because, well, we’ve got the four, five, and six today, you know, so that’s a challenge, and it’s frustrating for reporters, sometimes. You know, I would rather, instead of cranking out a story a day, I would rather have time to work on more thoughtful pieces, you know, but, you know, sometimes it works, sometimes it doesn’t.
The individual roles are now blurred in journalism. People don’t just have one task to focus on, as previously discussed. One participant said the consequences of this are clear.

“I think that the issue right now is, I just don’t think the product that we’re putting on today is where it needs to be,” Reporter C said.

The common sentiment among those interviewed suggests having clear, defined roles for each person will result in a better quality product, which will not then lead to frustration on the part of journalists. One reporter showed understanding in why the industry has changed to, but still offered his thoughts on how the quality of the overall product could be improved.

(…) it probably would be better if, in an ideal world, to have on-air people focus mostly on the on-air product. But, I understand why– I mean, it’s money. It all comes down to money. I understand why, financially, that’s difficult to do. But, yeah, ideally, you would want to have your on-air people, to get the best out of them, to get the best on-air product, you would want to have them focus strictly on producing the on-air– the best on-air product they can.

**Schedules/ Holidays/ Time away from Friends and Family.**

In today’s world there are more newscasts on TV than there were in the past. Local television stations now have newscasts starting as early as 4:30 a.m. to go along with the more traditional times, not to mention, the always present website and social media accounts. Print publications don’t have scheduled hours, but with a presence on the web and social media sites, they are always on as well. News professionals no longer
have set hours. It is a 24/7 world where news is always breaking and the audience wants to receive it as it happens.

Sports is an interesting case, since some of the events happen during nights, weekends, and even holidays. This results in news professionals spending a lot of time away from family, friends, and loved ones, which as many participants said, can take a toll on those involved. Reporter B said,

It takes a toll. You feel like you’re constantly on-call, which you are, but it, it’s taxing, I mean, when you feel like you need to have your phone on all the time and it’s stressful. When you have a family, it’s stressful. I mean, when your kids literally tell you, ask if you can put the phone down or your wife does, it’s— It becomes a grind that’s, that seems unnecessary. I mean I think that you can do the job without having to have your iPhone in your hand 24 hours a day. So that’s another thing, where you just have to, sometimes, check yourself, and just have a little perspective.

Reporter C, who used to work in sports, but now works in the news department said it is very clear to him why sports reporters burn out. He said the problem is that sports never stop, since they happen on weekends and holidays, too. He added that he worked six days a week for 10 years when he was a sports reporter and anchor.

One participant said there is a big difference between being single and having a family for people working as sports journalists. Reporter A said that at one point in his career he was working the early morning shift. He said his schedule was opposite to that of his wife’s. He said this resulted in him and his wife were not able to share a lot of time together.

“I might go three, four, five days without seeing my wife awake, you know, so that, I mean, but we’d make up for it on the weekends and stuff,” Reporter A said.
Reporter B echoed Reporter A’s sentiments and added that news professionals have to be OK with missing out on certain events. Reporter B said the schedule is not only physically grueling, but mentally, as well.

I think a lot of it is family related. Your spouse can’t, you know, can’t take it anymore. Kids—The challenges, I think a lot of people that quit or scale back or go to a different job get tired of missing out on big moments or big events like kids birthdays or things like that or they’ve had to reschedule so many different things. I mean, I have to schedule, my kids, my kids, I have twin boys and they were born in November, not this November, they’re five, we always have to schedule when we’re having their birthday party around when I’m going to be in town for football. You miss weddings. You miss things like that and it takes its toll eventually on a family. Now, if you’re single, great. No big deal. But, I think that’s probably the number one contributing thing is having to rearrange your life so you can go to (REDACTED) for the weekend or go to (REDACTED) or whatever.

Reporter C, who no longer covers sports, said the schedule takes a toll on people, no matter who the person is and that the reporter just has to learn to accept it as a reality of the business.

“And again, there’s no such thing in television as a holiday. So Christmas, Thanksgiving, I mean, I went 25 years of never being home for Christmas or Thanksgiving. I mean, that’s part of—That’s part of the deal,” Reporter C said.

Reporter B said there is one ingredient that is key to make it work.

