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# WHAT PSYCHOLOGY CAN OFFER IN UNDERSTANDING JOURNALISTS' WELL-BEING

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Estimates suggest that people spend an average of 90,000 hours working in their lifetimes.[1] Journalists may work even more hours,[2] hours which vary considerably due to breaking news and particular assignments.[3] Journalists, like others, desire to spend that work time doing work that is fulfilling or meaningful to them—something that contributes to their well-being, including happiness.[4] In this chapter, we introduce the psychological science of well-being as applied to the work of journalists. First, we define well-being, which includes happiness, and we distinguish it from related psychological concepts of resilience and recovery. Using the National Institute for Occupational Safety and Health (NIOSH)s Total Worker Health®[5] as an organizing framework, we discuss opportunities for improving research and interventions aimed at improving journalists' well-being. This review will introduce key ideas and outline recommendations for future research as a step toward leveraging the vast knowledge of well-being from psychology and occupational health to amplify knowledge and promote evidence-based actions to enhance journalists' well-being and occupational success.

## Introducing Well-Being

Well-being is a fuzzy concept that represents living in a subjective state that is somehow good.[6] Researchers have suggested that well-being is more an area of study than it is a "thing."[7] That is, well-being may be better thought of as an umbrella term under which concepts are organized that represent positive emotional states, attitudes about many aspects of one's life, and experiencing fulfillment. There are two prevailing approaches to describing well-being: *hedonic* and *eudaimonic* well-being. Aside from communication studies on hedonic and eudaimonic entertainment preferences,[8] journalist-focused

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research has not used this specific terminology when studying different indicators of journalists' well-being.

## Hedonic well-being

Hedonic well-being, also referred to as subjective well-being,[9] is characterized by experiencing more frequent positive emotions, less frequent negative emotions, and evaluations or judgements that life is good.[10] Emotional states differ in their valence—positivity/pleasure or negativity/displeasure—and their arousal—how physiologically activated a person feels (affective circumplex).[11] Feeling happy and excited are positive emotional states with higher activation, whereas feeling content and calm are positive emotional states with lower activation. Similarly, feeling anxious and angry are negative emotional states with higher activation, and feeling sad or tired are negative emotional states with lower activation. These emotional states represent the affective well-being dimension of hedonic well-being, which is typically assessed using a list of emotional states, and people are asked to indicate to what degree they have experienced that emotion (e.g., POMS-SF and PANAS-X). The traditional stereotype that journalists are tenacious, miserable pessimists may run counter to the notion of hedonic well-being, although many journalists experience positive moods from their work. Thus far, journalism research has examined general positive and negative affect as outcomes of working conditions and worker characteristics.[12]

Subjective judgements about how well one's life is going relative to some standard or ideal state represents cognitive well-being, i.e., life satisfaction.[13] Cognitive well-being is measured by asking people to rate the extent to which they agree with statements like "As a whole, I am satisfied with my life"[14] and "In most ways, my life is close to ideal."[15] Journalism research has largely examined job satisfaction[16] over other cognitive well-being outcomes. Cognitive and affective well-being have different antecedents. Affective states are reactions to specific events, like giving a presentation at work, and are more easily recalled when asked to respond in the moment or reflect on an entire day, whereas cognitive well-being is less impacted by individual events (e.g., an argument with a spouse) and more so by factors that stabilize or destabilize general life conditions, like a well-resourced work environment driving higher job satisfaction.[17]

## Eudaimonic well-being

Eudaimonic well-being is characterized by fulfilling one's potential[18] and is rooted in pursuit of goals that are consistent with a person's values and identity.[19] Eudaimonic well-being is less well-studied compared to hedonic well-being so there is no unified definition or set of concepts that represents an optimally functioning person.[20] However, common indicators of eudaimonic well-being include a sense of meaning or purpose, self-acceptance, autonomy,

and growth. Given the nature of journalists' work, eudaimonic well-being is important to examine. Many journalists view their job as a calling, dedicated to truth telling, the democratic ideals, and public service.[21] Further, the opportunity and privilege to tell interesting stories and witness historical events unfold are identified as key aspects of the professional role,[22] and the joy of daily challenges and working against deadlines are part of journalists' professional identity.[23]

