

Not first responders, but often first to respond: Canadian journalists' use
of trauma-informed approaches in reporting

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To the dedicated journalists who continue to listen, ask questions, and tell the complicated, contextualized stories of Canadians in compassionate and innovative ways, despite mistrust and ever-thinning resources

Abstract

As part of their work, journalists regularly encounter people who have experienced trauma, whether long-term and systemic or immediate, such as following the death of a loved one. Their jobs take them into the intimate lives and emotions of these people, which they then have to communicate with their audiences, and their approaches could have a harmful, neutral, or positive impact. The central purpose of this study is to investigate if journalists have an understanding of trauma-informed communication practice and how they use them when performing their daily job tasks. The study involved qualitative interviews with six working journalists in Ontario, Canada. Using grounded theory approach, the study found the journalists have a deep desire to be sensitive and empathetic to the people they encounter on the job, and that they regularly put the demands of their superiors and the (sometimes unwritten) rules of their profession second to the needs of the people they are interviewing and reporting on. Based on the responses of the participants and on an understanding of trauma-informed approaches, a series of guiding principles were formulated for newsrooms and for journalists, mindful of daily deadline pressures, the demands placed on journalists, and the need for trauma-informed approaches to tell more meaningful stories while not further harming those individuals or communities which are being reported upon.

Keywords: journalism, empathy, trauma-informed communication, guiding principles

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Table of Contents

List of tables8

List of Appendices9

Chapter One: Introduction10

 Grounded theory13

 The role of the researcher15

Chapter Two: Review of the literature17

 What is trauma-informed care and trauma-informed journalism17

 What academic research exists20

 Trauma, communications and social responsibility theory22

 Physical effects of trauma27

 Impact of trauma on journalists and the Taking Care survey29

Chapter Three: Methodology34

 Participants34

 Anticipated ethical issues36

 Strategies for validation of findings38

 Tools for collecting data40

 Data analysis41

Wrestling with preconceptions	43
Chapter Four: Results	44
Research question 1	44
Research question 2	46
Research question 3	48
Research question 4	53
Conclusions	56
Chapter Five: Discussion	57
Person first, journalist second	58
Person and journalist first	60
Guiding principles for newsrooms	62
Guiding principles for journalists	64
Chapter Six: Conclusion	66
Lessons learned	67
Limitations	69
Recommendations for further study	70
References	72
Appendices	74

List of tables

Table 1: Research questions34

Table 2: How do you define trauma-informed practice?47

List of Appendices

Appendix A: Interview questions79

Appendix B: Invitation to participate in the study80

Appendix C: Informed consent81

Appendix D: Initial memos82

Appendix E: In-vivo coding85

Appendix F: Memoing by category94

Chapter One: Introduction

Journalism is the first draft of history (Shafer, 2010). When a house burns down, a child dies in a car crash, or a crime rocks a community, reporters are among the first people to speak to the affected parties, often at the same time as first-responders such as police officers, paramedics, or firefighters. The pressure, in a 24-hour news cycle, is to deliver well-written, balanced stories in a short amount of time. The person who is being written about in a news story, particularly one in which emotions are heightened, must put an incredible amount of trust in the reporter he or she is speaking to. The person is entrusting the reporter with emotional details, and must believe that the reporter will listen, will understand the context of the moment, and will, eventually, write or report about the event or their conversation in a way that is reflective of the afflicted party's experience. Increasingly, there is an awareness of the trauma that some live with every day: those suffering from post-traumatic stress disorder, communities that have dealt with systemic barriers, marginalization that can be intersectional (for example, racialized people or members of the LGBTQ+ community) and intergenerational trauma. The reporter must take long, emotional interviews and turn them into one-minute voice reports for radio, 90-minute television stories, podcasts or ever-evolving digital or print reports.

There is a tremendous amount of pressure put on the reporter to communicate well: to deliver the requirements of their job on deadline, and to accurately reflect the grief, sadness, loss or sense of hope that is felt by the person, or people, they have interviewed. Sometimes, those narratives conflict with one another: a fentanyl dealer was a loving father; a drunk driver was a community pillar. Other times, they reflect the broader world: a Muslim family out for an evening stroll is run over by what police say is a hate-fueled attack; a head-on collision was caused by a father intent on killing his children to get back at his estranged wife. How does the

reporter accurately reflect all those things – the nuanced realities – without adding to the trauma felt by family members who have just lost a loved one or the community members who are collectively grieving? How does the reporter tell the stories of residential school survivors, or their children and grandchildren, without forcing people to relive some of the most painful experiences of their lives?

Journalists go into the profession to tell stories, to educate people, and to reveal injustices that may otherwise remain unseen by the broader public; they want to do so in such a way that does not further inflict trauma on the afflicted. Although they may be among the first people to see, document, or speak to those experiencing trauma, journalists are not medical professionals who have knowledge of trauma response, nor are they first responders such as paramedics, firefighters or police officers, who receive specialized training to respond immediately to emergencies. Although some journalism courses may contain curricula within the syllabi to teach students about trauma and trauma-informed practice, there is a lack of foundational courses about trauma-informed reporting required in Canada's undergraduate journalism programs in University of Kings College (ukings.ca), Mount Royal University (mtroyal.ca) and Carleton University (carleton.ca). While trauma-informed practice may be covered within courses, one the research questions this thesis seeks to answer is just how much, if any, trauma-informed practice working journalists have been taught.

In the effort to get the story, get it quickly, and tell it in a way that is unique enough so it may be read before the competitors, there is often not a lot of time for a journalist to consider how his or her questions, his or her approach, or the eventual finished product, will affect the community or person being covered. In fact, it may be difficult to predict how a person who has been interviewed will react to seeing their story, hours, days or months later, in the media. The

empathy that journalists have for the subjects of their stories is often developed and honed over time, and not taught in school; indeed, in the throes of a breaking news story, journalists have been known to be insensitive and have added to the grief and trauma that people are experiencing (Kay et al., 2010). Journalists have also added to grief and trauma by not covering certain stories, such as the racial injustices faced by racialized communities or, until very recently, the experiences of residential school survivors and their loved ones.

Using a grounded theory approach, this thesis examines what trauma-informed communication and journalism is and what resources are available to Canadian journalists. An analysis of what is available for journalists informs the research questions of this thesis: How do journalists understand trauma-informed communication practice, and how do they take it into account when doing their jobs? This inquiry is important because journalists will continue to cover traumatic events and their work has an ever-expanding reach through the internet and social media; the impact of their stories, therefore, goes beyond the people and communities they are directly covering to the broader public and world. There is a gap in knowledge about how journalists are approaching difficult interviews, and what further resources they may need to cover these stories in sensitive and trauma-informed ways.

Journalists, like first responders, are constantly exposed to violence and its associated trauma. From 2010 to 2019 in Canada, there were 718 domestic homicides involving 815 victims (Dawson et al., n.d.) and the use of firearms has increased 81 per cent from 2009 to 2019 (Statistics Canada, 2020). Deaths from overdoses are increasing in Ontario (Kitchen et al, 2021) and the according to the Ontario COVID-19 Science Table, the prevalence of severe burnout among health care professionals was between 30% and 40% in Spring 2020, and by Spring 2020, it was over 60% (Maunder et al, 2021). Like psychologists or social workers, journalists listen to

the stories of people who have been sexually assaulted, beaten, incarcerated, or have lived through systemic injustices. All the while, 49 per cent of Canadians surveyed say they believe that journalists are purposely trying to mislead people by saying things they know are false or gross exaggerations (Edelman, 2021), while 46 per cent of respondents say they forward or share news stories they find interesting (Edelman, 2021). To prevent further erosion of trust, it is imperative that the stories journalists report are accurate and done with care for the subjects.

Grounded Theory

Grounded theory inquiry is not a linear process, just like life, and journalism, are not linear processes. The underlying principle of grounded theory, the notion of “generating new theory from data, as opposed to testing existing theory” (Birks & Mills, 2011, p. 2) was first articulated in the 1960s by sociologists Glaser and Strauss, the first generation of grounded theorists. Coming from a tradition where data was the end result, Glaser and Strauss turned the concept on its head, and emphasized the need for actual data on which to develop concepts and theories, and also a flexible procedure for analyzing the data collected (Corbin & Strauss, 2015). Eventually, Glaser and Strauss split (Birks & Mills, 2011) but the essentials of grounded theory remain: qualitative data is collected and interpreted by the researcher, making the researcher “as much part of the research process as the participants and the data they provide” (Corbin & Strauss, 2015, p. 4). With grounded theory, the analysis of the data is continuous and, as a qualitative research method, it allows the researcher to connect with the research participants, and to look at the data they provide in order to bring forward a new theory into the world.

Grounded theory is unique for two reasons: the theory is derived from the data and not prior to the beginning of the research process; and research analysis and data collection are

inextricably linked, allowing the researcher to analyze the data collected in an ongoing cycle throughout the research process (Corbin & Strauss, 2015). Theorists, therefore, are able to offer theories — or explanations — for what is happening, based on the data that is collected.

Grounded theory is not static: as new knowledge is acquired or new data collected, the theory can be revised accordingly (Corbin & Strauss, 2015). The flexible methodology of grounded theory allows logic and facts to be derived from the behaviours, words, and emotions of the research participants, while accounting for cultural and historical sensitivities (Corbin & Strauss, 2015). It is that ability to evolve and change that makes grounded theory appealing to me as a researcher.

Grounded theory may be particularly useful in studying aspects of journalism, because both are based in listening and recounting what participants — whether the subjects of a story or the participants in an academic study — have to say. Both use “the words of participants to bring abstract ideas to a human level of understanding” (Corbin & Strauss, 2015, p. 12), but grounded theory goes further than just describing those abstract ideas: the researcher links the ideas, themes and categories through careful analysis to come up with a “core category” (Corbin & Strauss, 2015, p. 13). The core theme or category captures the major essence of the study, and allows the concepts that are derived by analysis to form a single theoretical explanation for the thing that is studied. In the same way that two journalists may write two very different articles about a single event, so too the single theoretical explanation one theorist derives from the data may be different than an explanation derived by another researcher; both are “logical and plausible” based on the data (Strauss & Corbin, 2015, p. 13). The life experience that I bring into this research, and that is brought into it by the participants, will make it unique but also grounded in the data.

A careful analysis of the data reflects the answers provided by the research participants. The differences derived by theorists from similar sets of data stem from just how the data is separated, sorted and synthesized through coding (Charmaz, 2006) that is constantly ongoing throughout the analysis process. As with other qualitative methods, grounded theory methodology allow researchers to “follow up on interesting data in whatever way they devise” (Charmaz, 2006, p. 3). It is this flexibility that allows for different theories to emerge from different researchers. For Charmaz (2006), it is important to use grounded theory “with twenty-first century methodological assumptions and approaches” (p. 9). Charmaz’s approach to grounded theory lies in the assumption that “neither the data nor theories are discovered” (p. 10) as they might for Corbin and Strauss. Rather, Charmaz (2006) argues that “we are part of the world we study and the data we collect ... We construct our grounded theories through our past and present involvements and interactions with people, perspectives and research practices” (p. 10). Like my approach to journalism, Charmaz’ approach to grounded theory is the understanding and assumption that any rendering — theoretical or journalistic — offers “an interpretive portrayal of the studied world, not an exact picture of it” (p. 10). What will emerge is a theory, or a construction of a particular part of reality (Charmaz, 2006), using grounded theory methodology but also subject to my own biases and assumptions.

The role of the researcher

My goal is to “advance, refine and expand a body of knowledge” (Chun Tie, Birks & Francis, 2019, p. 1) and to reach new conclusions about the availability and need for trauma-informed practice by Canadian journalists. I approach this research, from a constructivist worldview (Cresswell, 2014). Constructivism assumes that people, including researchers, “construct the realities in which they participate” (Charmaz, 2006, p. 187). With the traditionalist

goal of generating a theory that, grounded in the data, accounts for a pattern of behavior (Chun Tie, Birks & Francis, 2019) in mind, my own standing as a working journalist cannot be divorced from the study. How participants construct meaning in relation to trauma-informed reporting will be part of my area of study, and for the duration I must confront head-on my own biases and assumptions about journalism, the role of the reporter, and trauma-informed practice.

As a researcher, I am part of the world that I study and I am part of the data that I collect (Charmaz, 2006). The answers the participants give and the stories they tell about their own careers and reporting are constructions of their own reality. My goal was to collect rich data which are “detailed, focused, and full” (Charmaz, 2006, p. 14) that revealed the participants’ views as well as the context in which they are giving me their views; in doing so, I hoped to gain new insights into old problems (Corbin & Strauss, 2015). These working journalists also likely reflected on their own practice and how they approach it, in preparation for and after participating in the research interviews.

Neither I, the researcher, nor the participants in my field of study, approached the research as blank slates. As a journalist, I have written about trauma, I have listened to stories of violence, and I have heard my colleagues talk about how they conduct interviews and go about reporting on sensitive stories. I did not undertake this research lightly. I conduct interviews for a living; however, in this case, I was not conducting interviews with a view to writing a public-facing news story; I was asking questions and used the answers which I obtained to develop a theory about trauma-informed practice among journalists. I was mindful of the fact that journalists ask questions; they don’t usually answer them, and there could have been a sensitivity to answering questions from a fellow reporter who is asking about trauma and violence and the impact on news coverage.

When studying and analyzing the data that I have collected, I was mindful of the fact that I would likely draw upon personal experiences described by the participants for comparison purposes (Corbin & Strauss, 2015, p. 98); in fact, it would be almost impossible for me not to draw on my own experiences. That is why it was especially important to be alert for instances where my “biases, assumptions, or beliefs are intruding into the analysis” (Corbin & Strauss, 2015, p. 98), or what Corbin and Strauss call “waving the red flag” (p. 98). I made sure to “allow participants to set the course and take the time that they need” (Corbin & Strauss, 2015, p. 38) and to return to topics at a later time if necessary. While we may share a cultural group, i.e. a career in journalism, my role in this instance was that of researcher, not reporter.

Chapter Two: Review of the Literature

What is trauma-informed communication and trauma-informed journalism?