You’ve got to find some balance. I mean, first you have to find someone who buys in to what you’re doing and gets it before it starts, before you really start a family. My wife was well aware of what I was doing because I was doing it for a while before we met, so that helped and she’s amazing, as far as putting up with it, because the hours, the travel is hard. So you just, you just have to kind of suck it up, and, and, and deal with it, but you have to. But, you get, you have to find balance, you just, you can’t be fixated on (REDACTED) sports 24 hours a day, seven days a week.

News is not entertainment. There is no such thing as a rerun in news, which means that the news is on every day, no matter what, as reporter C said. The participant
added it is important to keep things in perspective and stressed the importance of having one’s priorities in order.

That is the hardest part and—And quite honestly, you know, it’s a—It’s a sacrifice and—And some people would choose not to make the sacrifice because they think that’s not—That the most important thing is not the job. It’s—It’s the kids and the family. We made a choice in our family, before we even had children, that we knew what it was going to be like and so we made that choice. You know, you pay the prices for it. You know, I mean, I love my children, just as much as any father loves their kids, but I missed a lot of stuff. I’d try to make up for it. We’d try to take, you know, when I would get a week off, we took family vacations. We—We’d spend time together.

Reporter E believes that it is precisely then when some news professionals begin to question whether or not they want to continue in the business, and burnout kicks in.

The participant restated something previously mentioned, which is that the compensation for the job is not worth missing out on time with family and friends.

“All I think that’s when it happens, usually, whatever age that is that people have their kids or their husbands or wives and they go, ‘God, I would love to go on vacation or I would like to go see my son play, but I’ve got to go anchor the ten or I’ve go to go cover the (REDACTED) game or work wherever and I can’t spend time with them and that’s why, usually around that time, people start to bail. But, I do think, before you or I were around doing this stuff, I do think people made a good amount of money and so it was worth it and they were getting paid, I don’t want to say appropriately, but they were getting paid more and so it was worth putting up with it all.

All of the participants stressed the importance of having a good support system at home. Sports reporters, as already mentioned, work around the clock, including nights, weekends, and holidays. They all said having a partner who understands the demands of the job will helps a great deal. Still, Reporter C said, it is only a matter of time until frustration kicks in.

But, you know, when you miss Christmas after Christmas after Christmas or Thanksgiving after Thanksgiving, then, you know, ‘Why can’t you be here for one Thanksgiving, (REDACTED)’? And the answer is because they won’t let me. I mean, I— I ask for it off. Now, I’m at—I’m at the point of seniority, where I can
get it off, but for many, many years, I wasn’t. So, yeah, those things come up and, you know, maybe in another family, when that would happen, you would say ‘OK, well then I need to find something else to do because—’ And believe me, I’ve known people that have gotten out of this business and have been much happier for it because they, they, they get their life back.

Still, Reporter C said even though he had a good support system at home, it still pains him to think about missing out on spending time with family and friends.

My wife has been extremely supportive and, and has made it work for us, but I’m not sure I would ever win the father of the year award. I do the best that I can, but I, you know, I missed a ton of stuff and I still— I mean, I only have one at home, still, but I still miss a ton of stuff and you know. There’s a sadness about that, but quite honestly, I don’t know, I’ve been doing this now (REDACTED), (REDACTED) years, so this is my life and so there’s not a lot I can do for now.

Always being “On”/ Hateful tweets.

One of the biggest changes journalism has seen in recent years has been the incorporation of social media. It is a different ball game now. Social media has revolutionized the industry giving the audience the latest information; meaning that reporters can send news out to the public at times that traditional media does not. Reporter C said it puts pressure on the reporters to serve their audience as best as they can.

It’s not good for the person who’s having to do it. That’s for sure. I think the expectations are extremely high and as a reporter you don’t want to leave your viewers down, so you do the best job that you can.

Social media and the Internet have contributed to the 24-hour news cycle that exists today. Reporter D said now people are always expecting the latest information on their phones, so, in turn, reporters need to work around the clock to bring the latest information to the audience.

You’re asking people to do a lot. You’re asking them to be on at all times and I think that’s where, that’s where the grind, you know, comes from. Sometimes, I
call it being on a hamster wheel, you know, where you’re always kind of always on.

That feeling of always being on relates to being where the news happens, whenever it does. Reporter E said he “hated” that part of the job.

If there’s a press conference they’ve got to leave, like their daughter’s game or something. For me, from my standpoint, especially knowing what the pay was like, it’s just no way to live and therefore I cannot advocate it to anybody to go through it. I think the issues is, I think everybody thinks they’ll be the exception to it (…)

Reporter D, who no longer works in sports journalism, said she felt different when she worked as a sports reporter. She said that at first, when she no longer worked in the field, she had to undergo, what she called “urgency detox.” She said that now that she’s in the corporate world she does not have to rush the way she did when she was a reporter. Now, Reporter D said, she has a couple of weeks to work on projects and does not have to finish a project the same day she starts it.