Although eudaimonic well-being is related to hedonic well-being, they are distinct concepts.[24] For example, experiencing and overcoming challenges are associated with higher eudaimonic well-being and lower hedonic well-being.[25] Rather than considering hedonic and eudaimonic well-being separately, some researchers take an integrated view. Flourishing is defined broadly as feeling good and functioning well.[26] It is conceptualized as a combination of eudaimonic and hedonic well-being characterized by experiencing more positive emotions, engagement, positive relationships, meaning, and achievement.[27] Work engagement is a positive affective and motivational state of well-being. It is experienced as the effort/intensity of doing work, attention/absorption to work tasks, and enthusiasm/energy during work. Similarly, thriving at work is a combination of vitality (energy, positive affect) and growth.[28] Flow, which is total immersion in an activity,[29] is another well-being indicator that is not clearly organized in one category or another. However, flow may reflect eudaimonic more than hedonic well-being,[30] because it involves higher levels of engagement that are not always accompanied by positive emotions. Flow has been examined in journalism research. Among 211 Norwegian journalists, those with higher levels of flow reported more work enjoyment, positivity, and efficacy; however, flow was unrelated to negative feelings.[31] Specifically, flow levels were unrelated to negative affect, emotional exhaustion, cynicism, and absenteeism. Hence, the positive experiences associated with being in a flow state do not negate the experience of negative emotions like frustration.

## Context of Well-Being

Researchers have studied well-being as "context-free," representing well-being that is not tied to a specific setting (e.g., happiness, life satisfaction, meaningful life) and "domain specific," such that factors within a specific domain or environment (e.g., job or family satisfaction, occupational calling) more strongly contribute to well-being within that same domain, environment,[32] or possibly culture. For instance, work-related well-being represents indicators of well-being that are connected to the work setting, occupation, or job requirements. For research on work-related well-being, the hedonic perspective is more dominant (e.g., job satisfaction, burnout), however increasing attention has been directed toward the eudaimonic view (e.g., meaningfulness at work).[33] Research on journalists seems to focus primarily on work-related hedonic well-being (e.g., job satisfaction, burnout); however, one study on

work–family conflict in Indian journalists incorporated both work (job satisfaction) and nonwork (family and life satisfaction) indicators of well-being[34] showing that as work interfered with family, journalists had lower family satisfaction, and as family interfered with work, journalists had lower work satisfaction. The research on the intersection between work and home and the impact on well-being is complex,[35] but is important for understanding how journalists' work follows them home and how home situations impact work.

### *Positive well-being, negative well-being, and ambivalence*

For the longest time, psychology followed a "disease model" focused on fixing what was wrong with people[36] by identifying factors that predicted negative well-being or unwell-being, such as burnout, depression, or fatigue.[37] The advent of positive psychology promoted a focus on positive outcomes, including work engagement, work-related flow, and meaningful work.[38] This shift in emphasis does not signify that one view is more important than the other or that these perspectives are opposite sides of the same coin. Further, the concept of well-being does not reflect the absence of negative emotions or a lack of suffering.[39]

Indicators of positive well-being can co-occur with negative outcomes, especially in work-related challenges.[40] For example, a study of 69 U.K.-based print and broadcast journalists found that personal life-threatening risk was positively correlated with both post-traumatic growth (positive outcome) and post-traumatic stress symptoms (negative outcome).[41] Feeling both good and bad is characteristic of ambivalence, a psychological state that is hardly measured but is needed within the context of well-being.[42] Most studies on trauma-related mental health difficulties in journalists focus on solely negative outcomes,[43] except for the few studies on post-traumatic growth.[44] Especially when studying trauma exposure among journalists, a sole focus on positive well-being has the risk of invalidating journalists' experiences.

### *Summary and recommendations*

Well-being is a multi-faceted area of study, and so consistent use of terminology is important for future research on journalists' well-being. For example, affective well-being is a specific category of well-being that reflects various emotional states. Using terminology like "emotional well-being" to connote mental health problems about journalists,[45] creates conceptual confusion. Although mental health is a component of well-being,[46] psychopathology is distinct. Individuals with mental disorders or maladaptive behaviors may experience positive emotional states. Journalists who respond to everyday work stressors (e.g., deadlines) with negative emotional responses are not experiencing psychopathology. Using appropriate terminology is critical for advancing understanding of journalists' well-being so that information about

journalists can be contextualized and compared to other professions and contextualized in the field of occupational health psychology.