Trauma-informed practice, often used in physical or mental health-care settings, is a form of communication used to minimize harm, not to treat trauma (Health Canada, 2018). The idea is to recognize the connection between violence or trauma, and to design systems in a way that does not inflict further harm on an individual (Health Canada, 2018). In the context of journalism, that would mean designing systems for interview requests or questions that respect the trauma a person may be facing. The principles of trauma-informed care vary slightly between organizations, but generally include: an acknowledgement of the trauma; creating an environment where the person in question feels physically and psychologically safe; allowing the person to have control over the situation or informed consent; collaborating with the person to help facilitate trust and control; are applied universally but with an individual’s unique needs in

mind (CAMH, 2014; New South Wales, 2020; SAMHSAH, 2014; Trauma Toolkit, 2013). These principles, in my opinion, can be applied to the journalism context.

Journalists often speak to people in the throes of these exceedingly difficult situations: crime or disaster, disease, or racist or homophobic incidents, often within hours or days of them happening. They also speak to people who are experiencing ongoing trauma, such as the fallout of the attempted genocide of Indigenous people in North America, wars taking place around the world, or the systemic discrimination experienced by racialized people. Traumatic events are often unexpected and can make people feel powerless (Trauma Toolkit, 2013). Embedding trauma-informed practices into aspects of reporting can minimize the potential for re-victimization or harm but, as Jo Healy argues in her 2019 book *Trauma Reporting*, can also help the journalist meet his or her goal: to get a story that is powerful, has an impact on the audience, and is reflective of the people who it is about. As Healy says, “by treating people decently, you are more likely to get a stronger story, better access and shots, more insightful interviews, and they are more likely to come back to you as their story unfolds” (2019, p 2). People at the centre of stories in which there is trauma or violence do not choose to be in the spotlight; by definition, something has happened to them that is extraordinary and has thrust them into the media’s attention.

Although many journalists do not know they are doing it, they are speaking to their subjects through a trauma-informed lens. After a death, they give their subjects a sense of control and establish trust by asking the family to choose a favourite photograph of their loved one, or checking how they would like to be referred, or taking time to verify important facts (Healy, 2019). Inaccuracies in reporting can shatter that trust and can lead survivors to feeling revictimized (Simpson & Cote, 2006). Allowing someone to think about what they would like to

say and giving them time to formulate their thoughts is another way reporters can help the subjects of their stories feel psychologically safe. Giving people as much information as possible — about the platforms on which their stories will be told, which affiliates or news agencies might use the story — can also help make those being interviewed feel like collaborators with the reporters, instead of the subjects themselves (Healy, 2019). Collaboration can also make for a stronger story, as a strong relationship between the subject and reporter can lead to follow-ups months or years later that other reporters who do not foster that bond may not get.

Healy's work (2019) also outlines briefly what a trauma response might look like and tells reporters reading her book the physical and psychological responses people might be feeling after a traumatic event, from anxiety and hyper-vigilance to insomnia and irritability. She does not offer any ways for the journalist to cope with these responses, but simply asks her reader to consider "how may you need to adapt your working practice and the questions you ask?" (Healy, 2019, p. 38). This is a significant limitation in her work because journalists may not know the answer to those questions; they are not psychologists, and they have not had basic trauma training.

Just as journalists' work has an impact on the individuals who are being covered, so too can it have an impact on entire communities. Kay et al (2011) argue that news coverage can impede a community's ability to heal, particularly during a large news event: "As the number of reporters at the scene grows, so does the frenzy; the emotional intensity and chaos can become viral" (Kay et al., 2011, p. 441). Kay et al. argue in their article that coverage of trauma is not in itself traumatizing; it just needs to be done correctly. That is just one of the ways that authors look at how journalists should treat trauma reporting. Simpson and Cote (2006) suggest practical guidelines for how to treat survivors and, importantly, how to write about traumatic events, with

the goal of doing no harm. As cited in Kay et al. (2010), Sykes et al. (2003) suggest the approach of the Golden Rule, treating their subjects as they would their own family, friends, or themselves.

What academic research exists?

There has been academic research about the impact of trauma on journalists and on communities, but not about how journalists understand and use trauma-informed practice in their daily tasks. In *Between a Rock and A Hard Place*, Kay et al. (2011) detail their research in which they interview seventeen people over an 18-month period more than a year after a murder in a small town on the United States-Quebec border. They set out to research the types of supports residents needed to restore a “livable balance” in their community, but instead found residents speaking about the impact of reporters on their town (Kay et al., 2011, p. 442). Themes emerged about the media’s depiction of the community, their intrusion on community life and the public process of grief, and the researchers concluded that reporters must become more aware of trauma and incorporate new practices into their reporting repertoire. They advocate journalists “bearing witness to traumatic events” as a way to “create opportunities to unify the community and facilitate its movement towards recovery” (Kay et al., 2010, p. 433). I challenge whether that is the role of the journalist. Reporters can do their jobs sensitively and with an awareness of community and trauma dynamics, but to suggest that they help in the recovery of a community or person is outside the scope of their profession. That said, I think that recovery can be a positive by-product of a well-told story.

When a story is told sensitively, using trauma-informed practice, the reporter and the public are tied together, with the journalist giving the public “vital information about calamities

without further harm to the victims” (Simpson & Cote, 2006, p.4). Skilled reporters, Simpson and Cote argue, put people’s struggles at the centre of their writing, because events are best perceived through thoughts, words and actions of the people involved in them. Thoughtful reporting about trauma can help readers and viewers gain empathy for the suffering of the people being written about, and Simpson and Cote (2006) note that it can also lead to “collective care and support” (p. 9) that can be a great public benefit. Simpson and Cote address the idea of covering violence and trauma from a working journalists’ point of view; their book is based on the premise that journalists *will* interview victims or family members, after taking thoughtful care about how to make the approach.

Furthermore, they add that the journalist should “back off” if they determine that his or her actions will cause further harm or trauma (Simpson & Cote, 2006). Importantly, they note that journalists are in a unique position to know about and report the “innate ability of most people to endure traumatic conditions and continue their lives without lasting effects” (Simpson & Cote, 2006, p.19). Human beings, they argue, are built to survive traumatic experiences and remain whole, though not unchanged. Being taught and understanding trauma and the different emotional responses it can bring out in people could help reporters both tell their stories better and not add to an already traumatic experience.

A look at trauma-informed practice cannot be done without also examining the effects of covering trauma on the reporter or journalist, who is sometimes the first to arrive at a violent or dangerous scene, or who is hearing gruesome or emotionally disturbing details that they then have to, often very quickly, process and report on deadline. As the importance of mental health continues to gain traction in today’s world, journalists are increasingly being told to be aware of their own responses to the trauma they are witnessing and covering (Simpson & Cote, 2006).

The Dart Centre for Journalism and Trauma [DCJT] in the United States advocates for the ethical reporting of trauma and the professional treatment of victims and survivors, and also educates journalists about the science and psychology of trauma and implications for new coverage (DCJT, n.d.). It was started in 1999, based on the work of psychiatrist Frank Ochberg, who worked to help journalism students report on victims of violence “with sensitivity, dignity and respect” (DCJT, n.d.). It did not, however, have a full-time executive director until 2006 and relocated to the Columbia Journalism School in 2009. The study of the impact of trauma on the journalist, rather than on the person or community that is the focus of news coverage is growing, but it is outside the scope of this thesis. The two, however, are inextricably linked.

Trauma, communication and social responsibility theory

A free press exists as a central pillar of democracy, but that freedom comes with certain responsibilities. I take a much different view than the pessimism of theorist Jürgen Habermas, who sees the media as “creating a society of private and fragmented individuals for whom it is difficult to form the public rational-critical opinion which could oppose established power” (as cited in Livingston & Lunt, 1994, p. 10). I think that journalists, to the best of their ability, try to create a forum for public discussion, and that the Internet and social media have further created opportunities for the public to go beyond the role of passive spectator to being able to genuinely debate with each other, with powerful entities, and with journalists themselves. In the United States during the Second World War, the Hutchins Commission on Freedom of the Press looked at the proper functioning of media in society. The Hutchins Report stated that the press is guaranteed certain freedoms, but with it come responsibilities to the “common good” (Hocking, 1947, p. 8). The claim to freedom of the press disappears when the duty to the common good is “ignored or rejected” (Hocking, 1947, p. 9). The media cannot perform its job responsibly if it is

causing harm. In Canada, the Senate released a report in 2006 about the news media, stating that “to make informed decisions, citizens need a wide range of news and information ... about matters of public interest. Journalists are important providers of such information” (Senate of Canada, 2006). Section 2(b) of the Charter of Rights and Freedoms guarantees the freedom of the press and other communications media (Canadian Charter of Rights and Freedoms, 1982) and the Senate committee concluded that “it is impossible to have democracy without citizens and impossible to exercise meaningful citizenship without access to news, information, analysis and opinion” (Senate of Canada, 2006).

Communication is the primary focus of trauma-informed communication approaches in different settings, from university counselling centers (Yoshimura & Campbell, 2016) to an interaction between a journalist and the subject of a story. The principles of trauma-informed practice include open communication which allows for a leveling of power differentials and establishment of choice, trust, and a collaborative approach to the interaction (Health Canada, 2018). Expressing empathy can help someone feel understood, not pitied (Trauma Toolkit, 2013). This can be done in verbal and non-verbal ways, but is essential to openly hearing what someone is saying and not judging where they are coming from (Trauma Toolkit, 2013).

Research about trauma communication focuses on the health care field and examines the discipline for nurses, doctors, medical students, sexual assault centres, hospitals and mental health counselling. Trauma-informed care aims to “establish psychological safety” (Isobel & Delgado, 2018, p. 291) among patients. Isobel and Delgado (2018) created workshops for nurses as a way to increase mental health nurses’ knowledge of the potential impacts of trauma on their patients, how they can use communication approaches to minimize harm. The researchers found that there is a “major disconnect” (Isobel & Delgado, 2018, p. 294) between the trauma-informed

communication outlined in mental health policy documents and what actually occurs in the clinical settings, and that nurses may have to reconsider how they perform their roles. The workshops allowed participants to learn and understand trauma-informed care and to increase their knowledge and confidence in using the approach, particularly when guided by experienced, senior nurses. In a study of university campuses and how they do or do not support survivors of sexual violence, Monahan-Kreishman and Ingarfield (2018) noted that those who work with survivors must be acutely aware of their own implicit biases to reduce the possibility of re-traumatizing victims. Implicit bias may “result in accusatory questioning of victims and unconscious favouring of perpetrators” (Monahan-Kreishman & Ingarfield, 2018, p. 74), and is a result of sexism, racism, homophobia, transphobia and other implicit biases, fuelled by the believe in a “just world” (p. 74), which is one that assumes a person’s actions will result in morally just outcomes. Journalists see injustices all of the time and must also be aware of their own implicit biases. Monahan-Kreishman and Ingarfiled (2018) recommend that leaders on campus must create environments where survivors are listened to and believed.

The traumas that people have gone through are not immediately apparent, so researchers point to the need to treat everyone with dignity and as though they may have suffered trauma. Regal et. al (2020) look at the impact of adverse childhood experiences, such as sexual abuse, on the people who are undergoing cancer treatment, and advocate for trauma informed practice as a way to improve the patient-physician relationship and “reduce patient re-traumatization” (p. 18). They recommend an integrated approach to care, including nurses, physicians, and counsellors, and that they should all be taught trauma-informed communication. This could apply to journalism by having reporters, photographers or videographers, producers and editors – those that deal with a person and the story at all stages of the process – to be taught trauma-informed

approaches; integrated trauma-informed care “builds on strong interpersonal relationships for both patients and providers (Regal et al., 2020, p. 25), though the researchers note that some providers may be so busy that they cannot effectively provide trauma-informed communication and that this is worthy of further study. A 2020 study by Knaak et al. looked at how to embed resiliency and self-compassion within trauma-informed training programs in order to change the culture of healthcare and reduce the stress and burnout that health care providers feel. They view trauma-informed communication as key to the roles leaders can play in bringing compassion to the workplace (Knaak et al., 2020, p. 91). It can help “mitigate burnout, improve provider resiliency, and improve care by reducing stigma” (Knaak et al., 2020, p. 91). In a study published in 2022, Fialkowski et al. found that trauma-informed care and communication are important for all age groups, including adolescents, and that trauma can occur at any life stage and that COVID-19 represents a collective traumatic stress, “akin to the trauma of a natural disaster,” which may have enhanced other traumas. Communicating in an open and honest manner can help reduce harm, and Fialkowski et al. recommend that medical staff can ask a patient’s preference about where a procedure should be performed, provide early and honest discussions about diagnoses, and allow patients to ask questions (p. 46). Researchers suggest simulations among health care professionals to “hone communication skills and focus on patient-centred outcomes” (Stoklosa et al., 2017, p. 1) by using trauma-informed practice. That, the authors argue, gives medical students “the opportunity to practice these complex communication skills in a clinical setting” (Stoklosa et al., 2017, p. 2), allowing for immediate feedback from supervisors. “The feedback was a direct assessment of their communication skills, with a focus on their ability to provide sensitive, trauma-informed care” (Stoklosa et al., 2017, p. 3). Students were also encouraged to write down their own ideas about trauma-informed communication

strategies “that aid in building patient trust” (Stoklosa et al., 2017, p. 3). Similarly, Fang et al. (2021) encouraged the use of role play and simulation for students to develop important trauma-informed communications skills. The students studied noted that “demonstrating concrete examples of trauma-informed communication was impactful” (Fang et al., 2021, p. 17). In focus groups, second-year occupational therapy students told researchers they felt unsure of their ability to communicate effectively with patients and handle the “psychological expressions of trauma including hostility and tearfulness” (Fang et al., 2021, 7). In their conclusions, “practice for communication with individuals who have experienced trauma and violence were considered a priority to include” (Fang et al., 2021, p. 11) in future clinical education.