Social media also allows news professionals to reach a wider audience, since it is very easy to “share” the news with others. Out of all the social media sites that exists the participants in this study seemed to only focus on Twitter.

News professionals are now more accessible than ever, since the public can now reach them directly. There is no longer a “barrier” dividing the audience from the news professionals. Social media could be used as a tool for journalists to get tips on stories, but it also opens the door for interaction with the audience, as Reporter B said. He said it would be boring if everyone always agreed with everything he writes. He said it does bother him when people tell him he has fact errors when he knows he does not. He also said it is impossible to make all the readers happy. Now, he said, he just worries about making sure his editors are happy.
But, as Reporter E said, the tweets are not always pleasant, but he said you have to find a way to deal with the situation if it comes up.

I’ve been dealing with it ever since I’ve been in (REDACTED) in (REDACTED) and it’s never pleasant, no matter what. But, it’s also—It’s also, in a way, in one ear out the other and the way I’ve decided to handle it. It’s almost like a Zen-like type thing, but it’s like I handle it. I just immediately just block the person, because I have—I’m not getting paid to tweet. I’m not getting paid to post on Facebook. If that person wants to troll me, I’m just like, ‘OK,’ you know.

Reporter E said he is not completely sold on social media as a tool for journalists, especially Twitter. Reporter E said people are at times too quick to judge a tweet, which might not have much context due to the 140-character limit. He said the lack of context could lead to negative consequences for the news professional and could unleash hate from the audience. Reporter E said he even has a name for those who send hateful messages on social media.

I call them Twitter pitchfork mafias where they just go from one target to the next target. I’m sure we can think of examples in the sporting world where somebody tweets something and they’re like, ‘Oh, we need to have that person fired or suspended’ or you know, like the thought police. A self-appointed cultural police and I don’t like that stuff. I think—And it’s something that I’ve learned over the last few years, that for me as a business owner, as opposed to a talent, that if I were to say something on Twitter that could lead to a controversy that could then lead to advertising dollars lost, I have to be careful, which I think sucks, but I’m aware of it. I also think there is a lack of context when you only have 140 characters and I think context is so important and I also think due process is so important, as opposed to an automatic conviction over Twitter or Facebook or Instagram or whatever the case might be and I think that has transpired quite a bit over the last couple of years.

But, one participant, Reporter F, had a different take on an angry audience tweeting at news professionals. He said he get’s angry tweets from viewers every day. Reporter F, however, said it does not bother him because people are valuing what he said or puts on the sportscast to some degree. Reporter F said he sees why some people are
bothered by some tweets from viewers, but he said it just shows they are consuming the content.

One participant gave an interesting take on the notion of “always being on.” Reporter H said that because he is a public figure, he needs to be aware of how he acts in public, no matter the circumstances.

The worst part is the commitment to it. You know, you always are there, no matter if you’re at work or off work because you always represent that person. So, I can’t be in the grocery store pissed off about something because you’re always going to be who you are and they’ll go, ‘Oh, that guy from (REDACTED) is a dick.’ So, you always want to come across like everything is happy-go-lucky and it’s great.

**Lack of Understanding/ Support From Management.**

Sports reporters can be as self-driven as possible, still their efforts sometimes fall short due to a lack of support from management. In addition to a support from management, a lack of understanding of what it takes to produce the content can lead to frustration from those creating it, as one participant said.

“I think the frustration comes from management not understanding sports or the importance of sports and try to constantly figure out what it is they want to do and not necessarily what you believe should be done,” Reporter H said.

Another participant said it sometimes feels as if managements forgets about the sports department and it’s up to the sports reporters to make sure they serve their audience to the best of their abilities. Reporter F said management is not engaged enough with the sports department to know what is going on or if something needs more coverage. He said it sometimes feels like he could just not show up to work and management would not notice because they are not supervising the sports department like
they do the news department. Reporter F said he is frustrated because management acts as if what the sports department is doing on a daily basis is not important.

One participant said management does needs to be more realistic when it comes to expectations from reporters. Reporter D said management sometimes expects too much from reporters, due to being short-staffed.