Similarly, the various well-being concepts described above are not interchangeable and each concept has unique correlates. Inferences about one aspect of well-being do not necessarily generalize to others. For example, inferences that journalists are "doing well" based on measures of job satisfaction alone ignore when journalists are dissatisfied in other domains. Caution is warranted when including multiple well-being concepts in a single study. It is important that the measures selected reflect the intended concept, and measures should be avoided that have considerable overlap. For example, items from some measures of fatigue, burnout, and depression have strong conceptual overlap.[47] Recently, NIOSH developed the Worker Well-Being Questionnaire (WellBQ), which is a theoretically driven, comprehensive assessment of worker well-being across multiple spheres, including quality of working life, circumstances outside work, and physical and mental health status.[48] This WellBQ is freely available for public use and is intended to help researchers, employers, workers, practitioners, and policymakers understand the well-being of workers and develop interventions to improve their well-being. Future research examining journalists' well-being should consider using the WellBQ.

## Distinguishing Well-Being from Related Concepts of Recovery and Resilience

Other phenomena that are sometimes discussed interchangeably with well-being are recovery and resilience. These are processes that promote well-being in response to stress. Recovery may be considered a pathway to daily well-being (at and outside of work) that disrupts the development of unwell-being and ill health in the long term. Resilience, on the other hand, may be considered a pathway to well-being following exposure to a unique type of stressor or adversity. Below, we explain these different processes and how they affect well-being.

### *Recovery*

Recovery is the psychophysiological process of unwinding or undoing the stress response whereby psychophysiological states and resources return to a pre-stressor state.[49] It is a process of recharging one's "batteries" to prevent build-up of negative reactions to stressors and conditions like burnout, depression, and increased risk for ill health, like cardiovascular disease.[50] The success of the recovery process is often indicated by changes in hedonic well-being, such as positive and negative affect[51] and fatigue and energy/vitality.[52] Although studies have examined eudaimonic well-being as an outcome of recovery[53] (e.g., flow), a great deal of research has identified work engagement, a combination of hedonic (energy, dedication) and eudaimonic (absorption/flow) well-being, as improved by pursuing recovery opportunities.[54]

Recovery as an area of study has focused on what people do (recovery activities) and how people perceive their experience (recovery experiences) during their time off work (i.e., work breaks, evenings, weekends, vacations).[55] Overall, social and physical activities are more consistently linked to higher vigor and lower exhaustion or fatigue,[56] whereas continuing to do work or engage in work-like tasks (e.g., paying bills) reduces happiness and vigor[57] and increases exhaustion.[58] Recovery experiences of psychological detachment and relaxation have the strongest and most consistent associations with improved well-being (e.g., increased energy, reduced fatigue).[59] Mastery experiences, however, are only sometimes related to improved well-being (e.g., work engagement and burnout avoidance),[60] which may be a function of personality differences.[61]

The technology-connectedness characteristic of modern work creates a situation where people always have work with them, whether they are actively continuing to do work during "off-work" time or passively receiving work-related notifications. On the one hand, this keeps people engaged with work, while also keeping stress responses activated and leaving people overtaxed and depleted when they return to work.[62] For journalists, the 24-hour news cycle creates a need to be aware of up-to-the-minute changes in a story, which interferes with having sustained time off work to recover. Yet, journalists can practice intentionally monitoring the news related to their work, rather than monitoring all news. Furthermore, journalists can take advantage of 1–2-minute microbreak opportunities (e.g., breathing exercises) and news organizations should encourage microbreaks. Journalists and news organizations might actively plan longer periods of recovery time when they are not tethered to technology and the news. Novel scholarship on connection and disconnection in digital media[63] which addresses these issues will benefit from leveraging existing recovery research, especially those related to technology.