The relationship between the reporter, who does their job daily and understands how the news ecosystem works, and the subject of a story, who has been the victim of a crime or who has experienced some sort of difficult event, is one that begins with a power imbalance. The reporter holds the personal story of someone else in his or her hands. By openly communicating, the journalist is able to equalize the power imbalance, to allow for the expression of feelings without fear of judgment, to provide choice and to work collaboratively, as much as professional ethics allow, to ensure the interaction minimizes harm (Trauma Toolkit, 2013). Public relations professionals, too, are exposed to trauma while doing their jobs. They are the people who often mitigate between reporters and internal systems within their organizations. Similar to journalists, however, trauma-informed care by PR professionals has not been extensively studied. Madden and Del Rosso (2021) explored how public relations faculty approach trauma in the classroom. They found there’s a need to develop trauma-informed approaches to public relations education to better prepare students and teachers for the emotional aspects of their jobs. One of the participants in their study said that “we need to train informed students who will turn into

informed practitioners (Madden & Del Rosso, 2021, p. 182). Their participants also spoke about “balancing fairness with empathy” (p. 185), a theme that also emerged during the course of my study of journalists. The authors advocate for trauma-informed leadership that would help public relations professionals and educators be more prepared to handle the emotional aspects of their jobs (Madden & Del Rosso, 2020).

Trauma-informed care dovetails with the social responsibility theory developed by Denis McQuail, the British mass communication theorist. McQuail (2010) noted that the media have been entrusted by the public to perform their work as an essential part of a democratic society, and that they have a responsibility to the public that they serve. Journalists adhere to professional standards and codes of conduct (Ethics guidelines, 2011) while exercising editorial freedom. But while the media is relatively free of arbitrary government controls, it must serve the public and has a moral obligation to provide information to citizens and to truthfully and accurately reflect the communities that they serve (McQuail, 2010). Journalists, as a professional entity and as individuals, cannot do that if they are harming those who they are serving, and it is therefore important that they use trauma-informed communication practice when doing their work. Moreover, journalists are beginning to understand that “people participate in more than one public” (Livingstone & Lunt, 1994, p. 26), and that it is important to reflect all of those publics. Those who have intergenerational trauma are different than those who have just experienced a car crash; those who are visible minorities and carry with them the systemic discrimination of Canadian society will approach an interview differently than someone who has not had to face any racism. The mass media, and journalists themselves, have a “significant role to play in bringing diverse cultures or groups together in discussion” (Livingstone & Lunt, 1994, p. 27).

The physical effects of trauma

Throughout this research, I refer to trauma as something that a person is exposed to, has experienced or is experiencing. It's important to note that while trauma or harm can have emotional effects on a person, it can also have very real physical effects on the body. Under stress, the brain's ability to process language is reduced because the language centre (Broca's area) literally shuts down, making it difficult for someone to communicate at exactly the time when a journalist is asking them to do so. At the same time, "the brain's limbic system – the seat of emotions – is ramped up, and the amygdala sends out hormones and neurochemicals that drive up blood pressure, heart rate, and oxygen intake to ready the body for fight or flight" (Newhouse, 2015). A limbic response means that someone is reacting with emotion, not rationally; this makes the idea of choice and consent all the more important when dealing with victims of trauma (Martin, 2015). Martin (2015) considers the brain's response to trauma when planning communication strategies for organizations who deal with people who are survivors of disasters, intimate partner violence, or other traumas. However, the work is applicable to journalism. He says, "During communication planning, be sensitive to the trauma histories of those involved in the current or projected event. Prior trauma will alter the perception of your messages in the here and now" (Martin, 2015, Slide 45). So, too, will prior trauma alter the perception of the journalist approaching someone for an interview. He advocates for compassion, empowerment and choice (Martin, 2015).

Trauma-informed communication plays a very important role in the education that nurses, doctors, and social workers get because they are often dealing with people who are in the immediate aftermath of a trauma. Lapum et al. (2020) advocate for a transactional model of communication, allowing for a complete understanding of context and accounts for "contextual influences outside of a single interaction." Nurses are taught to "let the client set the pace of the

interview and shape it based on their needs” and to promote “safety, control, and choice for the client” (Lapum et al, 2020). When communication is framed as being integrated into the social realities in which we live, it allows people to create and change that communication. There is a give-and-take approach that allows for even the person who is traumatized to experience and have control over what is happening.

The impact of trauma on journalists and the Taking Care survey

In Canada, several journalists have become outspoken advocates for trauma-informed reporting, including Cliff Lonsdale, who heads the Canadian Journalism Forum on Violence and Trauma [CJFVT]. The CJFVT has recently released a nation-wide survey of the impact of mental health and trauma on working journalists – the first of its kind in Canada (CJFVT, 2021). The survey results were released in spring of 2022, with an eye to helping newsrooms and journalism schools better support journalists who deal with coverage of disasters and tragedy. The results were stark: More than 1,200 Canadian journalists and media workers were surveyed, and reported high levels of stress, levels of anxiety and depression higher than the Canadian average, problem drinking double the rate of the average Canadian and a lack of expertise on the part of managers or supervisors (Taking Care, 2022). The Taking Care survey was released as the interviews for this thesis were being conducted; many of the quantitative findings can be directly linked to the answers given by journalists interviewed for this thesis. The Taking Care survey asked journalists to take a voluntary online 20-minute survey and the results offer a first-of-its-kind look into the mental state of Canadian media workers. The picture painted was one of a workplace culture that “sometimes punishes those who decline work when the story is too graphic or upsetting, and which fails to deliver meaningful training to those whose job it is to report on trauma” (Taking Care, 2022, p. 24). Younger journalists are the ones least likely to

refuse a story because they want to prove themselves and want to avoid professional consequences (p. 27). In answer to questions about training about trauma and trauma-informed reporting, 90% of survey respondents said they got no trauma training in journalism school and 85% said they didn't get it at work (p. 28). The Taking Care report focused on the mental health of journalists and other media workers in Canada, not on the approaches they use to conduct interviews and produce stories in which the people they are speaking to are impacted by trauma; however, it offers a very useful quantitative insight into what journalists know about trauma and how their perceptions of it are reflected in the field.

The Taking Care survey is spearheaded in part by Matthew Pearson, a journalist and professor at Carleton University in Ottawa. Pearson won the Michener-Deacon Fellowship in 2017 to develop a learning module about the effects of trauma that can be used by instructors across the country, to create an online resource for Canadian journalists assigned to cover traumatic events, and to organize a symposium about trauma-informed journalism (Pearson, 2018). This growing understanding of the trauma that reporters are exposed to is supported by Frank M. Ochberg, a psychiatrist who is a pioneer in trauma research (Simpson & Cote, 2006) who stresses it is important for working journalists to anticipate, recognize and report their mental health struggle (Ochberg, 1996).

Information about trauma can help guide a journalist's approach to a story, or how they communicate with an individual. Armed with an understanding of trauma and post-traumatic stress disorder, a reporter can go into an interview being able to recognize patterns of traumatic stress and the emotional responses that go with them, and be less likely to dehumanize or re-traumatize the person they are interviewing (Ochberg, 1996). Although Ochberg (1996) states "there is no formula for setting the ideal time for a post-traumatic interview" (p. 25), it's possible

to assess the interviewee's emotional state within the first few questions, as well as to set the stage for where the interview might occur; some might be more comfortable at home, with a relative present, while others might be more willing to talk in a public place (Ochberg, 1996). Figuring out when and where a person wants to speak to a reporter can go a long way to building rapport and eliciting a better interview (Ochberg, 1996). As Healy (2019) and the trauma-informed practice organizations previously mentioned, so too does Ochberg advocate for reporters to give as much control as possible to those they are interviewing. He states:

Journalists are not PTSD therapists or after-incident crisis debriefers. You are interviewing a witness who will become the subject of a story. From an ethical point of view, you should afford your interviewee as much control as possible and as much foreknowledge as possible. (Ochberg, 1996, p. 27)

Explaining the objective of a story, or where it might appear (a website, a magazine, a radio show, etc.), is one way to offer a sense of control. Journalists who think the person they are interviewing, (or the listener, viewer, or reader) is at risk of re-traumatization can offer sources of help, for example crisis hotlines; this is often done with stories involving suicide (Ochberg, 1996). More recently, CBC News has been putting helpline information on stories about residential schools survivors and missing and murdered Indigenous women and girls. Ochberg also says journalists can mobilize resources for colleagues looking for help.

Journalists should also be on the lookout for their own trauma responses. Journalists could get secondary traumatic stress disorder, a response when professional detachment is overwhelmed (Ochberg, 1996). Most journalists go through three stages of reacting to the trauma they see: first, when their careers are starting, shock and revulsion at what they're seeing;

second, seeing atrocities as familiar and repetitive – too many reporters get stuck at this stage, Ochberg states. They don't allow themselves to enter the third stage, where they understand that traumatic events happen, and that it's okay to be sad and worn down by what you see. Again, the impact of trauma on the journalist is outside the scope of this thesis but is linked to trauma experienced by the person or community being covered by the reporter.

Another leader in the field of journalism and trauma is Dr. Anthony Feinstein, a University of Toronto psychiatrist and journalist. His latest research shows that a significant number of journalists reporting on COVID-19 show signs of anxiety and depression (Osman, Selva & Feinstein, 2020). Feinstein has studied journalists in many countries and focuses on those who cover war, though has also turned his attention to those exposed to stresses at home, such as the COVID-19 pandemic, and the often-violent user generated content that many newsrooms are turning to for news tips and to fill slots in the 24-hour news cycle (Feinstein et al., 2014). Often, that content is violent, and the journalists are asked to determine whether they are worthy of a news story or not; although the authors admit that further study is needed, they note that “good journalism depends on healthy journalists” (Feinsein et al., 2014, p 6), and that news organizations will need to look at what can be done to offset the risks that looking at violent user-generated content poses to the reporter. In addition, I believe that recent increases in attacks directly targeting journalists because of the COVID-19 pandemic will also necessitate newsrooms to deal with the trauma that reporters are faced with.

While previous research has examined the impact of reporting on communities or people dealing with trauma, and others have looked – and are looking at – the impact of trauma on journalists, there are gaps in the research of how journalists themselves approach sensitive or possibly triggering interviews. The practice commonly known as ‘door knocks,’ when a reporter

knocks on the door of the loved one of someone who has died, is a rite of passage for a young journalist. More recently, speaking to racialized communities experiencing systemic barriers, Indigenous survivors of residential schools or victims of inter-generational trauma has become an important part of reconciliation in Canada.

There is still a limited understanding of how a reporter approaches such a task, where or whether they have been taught how to do so, and how much thought they give to the emotional toll such an interview – or even the approach about such an interview – might have on the person they want to interview. Canadian journalists do not have a written code that they can point to, such as a Charter of Rights and Freedoms for journalists. Perhaps the closest is the ethics guidelines outlined by The Canadian Association of Journalists (CAJ), an independent non-profit that provides professional development for journalists across the country. There is only one mention of how to deal with victims of trauma in the Ethics Guidelines published by the CAJ: “We do not manipulate people who are thrust into the spotlight because they are victims of crime or are associated with a tragedy. Nor do we do voyeuristic stories about them. When we contact them, we are sensitive to their situations, and report only information in which the public has a legitimate interest” (*Ethics guidelines*, 2011). Examining the understanding of Canadian journalists’ approach to trauma, during the interviewing process and when a story is aired or published, will help contribute to this knowledge gap. It will help determine what is needed for Canadian journalists to approach their stories in a trauma-informed way so those in their stories are not re-victimized and so their stories are stronger for the effort. Journalists are communicating what they learn from their research and the people they interview to their audience, the general public. This study aims to look at the overarching questions of how

journalists understand trauma-informed communication practice, and how they take it into account when doing their jobs. In addition, the following research questions guided this study:

Table 1: Research questions

R1: How much, if any, trauma informed practice working journalists have been taught?
R2: How do these journalists define trauma informed practice?
R3: How do these journalists use [what I call] trauma-informed practice when doing their jobs?
R4: What resources do journalists wish they had access to regarding trauma-informed practice?

Chapter Three: Methodology

Participants

This research examines how Canadian journalists use trauma-informed practice. In-depth interviews were conducted with six journalists working in radio and newspaper newsrooms in the Canadian cities of London, Toronto, and Kitchener. The journalists were in varying stages of their careers; one had graduated within five years from a journalism program, another was within five years of retirement, and the others were in between. I wanted to speak to journalists in different stages of their careers because I wanted to know if there had been significant changes in what journalists learn about trauma and trauma-informed care in journalism courses. All journalists share a culture (Creswell, 2014, p. 36) in that they have worked as reporters for legacy or mainstream-media organizations; that is to say, they do not work for blogs. Each had some kind of journalism training, whether at the college or university level.

The journalists were asked about 11 questions (see Appendix A), although the number of questions varied somewhat depending on the answers of the participants. I knew each of the participants through my own 20-year career as a journalist in Canada. I approached them via email, sending out an invitation to participate in the study (see Appendix B) and interviewed them through video conferencing. The journalists were interviewed over Zoom because of the COVID-19 pandemic and work in large and medium-sized markets for mainstream media organizations, including newspapers and broadcasting (radio and television). Two of the participants are visible minorities; four are women and two are men.

The theory that I have developed is grounded in the words and views of the participants of the study (Creswell, 2014) and involved semi-structured interviews, which enabled some constancy over the concepts covered in each interview (Corbin & Strauss, 2015). This method of study included asking open-ended questions beginning with a one or two very broad “central questions” (Creswell, 2014, p. 185) to establish what the participants in the study know or think about trauma-informed practice, before moving to several specific questions about how these working reporters approach sensitive interviews.

Journalists are storytellers, and I wanted them to tell me the stories they feel best reflect their approach to trauma-informed practice. I tried to facilitate a “holistic account” (Creswell, 2014, p. 235) and complex picture of what the research participants (i.e. journalists) know about trauma-informed reporting and how they use what they know. To do so, I asked them about a scenario in which they have approached an interview or story in what they think to be a trauma-informed way, and who taught them this approach, if anyone. Semi-structured interviews allowed a return to topics or additional questions at a later time while also basing the interviews in a “core concept” (Corbin & Strauss, 2014, p. 13) that captures the major theme of the study.

This narrative scenario allowed me, as the researcher, to see what common threads, links, or interpretations, these journalists have when approaching sensitive interview topics, and where they have learned these skills from. I was interested in whether these skills are self-taught, handed down by colleagues, or learned in a classroom.