What I think becomes the issue is balancing how much an individual can give, versus what you’re properly staffed to be able to do. You know, we can only do so much and you could be working all the time and I think that’s where the burnout comes.

Reporter F said management does not understand how much time it takes to produce the content they put on the air. Reporter F said that even though a highlight for a game might be short in time, the process to put it together took much longer, which he says is something he always reminds his managers.

Analysis

This research study was intended to examine the causes of burnout in sports journalists in a city in the Midwest. At the end of the research, one cannot conclusively say what causes sports journalists in general to burn out. In the market I studied, one can say there are at least five factors that can cause sports journalists to burnout and leave the business: low salary; quality of the product is down; a tough schedule which includes long hours and working on holidays and weekends leads to time away from family and friends; always feeling like they are “on” and receiving hateful messages on social media; and lack of understanding and support from management.

People are different, so the way they react and face these factors differs greatly. The eight journalists interviewed for this research each had different ways of describing these factors. The one common factor in all the journalists interviewed what they said is a
way to reduce the effects of burnout: balance. They all agreed burnout is assured if all a journalist focuses on is his or her work and does not leave time to do something other than the job.

An interesting finding that came out of the interviews was the role a reporter’s relationship status plays when it comes to burnout. All the journalists explained that the hours and requirements to work nights, weekends, and/or holidays could take a toll on the partner and kids. The journalists all said it is important to have a good support system at home to make it as “painless” as possible when missing out on family time or big moments. They all agreed, however, there is nothing that can be done in terms of changing the industry. Reporters will continue to work long hours, including early morning, nights, weekends, and holidays.

Journalists today have to live with the fact that coverage is needed around the clock, which is known as the 24-hour news cycle. All the participants interviewed said it is crucial to have a positive attitude while doing the job. The participants all said they knew what they were getting into before taking a job in media. The participants further expanded on their answer and said they would not change what they are doing. The answers point to the many opportunities the participants experienced while serving as reporters. They all said, however, having a good attitude toward the job is crucial in the sports media business and will help journalists avoid falling victim to burnout.

All the participants said social media was something they had to learn and adapt to in order to use the tools in a way that truly serves the audience. While the participants accept social media as part of the constant evolution of the industry, they do not like that social media sites like Twitter, Periscope, among others, are becoming a key part of the
job. Most participants agreed that they can no longer devote the amount of time and effort
to what they all consider is the most important part of their job: writing. The participants
said the added tasks and importance stressed on social media has led to frustration due to
a drop in the quality of the overall product of the news organization. As for “mean
tweets,” the participants mostly agreed that are not enjoyable, but that journalists need to
have thick skin and deal with it because negative criticism and personal attacks to
journalists from the public have always been there, it is just that the way they launch
those attacks is different. The participants, did acknowledge, however, that they are not
pleasant and could take a toll on a person, depending on that person’s personality. Some
participants even said they just block the person on social media.

Participants also said some of the attitudes of those in management lead to
frustration. Some of the participants, especially those in television, said sports are not as
valued when compared to news. This could be due to having fewer reporters doing sports
than doing news or just a lack of interest in sports from management.

**Limitations.**

This research is limited for a number of reasons. First, the research was
conducted in one city. The issues discussed in this is research study only reflect those of
the people interviewed, which means there could be more that were not brought up by the
participants. The participants could have decided to not share some of their thoughts.
Also, since there was not a lot of diversity in the participants, the answers could be
limited. People of different backgrounds and genders have different experiences and
ways of looking at situations. The lack of diversity in this study’s participants could
reflect that in the answers provided. It is also important to note that the research was
based on open-ended questions and the answers are merely the opinions of those who participated in the research. This means that the data is subjective and not objective. It is also important to note the gender and age of the participants interviewed were not taken into account to accurately represent the current ratio in the field of sports journalism.

**Future Research.**

This research was limited by a number of factors, mainly time and location. Future research could focus on burnout on a bigger scale. It would be interesting to conduct the same study, but focus on Spanish-language media and journalists. This would shed light on whether background and culture play a role in the attitudes of those covering the news or sports.

**Conclusion.**

Given the wide-range of personalities people can have, there is no absolute way to prevent burnout. Each person is unique and has a way of handling situations, so what might affect one person, might not affect the other. The key ingredient to help avoid falling victim to burnout, however, seems to be balance. The data collected supports what the Conservation of Resources Theory states, meaning that it is important for people make sure they have a healthy combination of positive “resources” to supplement the challenges that arise while working in sports journalism.
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