### *Resilience*

Resilience is "the process by which individuals are able to positively adapt to substantial difficulties, adversity, or hardship."[64] It is largely evidenced by a unique response, a "bounce back" or positive adaptation, that occurs after experiencing adversity.[65] Adverse experiences are not well-defined, but represent acute or chronic experiences of difficulty or hardship that can cause disruption or disequilibrium in a person's functioning.[66] Some forms of adversity constitute traumatic stressors which are events that potentially threaten a person's physical integrity such as serious injury and sexual violence.[67] The characteristic resilient response is indicated by adversity first triggering a reduction in functioning. Over time, however, people "bounce back" and return to pre-adversity levels of functioning.[68]

Thus far in understanding journalists' occupational health, scholars have used the term "resilience" in a variety of ways. For example, resilience has been operationalized generally as coping with trauma, or as a process "to

minimize trauma" or "address the problems of journalists' adversity,"[69] without clarifying if the bouncing back is essential. Similarly in journalism education, resiliency training is sometimes equated with a more general trauma informed approach[70] or general well-being or self-care as opposed to returning to equilibrium. Clarity of the term is necessary as important scholarship may be disregarded or combined in ways that obfuscate important information about journalists' experiences of bouncing back and experiencing happiness after adversity from general wellness.

### *Summary and recommendations*

Recovery and resilience are processes that are distinct from one another but contribute to journalists' well-being. When developing a study, clarity is needed on what type of process (recovery or resilience) best fits the research question and considers the journalists' work context (chronic stressors or adversity), as few studies on journalists' work-related stress distinguish between daily work experiences and the distress of reporting on major adverse events[71] or they have focused solely on trauma exposure.[72]

Addressing these conceptual issues will inform selection of the research design, variables, and associated measures.[73] Of particular importance to the issue of resilience and recovery is the characteristic that these processes change over time. This means repeated measures are an important feature of any resilience or recovery study, whereas studies on well-being can be examined as a single snapshot in time. Journalists are busy and may be difficult to keep engaged, so researchers need to balance the research design with the burden on the participants.[74]

## Improving Journalists' Well-Being

Improving journalists' well-being requires a holistic picture of the person, work context, personal or family context, and socio-political context. Together, NIOSH's Total Worker Health® (TWH) holistic framework and Hierarchy of Controls can guide researchers identifying and prioritizing research questions, developing workplace interventions, and measuring the effectiveness of interventions that prioritize journalists' well-being.[75] TWH approaches recognize that employee health and well-being are impacted by more than just the traditional occupational safety and health concerns such as chemical, biological, and physical workplace hazards.[76] All aspects of work, including psychosocial factors (e.g., organizational culture, workload, co-worker and supervisor interactions, pay and benefits) contribute to the well-being of employees, their families, and their communities.[77]

Journalism as an occupation offers a unique combination of exposures to physical hazards and psychosocial hazards emanating from economic, cultural, organizational, and job-related challenges, all of which present intervention

opportunities for improving the well-being of journalists. In line with the Hierarchy of Controls, approaches that eliminate or replace job-related hazards are argued to be most effective.[78] However, many journalists are required to do hazardous work, such as reporting in high-risk locations, and it is often impossible to remove or replace the hazard. Existing solutions focus on risk reduction by enhancing physical and digital safety protections, individualized safety planning, restricting how often journalists are assigned to cover dangerous or emotionally difficult stories by rotating staff and enforcing breaks, but their effectiveness has not been evaluated.

The next most effective strategy is to redesign the work environment by adding or enhancing aspects of the work environment that reduce barriers and improve employees' ability to do their work, including introducing or increasing job control, social support, feedback on how their job contributes to the organization's mission.[79] Bolstering resources like these also provides an environment that fosters resilience.[80] Management support addressing staff distress appears to be a critical variable in promoting job satisfaction and reducing turnover for journalists.[81] Typically, middle managers (editors, producers, bureau chiefs) see themselves as the sole support for trauma exposed staff yet have no training and are often peers in age or experience to those they supervise. Relatedly, inconsistent leadership styles, supervisory conflicts, and changes in organizational policies predicted trauma-related symptoms,[82] and so these appear to be fruitful areas for potential redesign for well-being. Newsrooms have experimented with extra days off on a rotating basis, hazard pay, formally trained mentors, peer support programs,[83] game nights for staffers, check-ins with staff, enhancing mental health benefits, and management training; however, none of these interventions have been formally evaluated.

Less effective are education strategies and encouraging personal change.[84] These interventions shift the burden onto the employee. They are more commonly implemented as they are perceived as easier and more cost effective.[85] These individually focused interventions typically focus on stress management, recovery from work stress, and self-care.[86]

Many trainings have been proposed or developed to promote recovery and resilience among journalists especially those exposed to traumatic events,[87] but few have been formally evaluated.[88] Typically, these programs include trauma-education and coping strategies including mindfulness training. With respect to organizational strategies in newsrooms that focus on individual-level support, peer support programs,[89] informational briefings on physical and psychological safety and management training have been implemented. Some newsrooms, especially during difficult prolonged new reporting cycles have brought in massage therapists, emotional support animals, and therapists although none of these interventions have been tested.