I reached the point of theoretical saturation at the fifth interview. Theoretical saturation is defined as the point at which each additional in-depth interview no longer added unique information to the collection of data (Glaser & Strauss, 1967). While each of the journalists brought to the study their own unique experiences, their own ideas about trauma-informed work and their own ways of dealing with difficult interview subjects, the pattern of “person first, journalist second” and the idea of empathy emerged within the first three interviews. I wanted to see, however, if this pattern would continue with the next few interviews, and it did. It was after the sixth interview that I decided that further collecting and analysis of additional data would not help me answer the research questions in any greater depth and that further data collection would be redundant.

Anticipated ethical issues

This is a thesis about trauma-informed journalism, and it was therefore incumbent on me as a researcher to formulate my questions and structure my interviews in a way that doesn't traumatize the research participants. The people I spoke with are journalists, and for a living they speak to people about sensitive subjects; they know about the importance of obtaining consent, maintaining confidentiality, and developing “an atmosphere of mutual trust” (Corbin & Strauss, 2015, p. 13). The participants were treated with respect and dignity. I made clear to the participants what their interviews would be used for, answered any questions they had about the

process, and I would send them the finished thesis after it has been defended, so they might see the research their insights helped advance. In this way, they had a sense of control, much like a reporter using trauma-informed practice would give interview subjects a sense of control during the course of an interview and subsequent news story. Throughout this study, I use the singular “they/them/their” to refer to the journalists I interviewed, because I do not want to identify their gender and accidentally have them be identified in this study. Journalism is a small profession, and these participants took a risk in speaking with me about how they view trauma-informed practice; some spoke about breaking the rules of their newsrooms in order to use a trauma-informed approach, and I do not want to break the trust they put in me to have their interviews remain anonymous. This de-identification of data minimizes the risk that these participants could be identified.

Grounded theory research evolves over the course of the study. It can be difficult to articulate to the participants ahead of time what direction the study will take when their consent is first given (Iphofen & Tolich, 2018). This can be addressed through the use of process consent, “whereby progress in a study is shared with participants as the study unfolds” (Iphofen & Tolich, 2018, p. 491). Journalists are busy people; I asked the participants whether they would like to use process consent, but each said they were content with giving consent at the beginning, with the knowledge that the direction of the study may change.

Grounded theory is rooted in the experiences of the participants, and these can sometimes be difficult to describe and “may be emotional and distressing for participants, particularly when the study is focused on a sensitive subject” (Iphofen & Tolich, 2018, p. 491). Furthermore, my constructivist approach means that my own interaction with the data is part of the research process, so I was aware of that. I had a list of supports available for

the participants, including the Mindset (2016) document, which some of the participants were already familiar with and which lists do's and don'ts for reporters as well as expands on trauma and mental health, and includes a self-care section for journalists. The support available also included the Canadian Journalism Forum on Mental Health (journalismforum.ca), which includes information about post-traumatic stress disorder, moral injury and vicarious trauma (journalismforum.ca/resources). Journalists speak about sensitive subjects on an almost daily basis. While there is always a power differential between researcher and participant (Iphofen & Tolich, 2018), the fact that I interviewed people who are used to speaking to both the powerful (for example politicians) and the powerless (for example people experiencing homelessness) in the course of their daily jobs, flattened that differential somewhat, though I was always aware of it. I maintained a "meticulous memoing process" (Iphofen & Tolich, 2018, p. 493) that kept my voice and the voices of the participants from becoming blurred.

Strategies for validating findings

It is important that this research, its findings, and the theory that is developed from it, are valid; for this thesis to have usefulness in an academic and journalistic context, it must be credible and have practical applications. Grounded theory research itself is general and the analytic process safeguards against "forcing data" into categories or preconceived assumptions (Charmaz, 2006, p. 181). The information gathered, the analysis, and the theories derived are grounded in this time and place: "social, historical, local and interactional contexts" (Charmaz, 2006, p. 181) and allow for nuanced comparisons with other studies. This is a strength of grounded theory and this external review, eventually, is the ultimate way of validating my findings. Throughout the entirety of the research process, I was deliberate in ensuring that the data and its analysis is valid and reliable (Corbin & Struss, 2015). I kept a journal and made

frequent notes about my own biases and ideas as they come up, as suggested by several grounded theorists (Charmaz, 2006; Birks & Mills, 2011; Corbin & Strauss, 2015). Furthermore, Chiovitti and Piran, as quoted in Corbin and Strauss (2015), have a list of criteria that help in achieving rigor in grounded theory research, notably using the participants actual words in the theory, letting the participants guide the process, making sure that the researcher and participants' definitions and meanings match, and articulating my own personal views and criteria (p. 343). It's important that the research that emerges can be applied by journalists currently working in this field.

There are many questions to consider when making sure that the theory is valid and useful. I relied most heavily on Charmaz (2006, p. 182-183) and her criteria for evaluating constructionist grounded theory, which addresses both the scientific and creative aspects of qualitative research that I find so interesting. Charmaz (2006) points to four categories for evaluating theory: credibility, originality, resonance and usefulness (p. 182). For each category, she lists a series of questions which the researcher must confront, including whether the data sufficiently merits the claims of the researcher, and whether the research provided enough evidence for the reader to form an independent assessment of the claims. The researcher must ask whether the analysis challenges, extends, or refines current "ideas, concepts, and practices" (Charmaz, 2006, p. 182) and whether the categories portray the fullness of the studied experience. Indeed, if the categories do not, then there is no merit in the research and the theory. Charmaz (2006) also argues that the theory has to make sense to the participants, and that the analysis must offer deeper insights into the participants own lives and experience (p. 183). The analysis, she states, must offer "interpretations that people can use in their everyday worlds"

(Charmaz, 2006, p. 183), which is key for this research because I want it to have practical applications in daily reporting and in journalism schools.

Evaluation and validation of the analysis required self-evaluation on my part, during and after the research process, which can be tricky because it requires “the ability to distance oneself from the research and a certain degree of sophistication and experience to know if the theory or findings actually match the criteria” (Corbin & Strauss, 2015, p. 345). I am confident in my ability to self-evaluate, and I was helped by my supervisor, Alla Kushniryk. Dr. Kushniryk has used grounded theory in her own research and teaches courses about qualitative research methods at the graduate level. I want my research to be credible but also to resonate with readers’ and participants’ life experiences (Corbin & Strauss, 2015, p. 347), as well be applicable because the findings offer insight into the field of journalism, those working within it, and those who come into contact with reporters or the news. While my thesis may be just one of several plausible interpretations of the data, by living in a state of self-evaluation during the process, as well as asking difficult questions about the data and my analysis throughout, I hope what has emerged is credible, valid, and reliable research that furthers the relatively new study of trauma-informed reporting.

Tools to collect the data

After agreeing to take part in the study, the participants were asked to fill out an informed consent form (see Appendix C) and told they could withdraw from the study at any time. I have included the consent form but not the ones that were filled out, because I do not want to identify the participants. I went over the informed consent form and asked them if they had any questions at the beginning of the interview, which was done via Google Meet. All but one of the interviews included a video so I could see the participant; one did not because the participant wanted to

walk while they spoke to me. I also typed while the participants answered the questions and as this is the method I use when interviewing people for my role as a reporter at CBC News, I was comfortable with taking notes while also listening and responding to the answers of the study participants. I considered meeting with the participants face-to-face, but journalists do not have a lot of free time, and all have become very adept at using technology during the COVID-19 pandemic. Using video meetings also allowed me to adhere to COVID-19 protocols and for the participants to do the interview where they were most comfortable and at a time that was most convenient for them.

Data analysis

I relied heavily on Charmaz's seminal book about constructing grounded theory (2006) when beginning to go through the data collected. To maintain the journalists' anonymity, I labelled each of their audio and transcripts by number (Participant 1, Participant 2, etc.), and I do so throughout this thesis. To begin data analysis, I re-listened to each of the interviews with just the audio, then I went through them a second time and made brief memos about each interview to summarize themes that stuck out to me (see Appendix D). Although I took a workshop about using MAXQDA software, which helps with qualitative research analysis, I decided early on that I would do the analysis without the assistance of this technology; I wanted to be immersed in the words of my study participants and the data that their voices provided. I began by using in vivo (open) coding: my participants are journalists, people who live and breathe words, whether written or spoken, and I thought using their own words seemed natural to the research and to the study of what they knew. As Charmaz states, "no researcher is neutral because language confers form and meaning on observed realities. Specific use of language reflects views and values" (2006, p. 46). It was important to use the words of these journalists to see what views and values

they were reflecting when it came to their newsroom environments and the way in which they view and use trauma-informed approaches. Their words allowed for an “analytic point of departure” (Charmaz, 2006, p. 55) at the beginning of the analysis.

I began by going through the six transcripts line-by-line and circled and underlined the words of the participants in the text that I thought were relevant to the research questions. I then conducted axial coding by going through those in-vivo codes and making a list of broader categories, though the list was still quite lengthy for each participant (see Appendix E). This process allowed for commonalities to emerge among the actual words of the participants (for example, the words “empathy,” being “sensitive”, and being “a human first and journalist second” were employed by each of the participants). I was quite struck by some of the similarities between the words of the participants, and larger common themes also began to emerge as I looked at their words, for example the concept of tension between the needs (or perceived needs) of the profession (such as tight deadlines and little time), and the desire of the journalists to be compassionate and respect the needs of the people they were interviewing (developing relationships and trust can take time). I found the term “human first, journalist second” to be particularly interesting, because it assumed that journalists are in some way not human, or that there’s a perception that a journalist is a negative that should be put second before human instinct or emotion. It also made me think about what these journalists think it means to be human, and what it means to be a journalist, and why those two are not compatible (why don’t these journalists think “human” and “journalist” can co-exist simultaneously, for example). Analysis of the transcripts led me to a series of larger concepts that came to be grouped into concise categories, about which I memoed (see Appendix F) and ultimately led to me axial coding which resulted in a determination that there is a significant tension between the

journalists and their desire and ability to use trauma-informed approaches in their work. Focused and axial coding ultimately led me to solidify this conclusion.

At the completion of axial coding, the following major categories, grounded in the data, were identified: 1. Lack of time and training; 2. Respect, sensitivity, compassion and awareness; 3. Acknowledging the trauma; 4. Creating a psychologically and physically safe environment; 5. Facilitating trust and informed consent; 6. Intersectionality and the precautionary principle. During the final coding stage, the coding categories were linked around one core category: empathy. In addition to these categories, findings from the interviews lead to the development of trauma-informed guiding principles for newsrooms and journalists.

Wrestling with preconceptions

Throughout the data analysis and the writing of this thesis, I was careful to think about my own preconceptions about journalism, about trauma, about trauma-informed approaches and about newsroom cultures. As a mid-career journalist myself, I am very much part of the culture group of the journalists I spoke to; indeed, I professionally know each of the participants in this study. I am also a white cis-gender immigrant woman, and this has shaped my perceptions of journalism and trauma, as have the newsrooms in which I have worked (where, admittedly, there was a ‘get-the-job-done-and-don’t-look-back’ mentality). I tried, to the best of my ability, to not take things for granted during my interviews with the participants, and asked them to clarify their answers and to give examples that could help me avoid putting my own perceptions onto their answers. In this way, my preconceptions about journalism and trauma were useful starting points for looking at my data but I was careful to avoid making them automatic codes for analysing my data. As Charmaz wrote in 2006, “A fine line exists between interpreting data and imposing a

pre-existing frame to it.” (p. 68). Some of the concepts and ideas that emerged from the interviews surprised me; the omission of others did, too.

Chapter Four: Results

In this chapter I provide answers to the research questions which guided this study and explore the major categories identified in the data analysis. For some of the research questions, the answers vary broadly and are not easily summarized in table or chart form. Quantifying the thoughtful answers given by the participants would do a disservice to the words that they used and the consideration they gave the questions, so although I have tried to summarize them, in many instances the variety of responses have to be considered.

R1: How much, if any, trauma informed practice working journalists have been taught?

Broadly, the answer is: not much. None of the participants I spoke to had any formal training in trauma-informed approaches; all said they learned what they knew on the job, although Participant 1, who has worked in the industry for just over a decade, said they remembered a professor giving tips about how to approach people whose loved ones have died, with the most salient tip being that to say to someone they are interviewing “I know how you feel” is bad practice, because one can never know how someone else is feeling or what they are going through. Participant 2, who has been in the news industry for fewer than 10 years, said everything they know comes from their own need and desire to understand the community in which they live. They had one day during their schooling in which a professor spoke about the fact that journalists have to call families of people who have died, but did not specifically address how to do that or how to deal with the trauma that these people have experienced. Participant 3 graduated from journalism school a decade ago, had a professor who spoke about

mental health reporting, who was seen as a leader at the time, but there were just “vague mentions” of trauma and being trauma informed. “You don’t learn it until you actually do it,” Participant 3 said, adding, “A lot of time, students come out of journalism school and have no idea. Unless they have a personal background on whatever it is that they’re reporting on, it’s really just all self-taught.” They added, “You’re never told, ‘This is the appropriate way to approach people.’ It’s assumed that you can do it, but actually it’s such an important skill that a lot of people don’t have.”

The participants said they are less likely at the beginning of their careers to ask questions of more experienced colleagues about how to be trauma informed or how to conduct difficult interviews because they do not want to appear foolish or like they don’t know what they’re doing. Participant 3 said, “If anything, because I’m older now, I feel more confident in my career, I would ask a senior journalist ‘How do I approach this?’ but it’s kind of ironic that it takes time and experience to ask the questions, when you should really be asking at the beginning of your career when you don’t know what you’re doing.” Participant 4 has been working in journalism for 20 years, also said they learned on the job. “You learn how to match their energy and how to read them,” they said about speaking to people who have experienced trauma. Each participant talked about the dread of speaking to someone who has lost a loved one or lived through a difficult event. Participant 4 said there has been some training in their newsroom about how to speak in a “sensitive and culturally appropriate way” to Indigenous survivors of residential school and their loved ones. They said, “There’s been more concerted efforts to train journalists about Indigenous communities and trauma, but I don’t think there’s been more training generally.” Participant 5 has also been in the industry for just over 20 years and said their university master’s program, they touched on “the fact that some subjects are

difficult and that some interviews can be challenging.” They added, “What stands out more in my mind was we talked about how to get the story, how to do the best interview. How to talk to people in a responsible way, taking into account things they’ve experienced, that was never on the discussion table.” They did think there has been a “major shift, one for the better” in society and in journalism about “the need to be cognizant of the experience of others, not just recording it and writing it down but also understanding that there needs to be sensitivity.” Participant 6 has been working as a journalist for four decades and said that trauma-informed work “was a subject that never came up” during their time in journalism school and something that has only recently come up in their career because of their own reporting on the trauma suffered by first responders such as police officers and the military. They cited “trial and error” as the main way of learning about trauma-informed practice, or being sensitive to the needs of the people they’re interviewing. Each of the participants said that large stories in their newsrooms and in Canada have brought a new focus on trauma, both for reporters and for those they interview: Four of the participants mentioned residential school coverage; two mentioned Black Lives Matter protests; two mentioned the Afzaal family killing in which a Muslim family in London, Ont., was killed by a driver motivated by anti-Islamic hate and which politicians quickly labelled terrorism.