### *Summary and recommendations*

We have noted several interventions directed at improving journalists' workplaces, access to resources, and developing skills and routines for recovery and self-care, but little evaluation research exists to form conclusions about their effectiveness. Given the financial pressures and rapid changes in journalism, intervention or program evaluations are often seen as costly time investments. However, it may be more costly in terms of productivity, health insurance, and even mortality if news organizations continue to implement strategies that are ineffective or even harmful. Existing tools, such as NIOSH's TWH program, including the WellBQ, can be used as a baseline needs assessment to inform the design of an intervention, and can be used in multiple follow up assessments to track the success of the program over time. The assessment of journalists at multiple time points during and after the intervention is recommended for determining the extent to which any intervention was effective.[90]

However, typical outcomes that might be included in a program evaluation such as employee turnover are difficult to interpret given that many journalists are changing jobs within the industry, there is a reduction in number of journalist positions, and an increase in the use of freelancers. As the industry relies more on freelancers, many current organizational approaches will not address the needs of these groups. Instead of newsrooms, alternative organizations, such as unions for freelance journalists (e.g., Freelance Journalists Union, National Union of Journalists) may provide opportunities for supporting freelance journalists' well-being.

## Conclusion

This review links the general psychological literature on health and well-being with the emerging literature about journalists' well-being to enhance our understanding of journalists' experiences. Hedonic well-being, typically measured as positive affect and job satisfaction among journalists, is one distinct aspect of well-being. Eudaimonic well-being, typically measured as an aspect of professional identity and mission among journalists, is less studied. In other fields, facing challenges is sometimes associated with higher eudaimonic well-being but lower hedonic well-being;[91] focusing on journalistic mission as an intervention may be more effective to increase one's sense of purpose and professional identity but less effective for improving journalists' fatigue. Addressing the work environment by improving resources in the face of challenging work demands can improve both types of well-being in the form of work engagement and flow.[92] Understanding ambivalence as it applies to well-being among journalists is also an area for exploration.

In addition, the Total Worker Health® framework provides a broader basis for identifying economic, cultural, organizational, and job-related challenges for journalists and presents opportunities for improving the well-being of

journalists by combining risk reduction strategies and work redesign. Currently, many of the well-being strategies used for journalists focus on the individual, which while helpful, certainly are not as effective as preventive strategies at the organizational level.

Finally, this review suggests many avenues for future scholarship. There is a need to continue to study well-being and the effectiveness of well-being promotion campaigns. Careful attention to methodology, such as clearly defining constructs, using appropriate measurement tools, and using rigorous repeated measures can further enhance knowledge about the well-being of journalists. Importantly, greater efforts need to be made to evaluate the effectiveness of existing and emerging interventions aimed at improving journalists' well-being.

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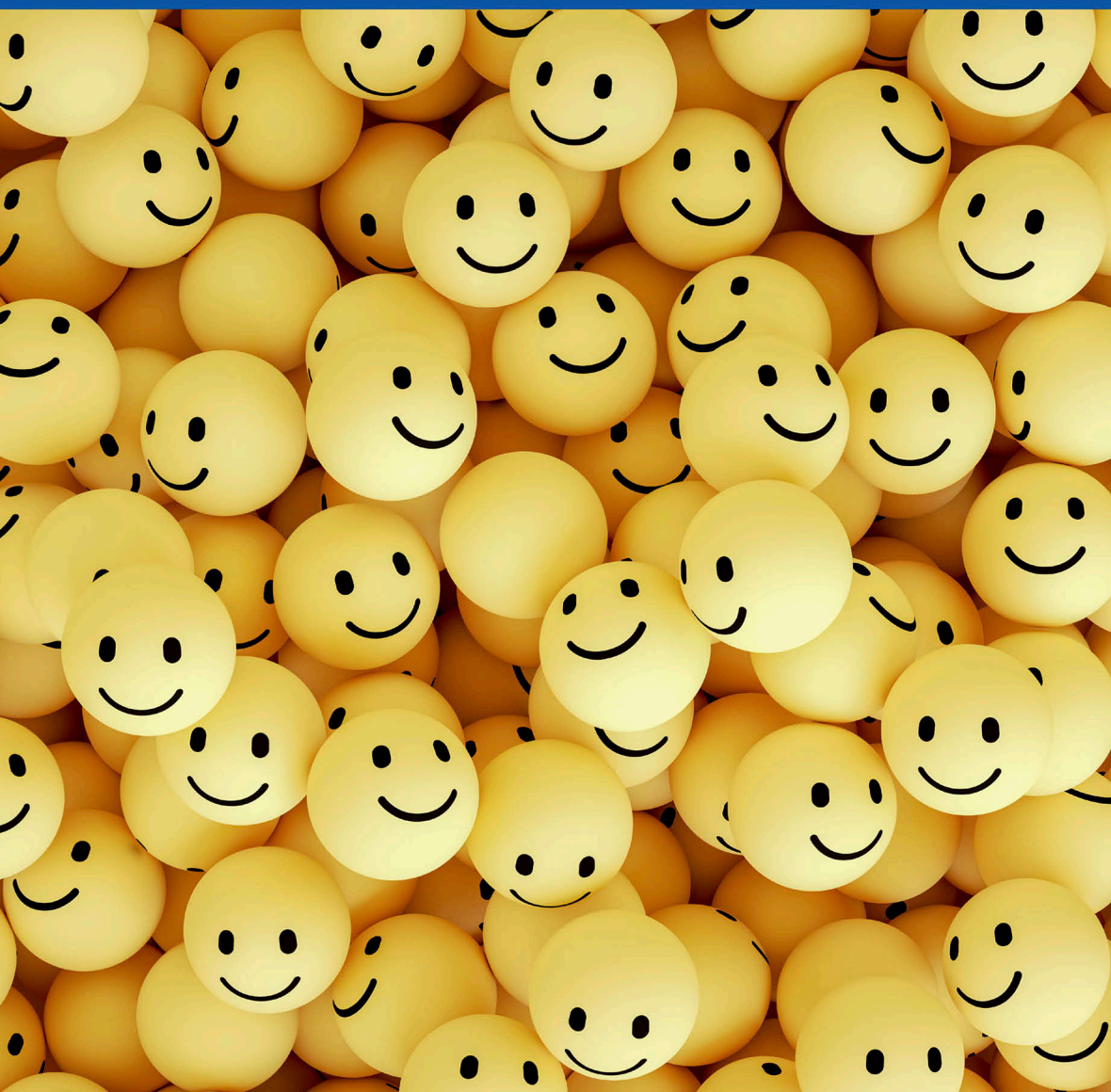
# HAPPINESS IN JOURNALISM

Edited by Valérie Bélair-Gagnon, Avery E. Holton, Mark Deuze, and Claudia Mellado



# HAPPINESS IN JOURNALISM

This book examines how journalism can overcome harmful institutional issues such as work-related trauma and precarity, focusing specifically on questions of what happiness in journalism means, and how one can be successful and happy on the job.

Acknowledging profound variations across people, genres of journalism, countries, types of news organizations, and methodologies, this book brings together an array of international perspectives from academia and practice. It suggests that there is much that can be done to improve journalists' subjective well-being, despite there being no one-size-fits-all solution. It advocates for a shift in mindset as much in theoretical as in methodological approaches, moving away from a focus on platforms and adaptation to pay real attention to the human beings at the center of the industry. That shift in mindset and approach involves exploring what happiness is, how happiness manifests in journalism and media industries, and what future we can imagine that would be better for the profession. Happiness is conceptualized from both psychological and philosophical perspectives. Issues such as trauma, harassment, inequality, digital security, and mental health are considered alongside those such as precarity, recruitment, emotional literacy, intelligence, resilience, and self-efficacy. Authors point to norms, values and ethics in their regions and suggest best practices based on their experience.

Constituting a first-of-its-kind study and guide, *Happiness in Journalism* is recommended reading for journalists, educators, and advanced students interested in topics relating to journalists' mental health and emotion, media management, and workplace well-being.

This book is accompanied by an online platform which supports videos, exercises, reports and links to useful further reading.

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# HAPPINESS IN JOURNALISM

*Edited by Valérie Bélair-Gagnon, Avery E. Holton, Mark Deuze, and Claudia Mellado*

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