R2: How do these journalists define trauma-informed practice?

The participants in this study looked at being trauma informed as a way to be empathetic and understanding to the people they were interviewing. After asking some questions about their background, career trajectory and what education they had, I wanted to know, “How do you define trauma-informed practice?” and the answers (see Table 2) centre understanding where the people they interview are coming from, respecting them and treating them with sensitivity and compassion.

Table 2: How do you define trauma-informed practice?

Participant 1	It's how sensitive you are when you're talking to your subjects. Trying to walk the balance between what you need for the story but respecting their grief and the emotions that they're working through at the moment.
Participant 2	To me, it's fully respecting the boundaries of people who have experienced the impacts of trauma, and coming from a place of compassion, even if you don't have that lived experience.
Participant 3	It's having the understanding of someone's history and what they've experienced and approaching them and speaking with them in a way that's based on having some sort of understanding of what they've experienced.
Participant 4	It's my awareness that someone might be dealing with something. When I approach them and talk to them, I have to be sensitive to what they are dealing with, whether it's the parents of a child who has just died or the parent of someone who is on the street or addicted to drugs. I think of it as other's people's trauma and how I approach them.
Participant 5	It's coming to an understanding before speaking to someone or reporting on their story and taking into consideration the experiences they've been to and recognizing that you'll need to be sensitive and compassionate and understanding. It's recognizing that you can be a journalist, you can be as unbiased as possible, while still being a human being.
Participant 6	When I talk about trauma-informed journalism, it's basically: Treat people I'm interviewing, the people I'm writing about, with an understanding that they have faced or are facing trauma. It's the care and

caution in how to proceed to try to get a story with people who are traumatized.

R3: How do these journalists use what I call trauma-informed practice when doing their jobs?

Each of the practices that the participants used when approaching, interviewing, and reporting on people with trauma or going through a traumatic event were, in some way, meant to “reduce harm” (Health Canada, 2018). As stated earlier, the principles of trauma-informed care vary slightly between organizations, but generally include: an acknowledgement of the trauma; creating an environment where the person in question feels physically and psychologically safe; allowing the person to have control over the situation or informed consent; collaborating with the person to help facilitate trust and control; are applied universally but with an individual’s unique needs in mind (CAMH, 2014; New South Wales, 2020; SAMHSAH, 2014; Trauma Toolkit, 2013). These can be adapted to the context of journalism and were by the participants of this study, despite the fact that none had learned about trauma-informed practices during their time in journalism school or have had trauma training in during their subsequent careers. Here is how the participants of my study interpreted and applied these principles:

1. An acknowledgement of the trauma

All of the participants spoke about trying to develop a human connection with the people they are speaking with, and not trying to pretend that they know what the person is going through. “I don’t want them to think that I am just here to take, take, take,” said Participant 2. “I want them to trust me and to know that I’m here to share your story, that it’s important for your community to hear your story, but at the same time I want to understand your boundaries.” There was an

acknowledged difference among the participants that spot news, which is a news event that happens unexpectedly and is reported upon immediately (for example, a car crash, a fire, a sudden death like a drowning), is different than longer feature reporting, which can take days, weeks or even months to research and write. “When we think about trauma, we often think an individual went through a single traumatic event that has shaped their world moving forward ... but I think that trauma comes in different forms, like people who are disenfranchised, historically discriminated against, people who have identities that intersect. People like that experience trauma in different ways,” Participant 2 said. Another way to acknowledge trauma is to “try to give them lots of outs,” Participant 4 said, and putting aside their own need to get the story and instead putting the needs of the interviewee first. “I tell them, ‘I know this is very difficult, that you’re at a very difficult point so no pressure, but if you want to share this story now or further down the road, here is my number.’ And I say ‘I’m sorry for your loss,’” Participant 4 said.

2. Creating an environment where the person feels physically and psychologically safe

The study participants made multiple references to making people feel both physically and psychologically safe while they were conducting interviews as well as afterwards when the story appeared and beyond. Participant 2 spoke about “meeting them in a place that’s comfortable” while Participant 1 said they tell the people they speak to “don’t worry about it, take your time. I tell them I am going to ask you some questions, some of them may be difficult, and if there’s a question you don’t want to answer, you don’t have to.” Participant 6 said they begin by telling people to have an off-the-record chat, before beginning formal interviews, particularly when working on longer feature stories. “I’ve had people come to the newsroom, or we’ve gone for coffee in a place they find safe, often it’s a coffee shop, a neutral place, and I tell them it will only be on the record when they want it to be,” they said. Participant 3 talked about looking at

the body language of people they are approaching at spot-news scenes and making sure they are “not taking advantage” of people who are in a vulnerable state, even though that might be “better for the story.”

The use of language was also very important. Three of the participants referenced specific times where they had to “advocate” for the use of language that the person they were interviewing asked for, but that higher-ups didn’t want to use. One example was the description of and use of terms to describe a disability, and another was the request to use the term “survivor” and not “victim” in a story about human trafficking. Participant 2 revealed, “Language is really important to me. If this person was a victim of something, an institution or systemic racism, I want to make sure that my language doesn’t further victimize this person, doesn’t further their trauma.” However, the participant said those aspects of a trauma-informed approach are sometimes not valued by editors or producers because they require time. Participant 2 said, “If we’re talking about systemic, intergenerational trauma, you need time, because those ties have been severed between media and certain communities, and you need the time to build those relationships.” Participant 6 said they often knew if the people they were writing about were getting psychological counselling, and on one occasion scheduled difficult interviews on the same day that the person would be seeing their psychologist, so anything brought up in the difficult interview could be debriefed and discussed with the trained professional.

3. Allowing the person to have control over the situation or informed consent

There was a sense of tension over allowing someone to have control over a story and journalistic principles which dictate it’s the reporter and editors or producers that have control over how the story will appear. Ultimately, newsrooms retain editorial control over the work that

their journalists produce. It is fairly easy to give control to the interview subjects beforehand, and each of the participants said they did so by explaining the journalistic process, how their words will be used (whether on radio, television or in print). Participant 4 said, “I talk to them about if it’s live, how it’ll work, but also for digital (stories), I tell them this is going to appear on our website, I’d love to get some photos. I’m always talking them through their consent ... and how we’re going to use their information.” They added, however, that this is “a commitment” that requires time, which is often at a premium. “I do it because if it were me, I’d want that done for me. You’re a journalist but you’re also a person and this is someone you’ve developed a connection with.”

Some of the participants talked about breaking journalistic rules to give people a sense of control. Participant 2 said they worked with a particular family over a series of months to get them comfortable with the media and telling their story; several participants said their newsrooms were not aware of the long time (weeks or months) they spent speaking with the people they wanted to write about, because they wanted to gain the subjects’ trust and they were sure their managers would want a story to be finished before a proper relationship could be built and all the information gathered. Participant 4 said,

I always say to them, I can’t tell you what I’m going to publish before I publish it, but if there’s something you don’t like, if you’re unhappy or you have questions, feel free to reach out and we can talk about it. I want to be available for people. They’ve put trust in me, and it feels like the right thing to do.

One participant said they have given their finished stories to the subjects of those stories if they involved particularly traumatic events, despite that being against newsroom rules and practices. The Participant said,

It goes against all journalism I've been taught, against company policy, and against the ethics that we have and frankly, I break it over and over again because I understand how important it is to the people I interview...It is sometimes a deal maker or breaker with people who are traumatized and it is well worth it for many reasons. It gives them a chance to feel comfortable about a story.

4. *Collaborating with the person to facilitate trust and control*

All of the participants spoke about sharing the treatment the story would be getting, for example when it would appear online, on radio, or on television, and said they also shared links to the story afterwards. "They've put trust into you," Participant 4 said. Two participants said they tell people they can pull out of an interview or story at any time, though they acknowledge that they don't want that to happen because it would mean not "getting the story." Participants also raised a sense of tension between the idea of collaborating with someone on a story and the journalistic ethos of getting multiple sides of a story, how do you collaborate with one side and not the other, for example. One participant explained it this way:

When I've asked for time on a specific story because I want to work with this family, I'd like to make sure that I am using the right language, what was said to me by somebody that doesn't understand this approach is, 'We're not advocating for this family, we're not advocates, we're reporters.' I think that point of view is very wrong. I'm not saying we're advocating, but we're respecting their boundaries and the

language that they want us to use. It's not advocating, it's respecting them and prioritizing their dignity and not further harming them.

Each of the participants said they knew that the more the people they were interviewing trusted them, the more information they would provide and ultimately, the better their story would be. Participant 3 mentioned they “make an effort to text them a link to the story, thank them for their time, and have a bit of a back and forth with them afterwards.” Several participants claimed they sometimes speak to people or listen to their problems and trauma even though they know a story won't result from those conversations, because they want to be compassionate, don't want to ignore people just because the conversation is not directly tied to a job they might be doing, and because they want to right historic wrongs that saw journalists as “insensitive jerks,” as one participant called the perception of the profession. One participant said, “I want them to come out of the interaction with ‘I was not screwed.’ I want them feeling as though they were heard and understood and even if they're not entirely happy with everything in in the story, the fact that are about them are factually correct and speak to what they were feeling.”

R4: What resources do journalists wish they had access to in regards to trauma-informed practice?

Overwhelmingly, the participants spoke about a lack of time to properly research stories beforehand, to do interviews thoroughly, to write sensitively and to debrief afterwards. There is a sense of running from one story to the next, without a break. One participant said if they finish a story early in the day, they are not given time to decompress or to research another story; they are immediately sent on to the next story. Another revealed, “We barely have time to pee” and that after interviewing the family members of mass-shooting victims for two days and filing

several stories over the course of those days, they were assigned to cover the story of a body found in a dumpster as they were driving back from the mass-shooting coverage. All of the participants appeared resigned to the fact that the journalism industry is contracting, that there are fewer journalists than ever before, and that they needed to hustle non-stop to do their work. This was particularly true on breaking-news stories, when they have to weigh telling people to “go at their own pace” with their managers wanting a story immediately, to beat the competition. Participant 1 said, “It would be ideal if you could have extra days so that people could have time to process and talk to you after a few days, but quite honestly you don’t have that luxury. You have to push to get the story. That’s the environment I grew up in, professionally speaking, that’s the expectation, so I’ve adapted myself to work within those constraints and limitations.” Participant 3 added, “It comes down to resources. If we had enough reporters all the time, enough content all the time, and I called the newsroom and said, ‘I need to push my radio deadline because I need to speak more with this person and make them comfortable,’ they might say yes, but for the most part, everything is such a scramble.” Several of the participants suggested a dedicated day, every few weeks or months, during which a journalist doesn’t have to file a story, but instead is given time to research, to return phone calls or emails, debrief after a difficult story or do research into something they’d like to cover. They said such a workday would go a long way to allowing “a breather” and a break, a time to catch up on things that there’s no time to look into during the normal course of a deadline-driven day, and also a chance to refocus on one’s own mental health, a sort of internal check-in. One participant said they bought books on Black Lives Matter that they, as a non-Black journalist, wanted to read and understand, but they have not had time because their job keeps them constantly jumping from one story to the next.

The participants also mentioned the need for managers, such as editors and producers, to check in with reporters, and to acknowledge that some take more time, and that some stories can have a negative impact on mental health and that they might require giving the journalist a break to decompress. “The culture is [to] get the story done regardless of what you have to do and who it might hurt,” one participant said. Another added, “There’s a lack of understanding and awareness of the need to put trauma and mental health issues first and foremost. The focus is, get the story, tell the story. The idea that has prevailed in journalism is that we have to tell this person’s story even if it’s uncomfortable along the way, but it doesn’t have to be an either-or situation.” There’s a sense that young journalists are “paying their dues” by speaking to family members of someone who has died. “It becomes part of the job very quickly ... We talk about it in a sort of short-hand. ‘I had to call that family and it sucked.’ But we don’t do any kind of post-mortems in any kind of helpful way.” Managers need to understand what trauma-informed journalism is and why it’s beneficial to getting a story, and a better story, the participants said.

Peer support was also mentioned by the participants. Several spoke about not asking questions of their more experienced colleagues at the beginning of their careers because they felt they would be outed as not knowing what they were doing, but others said they did ask for help. “Asking older reporters for help has been very important for me,” one participant said. “I’m not in a position where I’m an expert yet, but I did tell a younger reporter, ‘How do you feel, do you find it hard, we all feel that way but it gets easier.’” Another participant mentioned that their newsroom schedules “lunch and learns” on topics such as trauma-informed journalism or speaking to residential school survivors, but they’re done during the day when reporters are out gathering stories, and they don’t have time to attend. “It would have to be very intentional, where

it's something that is scheduled into your day, where you get paid the overtime for it, and you can ask questions where you won't be judged."

Two of the participants mentioned the *Mindset: Reporting on Mental Health* (2016) brochure which has been distributed to newsrooms and has been helpful in giving practical terminology and approaches for journalists to use. "I've read it, I keep it, and it's changed how I think about reporting on suicide, saying 'died of suicide' instead of 'committed suicide,'" one participant said. "It tells you exactly what to say and what to avoid. This would be helpful because we have fewer resources than ever before and not a long of time for handholding." Such a brochure for trauma-informed reporting would help younger journalists navigate uncharted waters and help older journalists break out of bad habits, the participant suggested. Journalism has its own conventions and rules, and having a document specific to the profession would be helpful, another participant said. However, managers would have to be on board, they said. "I don't think there's a lot of general support for trauma-informed practice. It's not outright opposition, but there's a lack of awareness," one participant said. "There's an old-school editor culture of 'Get the story, don't think about the person.' It's changing somewhat now."

Conclusion

The responses of the participants offered valuable insight into how Canadian journalists view trauma-informed practice, and where they think the gaps are in their own newsrooms and in the industry as a whole. Although not considered in the research questions, the participants spoke about the different approaches that can be and are used for breaking news situations versus longer features, and about trauma as not a single event but rather an inter-generational, systemic, or intersectional experience. Each of the participants spoke about an old-school culture where the

story mattered more than the people they were speaking to, but they also saw themselves as standing outside of that tradition, as seeing themselves as “human first, journalist second,” and fighting the newsroom culture to reflect the people they are covering accurately and sensitively without causing them any more harm.

Chapter Five: Discussion

In this chapter, I discuss my findings, grounded in the collected data and the theory that emerged: to successfully use trauma-informed approaches in their work, journalists routinely put the needs of the people they are reporting on before the demands and perceived rules of their profession. In my analysis, the core category that emerged is empathy.

Empathy is “ability to imagine and understand the thoughts, perspective, and emotions of another person” (Oxford University Press, 2022). The participants in this study all used empathy to communicate with traumatized people, though not all named it as such. Their careers centre around imagining, understanding and telling the stories of different individuals and people, sometimes after meeting them for minutes during a period of anguish and grief, and other times after months of research and collaboration on a longer features story or series of stories. Routinely, journalists are writing about incidents that they themselves have not been through, but they must accurately and sensitively reflect the thoughts, perspectives and emotions of the people involved, often under the pressure of a deadline.

There is no way of knowing what experiences someone has gone through, but a trauma-informed approach ensures that harm is reduced when a journalist is communicating with the person they are interviewing. Communication is a primary focus of trauma-informed practice. In their body language, the journalist is communicating their interest in the words of the person they

are speaking to. With their words, they are giving the person the ability to share their story, reclaim their dignity and control their narrative. A trauma-informed approach creates a safe space for someone to choose to engage with the journalist and tell their own story; it also allows the journalist to communicate the story the person has told with their audience in a way that does not harm the person or the audience. Journalists have individually developed their own trauma-informed practices because they are not taught those approaches in school, nor do they feel comfortable asking their colleagues for help, particularly when they are at the beginning stages of their careers. A general guide can be useful for how journalists communicate with those who have suffered trauma.

I have developed a set of guiding principles for newsrooms that can be used to help journalists do their work, whether deadline-driven breaking news or longer features, in a way that is both trauma informed and adheres to journalistic practices and standards. I have also developed a set of trauma-informed guiding principles for journalists to follow.

Person first, journalist second

Each of the six participants in the study said they wanted to be “a person first and a journalist second” or some variation of that phrase, which raises the question of tension between what it means to be the first, and why it has to come at the expense of the second. What does it mean to be a person, and what does it mean to be a journalist? These participants talked about the idea of the “person” as someone who is empathetic, a good listener, who respects the people they are speaking with, understands that it is difficult to speak to the media, to share intimate details of grief of discrimination, and reports a story that is fair, that accurately portrays the person’s emotions and actions, and connects with the people they are reporting on a human level.

“It remains a pillar of journalism to explore the human side of any situation or tragedy, and it’s an important part of the job,” one participant told me. To do that, they said, they have to “be a decent human being” or “just be human, really.” Another said they want to “respect the reporter-subject boundary” and that journalism has to “elevate the voices” of different people and communities by “building relationships” and “picking up the pieces of what happened before my time as a journalist,” when older media workers were not as sensitive and trauma-informed in their approaches, or completely ignored the communities altogether. All of the participants said there were “other ways to get the story” without being too pushy with people who did not want to speak. Two of the participants said that their empathy is a little bit of a double-edged sword: because they are seen as being particularly caring and successful at getting people to open up to them, they are routinely assigned to stories where they have to speak to the loved ones of people who have died. These two participants were among the youngest that I interviewed. They were so good at their jobs precisely because they were being a “person first,” and so they were asked to do more journalism that involves people who have experienced trauma as a result, at least in breaking-news situations such as shootings and car crashes. Their humanity made their journalism better.

The perceptions of what it means to be a journalist were defined by the participants as an “old school” way of thinking, when people who were taught to be “detached,” “neutral” and “a recorder of events” without any thoughts or feelings for the people being interviewed. All of the participants spoke about knowing that tears from the people they are interviewing are “good for the story,” because they mean they have tapped into the emotions of the person, but they reported feeling like they were “taking advantage” and “selfish” for seeing the pain of others as something that would benefit their work. One participant said there’s a perception that

“journalists are jerks” who are “camped out on the trauma victim’s doorsteps.” They said they were told “You have to suck it up. You’re the intern, you’re paying your dues. You’re reporting on a little dead kid.” Two of the more experienced participants expressed worry that they’d hurt people in their reporting because they didn’t know what they were doing, or how to approach people in a trauma-informed way because they were at the beginnings of their careers when they were doing the bulk of those kinds of breaking-news stories. Another participant said it’s “frowned upon” to offer direct resources to people after interviewing them, although phone numbers and websites are added to stories that deal with suicide and a hotline is given on stories about residential school survivors, as per the *Mindset: Reporting on Mental Health* (2016) guidebook. Nevertheless, journalists have found their own workarounds. Crying alongside the subjects of their interviews, advocating for a family that is marginalized, sharing resources that may be needed, breaking journalistic guidelines that prevent people from seeing a story before it is aired or published and checking in with people long after a story runs are all ways in which the participants of my study chose to be a “person first.” They used their empathy and humanity to not only get the story but also to prevent (or try to prevent) the further harm of those, whether individuals, groups or communities, were the subjects of their stories.

Person and journalist first

The six journalists that participated in this study each talked about trying to find a balance between respecting the grief and emotions of the people they are interviewing and the need to get the story. It is a balance that has sometimes tipped toward the negative: being a “journalist first,” an old school mentality that is still adhered to by some editors and producers and which the participants of the study actively, sometimes vocally and sometimes subversively, act against. I argue that it is possible to be a person first and a journalist first; to be a good

journalist and a good person; that journalism does not have to be synonymous with being a detached stenographer of events. Journalists, as evidenced in this study, no longer see themselves as bias-free recorders of events. They know that they come with their own histories, their own biases, and their own traumas. This is something new that newsrooms, particularly as they become more diverse and reflective of the communities they serve, are grappling with. In the United States, protests after the killing of several Black men by police, and the subsequent Black Lives Matter movement, led to a re-evaluation of how journalists, particularly BIPOC journalists, are asked to cover stories of communities they serve and are also a part of. The Black Lives Matter movement “has had a profound impact on the media and dramatically shifted the paradigm of how we think about doing news” (McNeill, 2021). Newsrooms were forced to reckon with the fact that in pretending to not have any biases, they were in fact showing their biases against a large segment of marginalized people. Racialized journalists were no longer content to stand back and dispassionately report on the killing of people in their communities. This has trickled down to newsrooms here in Canada. One visible minority participant spoke about their family history of intergenerational trauma and displacement and being a visible minority in Canada. They said “I think about how I would want someone to approach me when I’m talking about these things, about very vulnerable personal stories. I try to put myself in their shoes, because I have been there for certain things.” They suspect that certain managers “will never understand the value to do trauma-informed work when it comes to specific racialized communities” but that a “culture shift” has to happen within the system of journalism that will trickle down to journalists working in the field. “I think it’s crucial that newsrooms understand and see the importance of trauma-informed journalism because that’s what will help break down barriers with certain racialized and vulnerable communities.” I agree and have developed a set of

guiding principles which newsrooms can follow to allow for trauma-informed approaches to be encouraged and adhered to – and which can make the stories produced by journalists within those newsrooms stronger and more reflective of the communities they serve. This could help, in time, turn the public tide back toward seeing journalists as powerful amplifiers of the voices of the vulnerable and marginalized, committed to sharing the stories of the communities they serve not for their own benefit, but for the benefit of the greater good.

Guiding principles for newsrooms

Although journalists work in newsrooms for producers and editors, their work is often solitary. They go out to gather the elements of their stories – research, interviews, visuals – alone, and they work alone to complete the assignment. The following principles are developed based on the literature review and interviews with the participants in this study.

1. Define newsroom standards for trauma-informed approaches

Journalism is solitary work, and it has become even more so in the past few years, as newsrooms shrink because of layoffs and the COVID-19 pandemic pushed people to work from home. The idea of “paying your dues” by being assigned stories in which trauma is involved is meant to teach young journalists the ropes, but they are often playing blind, unsure of what the rules are. Newsrooms should define trauma-informed journalism for their teams, and spell out what different approaches working journalists can use, and what they can’t, in order to prevent further harm and also adhere to newsroom standards. These should be enshrined in the newsroom so they can be followed by journalists of all experiences and at all levels, including management. The Canadian Association of Journalists should also consider a list of standards for trauma-informed approaches.

2. Use shadowing and peer support

A large element of journalism involves learning on the job. Allowing less experienced journalists to formally shadow more experienced colleagues, would help show the new generation how to approach people, speak to them, listen, and respect their boundaries and tell their stories. This could mean sitting in on interviews, listening to recordings afterwards, or simply a debrief session where questions can be asked in a non-judgemental setting. Peer mentoring could benefit both parties, as the less experienced journalist gains insights in how difficult interviews or stories can be done, and the more experienced journalist is forced to think about their approach while they explain their process to their younger colleague.

3. Rethink old-school rules and paradigms

Is it okay to be an advocate for a family experiencing discrimination in the school system, or to cry alongside someone you are interviewing? What does bias and neutrality mean and how can they be achieved – or can they? Can a reporter offer a list of mental health resources to a person they've just conducted a deeply emotional interview with? What about checking in after a story is finished? Journalists no longer think of themselves as simply recorders of events; the choices they make about who to interview and how to write stories come from their own biases or the biases of their newsrooms. News-gathering operations should have serious, detailed discussions about what is appropriate for journalists to do in situations where their interviews have dealt with trauma.

4. Give time

When writing stories involving trauma, journalists should get more time. Sometimes this is not possible: during a breaking news situation, reaction from those involved needs to be gathered

and the story written. An acknowledgement from newsroom managers that this can be a difficult task would go a long way. Giving journalists a day off after a trauma-filled story, or time every few weeks to decompress, breath, and take time for professional development, would signal to journalists that their managers are serious about understanding the impact of trauma on journalists themselves and that their jobs are a constant which they sometimes need a break from.

Guiding principles for journalists

Journalists work in newsrooms, guided by rules and standards set out for them by their newsrooms and the profession, but their day-to-day dealings are often solitary ones. It is the individual journalist who approaches someone at the scene of a car crash; they're the ones picking up the phone to call the family members of someone who has just been shot; they choose which questions to ask, in which order, and which of the answers and language to include in the subsequent radio, television or written story. These guiding principles are based on the experiences and answers of the six participants of this study and the literature review, and could all fall under the heading of being empathetic, or being a person first and journalists second, when wanting to use a trauma-informed approach:

1. Use the precautionary principle

The reality of intergenerational wounds, systemic discrimination and intersectionality mean that journalists should be aware that it's possible everyone has experienced some sort of trauma. The precautionary principle means, in essence, that it's better to be safe than sorry; if it's uncertain that someone has experienced trauma, it is better to act as though they have to prevent further trauma. That does not mean journalists should tie themselves in knots when doing simple interviews unrelated to trauma or to difficult events, or that everyone should be handled with kid

gloves; it does mean that members of the public embroiled in stories or events should be approached with respect, sensitivity and compassion. People's histories should be taken into account.

2. Give as much control as possible

A lot of what journalists do comes after they speak to people; they take their interviews and edit them for length, clarity, and context. Many times, a 20 minute interview will result in a two minute piece of audio played on the radio, a 15 second television clip or a few quotes in a written story. Those being interviewed have no control over what can be used, but they can have control over many other things, for example where and when they meet with the journalist.

3. Be honest

Journalists know the lingo of their profession and they know how the public might react to a story once it is in the public domain; those reactions are not always positive. For people who are thrust into stories, telling them when a story might appear and in what platform, can ease the fear that comes along with sharing a difficult story or part of one's life. Telling someone who else might be interviewed for a story, or why other sources are being sought, can prevent negative surprises when a story is published or aired.

4. Language matters

Journalists know that language matters. Asking about pronouns is becoming more common. Ask also how someone wants to be referred in the story: are they a victim or are they a survivor? What part of their identity is central to the story, and what part isn't? Allowing people to control the language that is used when describing them and their situation can be a valuable tool in building trust and getting at nuanced questions about a person and what they've been through.

5. Consider giving resources

Journalists are taught to be dispassionate recorders of facts, but they are human, and they care about the people they speak to. To be good at their jobs, to get good stories and to write them well, they must have compassion and empathy. It's difficult for that relationship to sever immediately after a story is published or aired. News reports already publish lists of resources for those dealing with mental health issues or survivors of residential schools. Journalists should consider giving the people they speak to similar resources, if needed, such as crisis hotlines, if they believe that could help prevent further harm, particularly after difficult interviews.

6. Take time

It can be difficult to take and get time as a journalist, however, there is a need for self-advocacy. Journalists must push back against the constant grind to let their editors and producers know that they need more time with a particular subject, or that they need more time to reflect after a difficult story to avoid burnout themselves. The more this pushback happens, the more it will become the norm in the industry, and the better journalists will be able to reflect the wide range of stories in Canadian communities.

Chapter Six: Conclusion

Journalists record what is happening in the world, as it happens. The stories they choose to focus on can serve to inform future generations about what was going on in the world at a particular moment in time. In that way, journalists are the writers of the first draft of history. Increasingly, journalism has become aware of the stories that haven't been told: those of marginalized people, of racialized people, of systems that oppress and discriminate and shut the doors to those who aren't in the majority. Mainstream media outlets and the journalists within

them have been part of those systems, omitting stories that don't fit the narrative of Canada that is multicultural, inviting and forgiving; that is changing, and with it journalists' understanding of what they need to do to repair past wrongs, and how they need to approach communities which have in the past been left out of dominant narratives. Journalists have always reported on the immediate after-effects of traumatic events, such as car crashes, house fires, and shootings. Increasingly, they are reporting about larger traumas: historic sexual assaults, intergenerational addiction and survival, systemic discrimination, and intersectional oppression. Each of the participants of this study feel a great weight on their shoulders, of accurately, sensitively and compassionately reflecting the communities they are a part of, and communities which deserve more of their stories told.

Lessons learned

All of the participants in this study studied journalism in college or university; none had courses dedicated to the study of trauma or trauma-informed reporting, despite the fact that these kinds of stories form a large basis of the work they do, particularly at the beginnings of their careers, when younger journalists are thought to be "paying their dues" when they perform the difficult task of speaking to those in the immediate throes of a traumatic event. Each of the participants described the difficulty of approaching and speaking to people affected by trauma, and each had developed their own set of rules and guidelines to follow, from learning to read the body language of people they are approaching at the scene of a shooting, matching the energy of the person they're interviewing, and spending time beyond their work hours working with people in order to tell their story well. Each said the main thing that hinders them from doing their job better is time, and that although there are always "other ways to tell the story," often they feel they need to get in, get the interview, and get out, for the sake of the deadline and the pressure

from their managers. Each said their newsrooms are only recently beginning to acknowledge that telling such stories can be difficult and can have a negative impact on the journalist.

Newsrooms' understanding of trauma as a multi-layered thing comes at a time when resources are fewer; journalists are working in a more solitary fashion than ever because of the COVID-19 pandemic; and deadlines are even tighter because websites and social media channels need to always be updated with new material. At the same time, the hiring of more diverse journalists and younger journalists who are cognizant of the Black Lives Matter movement, Indigenous intergenerational trauma, and their own mental health, is butting up against the "old school" realities of newsrooms, where journalists were supposed to be dispassionate recorders of events, unaffected by the stories they tell or the demands of the people about whom they are writing. It is something that journalism in Canada must grapple with, and it is something that is beginning to be talked about, particularly with the release of the Taking Care (2022) survey. This study is a step toward the understanding that journalists have a responsibility not only to their listeners, viewers, and readers, but also to the people about whom they are telling stories and to the people in those stories. Journalists must take steps to understand trauma and to approach their daily tasks with the tools they need to do no further harm to those who entrust them with their stories. The participants in this study do so after having developed their own communication strategies; a profession-wide conversation about trauma and trauma-informed approaches, is in order. Those conversations will not harm the profession: they can make it stronger and the stories journalists tell more compelling and authentic. Trauma-informed communication ensures that people are not re-traumatized and also allows journalists to go deeper with the people they are speaking to, because trust is established. Journalism is a powerful communication tool, allowing the dissemination of information to a broad public, but the public's trust in journalism is eroding,

in part because of online misinformation as well as the idea that journalists will do anything to get a story. Journalists observe and communicate what they see and hear, but the way in which they do so is a complex social practice that requires training and a periodic re-evaluation of communication technique to ensure that the public is given stories with full and dynamic contexts.

Limitations

The sample of participants in this study is small, and it involved journalists in a particular part of Canada (southern Ontario). Although most journalists in Canada attend one of only a handful of journalism schools in the country, it's possible that some schools do teach courses on trauma and trauma-informed reporting but that they were not captured in this study. The journalists in this study were all at least five years out of school, and so they entered the profession before Black Lives Matter and before COVID-19, two events that changed how journalism is conducted and how the public thinks of journalism. The participants are those working in the field, not producers or editors who assign stories, and whose perspectives about deadlines, about the work of reporters, and about why a story must come together in a particular way are likely much different than the perspectives of those working in the field. This study also didn't look in-depth at the different approaches that can be taken when speaking to people who have experienced trauma within hours or days and those who have been experiencing it for months or years, and how those intersect or how approaches might be different for each. Photographers and videographers and their trauma-informed approaches were not studied. The diversity of the study participants did not form a large part of the conclusions, but it would be interesting to see how race and trauma in the journalists themselves intersect with how they approach the stories they report and the people they interview.

Recommendations for future study

While journalists often do their work solo, from finding a story to interviewing sources and writing or producing it, they do not work in a vacuum, and they are influenced by the newsrooms and news organizations in which they operate. It would be interesting to further study newsrooms as a whole, including those who assign stories (and therefore choose which stories are told and which are not) and those who edit them (and therefore choose the language that is used and how a story is presented). The participants of the study spoke about the old school mentality of some of their newsrooms and of some of their colleagues but this should be explored further. Another future area of study is an investigation of the people that journalists interviewed about a traumatic event or about ongoing trauma: how did the people being interviewed view the interaction with the reporter? Loved ones of people who have died are often thankful for stories written by journalists that memorialize their family members, but how do they feel about how they were approached, the questions that were asked, and the story that eventually appeared? Speaking to the people who have been interviewed could help inform how journalists approach people, how and what questions they ask, and how they present their stories.

Ultimately, the profession of journalism has to catch up to what is becoming apparent in the dominant narrative: that we must respect people's histories and their identities. By seeing itself as slightly outside of the mainstream, an onlooker that notes what is happening, the profession of journalism has been left behind as other professions where trauma is common have raced forward. Police officers, social workers, paramedics and firefighters have started to speak about the trauma they experience on the job and how it comes to affect them outside of work. Journalists have only just begun this conversation and they have only just begun thinking about how their own work impacts the trauma suffered by those they encounter on the job. By taking

care to approach people in a way that acknowledges and takes into account their trauma, journalist's stories will be better; they will more accurately represent the communities they represent; and they can begin to rebuild a trust that has been eroded over decades.

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Appendix A

Interview questions

1. Tell me about yourself and your career trajectory.
2. How do you define trauma-informed practice?
3. In what ways has your reporting been trauma-informed?
4. Tell me about a time you've used trauma-informed reporting
5. Where or from whom did you learn about trauma and trauma-informed practice?
6. What kind of focus on trauma-informed reporting have you seen during your career?
7. What attitudes about trauma-informed practice have you encountered among your reporter peers?
8. What attitudes about trauma-informed practice have you encountered among your superiors, such as producers or editors?
9. What skills or newsroom supports would be helpful to balance trauma-informed reporting with newsroom expectations?
10. Do you think it's possible to use trauma-informed journalism while adhering to daily deadlines?
11. What hinders you or has hindered you from using trauma-informed practices during your reporting?

Appendix B

Hello. My name is Kate Dubinski, and I'm a graduate student at Mount Saint Vincent University.

I am beginning my Masters of Arts (Communication Studies) thesis. I am inviting you to participate and share your expertise in the field of journalism. I am also a working journalist; currently, I work at CBC London contributing to the radio and digital platforms. I have previously worked in print journalism at the London Free Press and before that in Edmonton and Fort McMurray, Alberta.

My research focuses on trauma-informed journalism. I would like to know what journalists know about trauma-informed practice, how they do or don't use it in their interviews and story-writing, and what resources they would like to see in their newsrooms to help them gather and report news that is sensitive to the people they are speaking to and reporting about.

If you agree to be part of this study, you would participate in a one-on-one interview with me over Zoom or another virtual video conferencing software of your choice. The call would last about 30-50 minutes and would be recorded for note-taking and analysis purposes. After the study is over, the recording would be erased.

Your identifying information, including your name and news affiliation, will be anonymized for the purposes of the final study paper. The insights I gain from you and other participants will be used to write a thesis about trauma-informed practice in journalism.

Participation in the interview and study is voluntary and confidential. You can withdraw at any time and you can choose to not answer any questions during the interview process.

Appendix C

Informed Consent

You are being invited to take part in a research study about trauma-informed journalism. It is important that you understand the purpose of this study and what you will be asked to do before you decide if you would like to take part in the study. You do not have to take part in the study. Participation is entirely voluntary. If you have any questions about this study, the researcher will be happy to give you further information.

The researcher is Kate Dubinski. She is a journalist in Ontario and she is completing her masters of communications degree at Mount Saint Vincent University, based in Halifax, Nova Scotia.

The researcher is interested in understanding how journalists understand trauma-informed practice when they interview people after difficult, violent or emotionally complex news events. The insights gained through this study will help inform further research about the issue of trauma-informed practice in the context of daily journalism.

If you agree to enter into this study, you will be asked to participate in a one-on-one interview with the researcher about your experiences and views. This will be done over Zoom or another virtual video call service, which will be recorded for note-taking purposes. There will be questions about your experiences in the newsrooms which you have worked and it will likely last 30 to 50 minutes.

Your decision to participate or not to participate will remain confidential. If you choose to participate, only the researcher will know your name. Your name or news affiliation will not appear in any public documents and steps will be taken to make sure identifying features are not included in the final research paper. You may withdraw from the interview at any time, and you may choose not to answer any of the questions.

Your participation in this study is entirely voluntary and you may choose to withdraw at any time from the study, up until or just prior to the publication of the findings, approximately in June 2022. After the publication, any identifiable information gathered through Zoom or other recordings will be destroyed. No one will know whether you have or have not participated in this research.

If you have any questions, please contact Kate Dubinski at XXX-XXX-XXXX. If you would like to contact someone not directly involved in the study, please contact Alla Kushniryk, Kate's thesis supervisor, at XXX-XXX-XXXX.

I acknowledge that I have read and understand the content of this consent form.

Appendix D

Initial memos

Participant 1

The idea of trying to be a human being first and a journalist second really came out in this interview, as well as the fact that you get better with practice in interviewing people about different subject matters. The idea of ‘old school’ journalism not caring about people and new school being more empathetic also struck a chord, as did the idea that time is a luxury that many journalists working on deadlines don’t have. The participant talked about going against what he or she thought their editors might want by editing out racist or other statements from people who had been through a trauma, as a way to protect them. Getting people to cry is good for journalism but not great for the human being.

Participant 2

A big theme was the idea of intergenerational trauma and intersectionality; the idea that trauma isn’t just from a car accident or a death in the family, but a longer, living, breathing thing. This journalist also talked about systemic trauma and how journalism plays into that, so need to be even more respectful of people from communities who may have been harmed in the past. Superiors like editors or producers don’t seem to understand that. This journalist thinks there needs to be a culture shift in journalism to think about these communities and this kind of layered trauma, but sometimes deadlines don’t allow that. What also stuck out to me is the sense of duty to repair the wrongs of journalists that were not sensitive, wanting to do better and to give people a better experience. There’s a sense of being pulled in two directions: that of the obligations of the human being and that of the journalist; Advocate versus stenographer. Being an advocate isn’t what the ‘old school’ superiors want, but it’s what sometimes seems right.

Participant 3

The lack of time and resources really came through in this interview. When starting out, you don't want to ask questions because you think you'll sound ill-informed or stupid, which is ironic because that's when you need help the most. Managers tend to be older men and think that trauma and trauma-informed practice is a waste of time. There's an old-school mentality among older journalists: that you just write how you want to write, not how the person you're speaking with wants you to (for example, wanting to use nuanced language, such as survivor versus victim, resulted in an argument with a colleague). There's a pull between wanting to get a good story, which is seen as selfish, and wanting to be good to sources (sharing links when published). Has felt pressure to get the story, no matter what, and with little regard for the reporter's mental health.

Participant 4

Being a human being and being empathetic was really important to this journalist. They did things such as listening to someone speak even though they knew it wasn't going to be a story. Through time, you learn to match people's energy and how to read them, but it's not taught at all. Spoke a little bit about the developing awareness in newsrooms about how trauma affects entire communities, such as Indigenous people re residential schools. Speaking to people just becomes part of the job, and being a human first and journalist second takes commitment and time. They have spent hours emailing and on the phone with someone they knew there wouldn't be a story about, because it's the human thing to do. Thinks about how they would want to be treated if they were speaking to a journalist.

Participant 5

At the beginning of their career, there is very little training and there's a sense of just figuring out things as you go along, even though they did a masters in journalism. You learn in the field and that could harm people. They felt responsible for someone's death by suicide after a story appeared about charges against them, but no one talked to them about it in the newsroom. Used to be taught to be detached recorder of things but has realized it's much more helpful to be empathetic, to acknowledge what people are telling you. Is it appropriate to offer help/resources to someone who you're interviewing? This journalist doesn't know and there's a tension between being human and being a reporter. The focus is always on getting the story, but we need to reframe that. As an older journalist, they are able to take more time to do stories right, but they feel for the younger journalists who aren't able to do that.

Participant 6

This journalist takes being human first very seriously and breaks journalistic rules that they think will help them be more trauma-informed, which they would never admit to their superiors. There's a tension again between doing what's right for the person and what journalism rules tell you you should do. This journalist is further in their career and so is able to take a lot of time with people, but worries about how they have harmed people in the past because of need to get the story. They talked about there not being enough awareness among reporters about trauma and how to approach people (they learned from speaking to first responders for stories). There's not outright opposition from newsroom managers but there's a need to get a story fast. Old school editor culture of get the story, don't think about the person.

Appendix E: In-vivo coding

Participant 1

Sensitive
 Walking the balance
 Need versus respect
 Sensitive
 Try to be a human being
 Asking difficult questions
 Talking them through it
 Tell them not to worry, go
 at own pace
 Take your time
 Sensitive
 Don't use if negative
 perception
 I try to protect people
 Even if better story, don't
 include it to be decent
 Pause, let them cry
 No pressure to answers
 I always tell them
 Want to remember the
 person
 List of tips
 Give them opportunity to
 talk, memorialize daughter
 Some say yes, some don't
 People thankful for stories
 Thankful for stories
 Gave them copies of
 newspaper, PDF
 You get used to it
 Give them an opportunity
 to talk
 Sometimes they're
 thankful
 It's their right to say no
 Don't say you know how
 you feel because you don't

Be a decent human being
 You get better with
 practice
 Be a decent human being
 Editors want the story no
 matter what
 Old school editors
 Learn from your own
 experiences
 Become desensitized for
 good or bad
 First time is the hardest
 It's part of the job
 Get the story
 If they don't want to talk
 that's okay
 Never felt forced
 Better feelings from some
 editors than others
 Some editors have a
 human touch
 Some editors focus on end
 result
 Share the story after
 I hope I did justice to your
 loved one
 Crying means good quotes
 but it sounds bad
 Tension between
 journalism versus human
 "It sounds bad" but crying
 means good job (said it
 three times)
 Disservice to family and
 community/giving them an
 opportunity to talk
 Has to be done even if it's
 hard (tension)

Pillar of journalism to
 explore human side of any
 situation or tragedy
 It's part of the job
 Not doing your job if can't
 do it
 Nothing is going to make it
 easier
 Extra days would be good
 Time to process
 Time is a luxury
 I've adapted to work
 within constraints
 It does get easier
 Peer support is useful
 There are other ways to tell
 the story
 Easier if more time
 Waiting until someone is
 ready to talk
 Tension between empathy
 and difficulty
 The better you are at those
 stories, the more you get
 assigned them
 It's a double-edged sword
 It can be too much
 It's a blessing and a curse
 Just be decent with people
 Put yourself in their shoes
 I want to protect people
 Moments of grief, you're
 not thinking clearly
 Be a human being
 Be a decent person

Participant 2

Fully respecting boundaries
 Coming from a place of compassion
 Vulnerable populations
 Trying to understand impacts of trauma
 Trauma and its impact can be unseen
 Try to learn what they've experienced
 Research beforehand
 Systemic racism
 Intersectionality
 Human connection
 I don't want to just take, take, take
 I want them to trust me
 Share their story
 Understand boundaries
 Building trust and understanding boundaries takes time.
 Building a relationship
 Asking and respecting the needs of the person
 Giving power to the person
 Their comfort is my priority
 Meeting place of person's choosing
 Comfort
 Language is important
 I want to make sure my language doesn't further victimize/traumatize the person
 Systemic and institutional trauma
 Give them power to choose language
 Have to ask sensitive questions

Start with low-stakes questions
 Taking time during interviews
 The relationship doesn't end there
 I do care about you as an individual
 Want to respect the reporter-subject boundary
 I'm a human being
 Trauma comes in different forms
 Historic, identities that intersect
 People who have been historically disenfranchised experience trauma in different ways
 Systemic trauma, institutional trauma
 Don't come in one shape or form
 Have to do our own research
 I want the story
 I want them to speak out
 After a few months they will talk
 Many layers of trauma, not a single event
 Dig deeper to understand the full extent
 Impact of trauma is not on the surface
 Understand community outside of reporter status
 Tension between reporter and human being
 Listening
 My own trauma
 How trauma shapes you
 Journalists can harm
 Time needed
 Negative relationship with media

Minorities or vulnerable populations distrust the media
 Trying to pick up the pieces of previous journalists
 Create better relationships
 Communities I serve
 Misrepresented in the media
 I try to put myself in their shoes
 I tell vulnerable, personal stories
 Not encouraged because of deadlines
 Amount of work
 More time needed
 You need time
 Emotionally draining
 Time is not respected
 Lip service
 No resources
 The shift is a little bit performative
 More work needs to be done
 Can't just have conversations
 We're getting called out on not being trauma-informed
 Reporters have limitations
 I've had to advocate for a story
 It's frustrating
 Old school managers/not willing to budget/don't see the importance
 Needs to be a culture shift
 It starts in our systems and can trickle down to newsrooms
 You can't change how people think
 Management needs to understand

Need to understand the benefit
 There's a benefit to trauma informed journalism
 Respecting our subjects and communities
 Helps break down barriers, helps us elevate the voices of people
 We haven't created time to hear some communities/people
 We're not advocating, we're reporters
 Respecting boundaries
 Prioritizing their dignity
 Not further harming them
 Resources are crucial
 Time to work

Check in on mental health
 Tackle the impact
 Second-hand trauma
 Time to do the story, time off after a story to breathe
 Spot news, trauma informed can be easy
 You need more time for systemic trauma
 Ties have been severed between media and communities
 Need to build relationships
 Help break down barriers
 Value of elevating voices
 Need to change our approach
 Crucial to have those stories at the forefront

Neutral versus that I believe them
 I try to avoid helping, unfortunately
 I am always on the side of the oppressed
 I genuinely feel compassion
 I want to help people
 I keep checking in afterwards
 We pick and choose what we take our time with/give energy to
 Let's look at our own systemic racism or biases
 Hope ALL communities can be granted trauma informed approach

Participant 3

Having an understanding of someone's history
 Approaching them based on understanding of that experience
 My own doing
 Really listening
 Listening to language
 Empathetic
 So kind
 Kindness is pretty important for hard news
 Hard to watch others be very abrasive
 Language ... victim versus survivor, needed to advocate
 I had to argue for their terminology
 Certain times when someone wants language used and we don't do it
 I try to pay attention to what people have told me

It's so nuanced
 The feeling they're giving off
 A lot of it is feelings based
 Understanding body language
 Not taking advantage of someone
 You don't learn it until you do it
 Someone willing to take the time to explain it to you
 Learn through actual reporting
 Learn on the job
 Dreading it
 Learning on my own
 Don't feel comfortable asking for help at beginning
 It takes time and experience to ask questions

Recognizing that if you're white, you don't have the same experiences as a POC
 No emails from managers about how to approach people
 What you should understand about their history (abuse, human trafficking)
 Taking steps small steps
 Asking about trauma of the journalist themselves
 First time, people checking in
 How to approach people, nothing yet
 Super higher ups more informed
 Boomer generation not informed
 Old school mentality among middle managers

There's a generational gap
in approach to
trauma/journalism
Old school mentality
thinks young people are
too sensitive
They think "We can't say
anything, nothing we say is
right"
Pushback from middle
managers/editors/producers
Black Lives Matter
changed things a little bit
Men in their 50s have old
school mentality as a
coping mechanism

It's kind of shitty
It feels like we're using
that person
So little time in the day
No capacity to remember
to send things to people
We're on deadline
We're always working
No time of capacity or
space or resources
It's kind of selfish, I do it
because it's a wider benefit
to myself
Tension between being a
reporter, knowing that
you're doing something to
be nice but also because
you know it's going to get

Meetings with people who
experienced things would
be good
We barely peed during the
day ... no time!
Lunch and learns - no time
Would have to be very
intentional, get paid
overtime for it, no
judgment if silly question
Time is money
If going to trauma training,
takes away time from
doing actual stories
A shift needed
Resources
Not enough reporters, not
enough content, not
enough time
you a better story or more
stories in the end/people
recommend you to other
people/stories
Want to understand things
better but no time (BLM)
I haven't had a second to
open up a book
If something falls through,
no time to breath, onto the
next thing
Need to have one day just
to sit and reflect, make
calls, make emails
Need for time, dedicated
time every few weeks
Could learn more
background, read articles

Everything is a scramble
No time to make someone
comfortable
Industry would need to
change
More money to take things
slower
Very quick
speech explaining the story
Tension because the
reporter knows this is
really quick, it's a quick
spiel ... time versus
deadline
Send them a link, thank
them
Back and forth with people
afterwards (human
connection)
It's so demanding
Thank you so much, file
one story
Non-stop
I haven't slept but do one
more story
They're missing the mark
Boss checking in and then
asking for more (lip
service)
You're never taught this is
the way to approach
people
It's assumed you can do it
It's an important people
skill that a lot of people
don't have

Participant 4

Awareness
 Dealing with something
 Sensitive
 Other people's trauma
 How I approach them
 Different stages of
 conversation
 Give them lots of outs
 I want the story
 Tension between wanting
 the story and being a
 sensitive human being
 Difficult
 No pressure
 Sorry for your loss
 Sensitive
 It's a contract that we're
 talking about something
 difficult
 Be a human being
 Be empathetic
 Just have to be a human
 If crying, pause
 Get their consent
 Talking them through
 consent
 Talking them through the
 story treatment
 Sensitive to their mind
 Learn by doing, talking
 Learn to match their
 energy, how to read them
 (empathy)
 Human to human
 Context of trauma
 Residential school
 survivors
 You may never know the
 context
 Wider sense of what's
 going on
 Didn't know that as a
 younger reporter
 How trauma has impacted
 a wider community

As a white person I don't
 know that
 Talk about who will make
 calls, not how to make
 those calls
 Dread when you have to do
 it
 Learn by doing, by
 overhearing people do it
 Duncan McCue about
 Indigenous communities
 There's probably a reason
 why you don't understand
 Training on indigenous
 communities but not others
 Every young journalist gets
 thrown under the bus to
 make those calls
 The idea that it's getting
 "thrown under the bus" =
 not a positive thing
 Don't be pushy
 Be respectful
 Tension between what you
 think other journalists are
 like (I don't think you
 should be pushy but maybe
 others do).
 We don't pause to consider
 (time)
 It's part of the job
 It becomes part of the job
 You do it or you don't do
 the job
 There's always another
 way to get the story
 Call someone who is one
 step removed from the
 story
 No pressure to get the story
 from one particular source
 You have to do it but you
 don't know how
 You don't want to do it but
 you do it
 It's terrifying

You just feel shitty
 Don't take things
 personally
 There's an idea that you
 have to do it because it's
 part of the job but you
 don't know how
 There are other ways to tell
 the story
 Keep communication open
 if they allow (giving them
 power)
 Human being first and a
 journalist second
 Reach out in a few weeks'
 time
 Might make for a better
 story
 Send links after
 Do it for people who aren't
 in the media
 I want to be available to
 people
 Can't show them ahead of
 time
 Want them to know what
 their name is attached to
 I have developed a
 relationship
 If it were me, I'd want that
 done for me
 You're a journalist but
 you're also a person
 Developed a connection
 It feels like the right thing
 to do (sending links)
 They've put trust in you
 It's a commitment (time
 and emotionally)
 Respond to emails, phone
 calls, even if no story
 Want person to have a
 positive interaction with a
 journalist
 They didn't screw me over

Want the person to feel ‘I was heard, I was understood’

Factually correct
Even if not entirely happy with everything, factually

correct (needs of the journalist to tell different sides)

Participant 5

Taking into consideration experiences

Sensitive

Compassionate

Understanding

Can be an unbiased journalist while still being a human being

You learn in the field, you learn by doing

You make mistakes, figure out this isn’t the way to do things

Never any formal training

Young journalists doing the most work

Hustling

No check-ins with higher ups when starting out

I felt responsible for a person’s death (from a news brief)

Man died in front of me (motorcycle accident)

It makes me emotional

We had no idea what we were doing at all

No idea how to approach those conversations

One incident at the beginning of career has struck with them until now

Informs how they do their job

Have to share their story

Changed for the better recently

They want us to do the story

How to get the story, not how to approach people to not retraumatize them

Human being first

Right to privacy and dignity

Compassion

Person first, story second

I never push even if I want the story

Tension between getting the details and being

compassionate, compassion wins

Older so don’t get those assignments anymore

Talk people through why asking questions

Back in the day, taught to be detached, just a recorder of events

Old school mentality of being detached is changing

Change for the better

Pause and acknowledge what someone is telling you

Tension between old school and new, better practice

Wish there were resources to give to people

People come to journalists for help (but we don’t have resources)

Desperate people look to us but we can’t help,

ignore them or say can’t help

Wish there was a way to help

Try to be sensitive but feel limited

Feels tension of people coming for help but there’s nothing we can do to help

If trauma, go to greater lengths to explain

treatment, what it will say

Major shift happening

For the better

In society and in journalism

Need to be cognizant of experiences of others

Not just recording

Understand, be sensitive

Tell stories from communities that don’t reflect our own

Need to dredge up the past

Putting indigenous people and their desires in the media

Huge shift

Respecting their wishes, what stories they want to tell

Tell their own stories

Be respectful of lived experience

Go to where people live

Don’t be robot-like and insensitive

We realize we need to be reporting these stories,

now need to think about how
 Discussing impact of mental health on reporters
 Keeping dignity top of mind
 Respectful of the person
 Editors ask how a reporter is doing
 How do we do it better is not a conversation we have
 Mindset pamphlet on suicide - language. That's a huge help. Practical guide.
 Fewer resources
 No time for hand-holding
 Guide could be helpful for young and old
 Break out of bad habits
 Terminology

How to approach things more sensitively
 A guideline
 Everyone experiences trauma differently
 A guide would be helpful so I know I'm not stepping outside the boundaries of my professional integrity or what my employer wants me to do/allows me to do
 Make stories better
 Journalists aren't trusted
 Stereotype of bad journalists is because not trauma-informed
 We're people too
 Pause, take a break, how to make the story better (time)

People think journalists are insensitive jerks
 Focus is get the story, tell the story
 The end justifies the means
 End result will help the person tell the story even if it's uncomfortable
 Shift needs to happen that it's not either/or situation
 Tension between what journalism is/was and what it could be
 You're the intern
 You're paying your dues
 Incidents stick with you
 There should be a better way
 Help people navigate

Participant 6

Never had guidelines
 Make mistakes along the way
 Tension because no training so make mistakes that hurt people
 How I treat people
 An understanding
 Care and caution
 Many steps
 Reaching out takes work
 Human first, journalist second
 Express my feelings
 How sad I feel, not in a fake or false way
 Tension - journalists in the past have been fake or false, but I am sincere

I choose my words carefully
 Sincere
 Express sympathy
 Difficult to approach people on the scene
 You have to be cautious
 Might lash out, have to accept that
 Start with off the record
 Somewhere safe (neutral place)
 Safe place
 Only when they want to
 When they want
 Build up trust
 I always ask
 Give them story before
 Tension between company policy, ethics, but it's important

I break that rule all the time
 It pains me as a journalist to do that
 Bosses would not approve
 Often it's a deal breaker
 You can pull out any any moment
 Give them a lot of leeway
 Giving power to the people they talk to (informed consent)
 You have to be very patient
 You can't rush them
 No time limit on these interviews
 Keep an eye on how they're doing

Journalists always want tears, I have less of a desire to do that
 (Tension between what journalists are supposed to want and what they want)
 Give them space or silence
 Turn them gently away to something not causing pain
 Empathy
 I'm giving them a voice
 I want to comfort people
 Panic attack in an interview, I didn't know what to do
 She guided me
 Try to be as open as I can
 You direct how it goes (power)
 Constant touch
 Some people don't want that and some do
 Respect people
 Intuitively know how to deal with people
 Self-taught
 Constantly be aware
 Need comfort
 Offer help
 Good idea to offer resources after but have never done it
 Connected a teen with a shelter
 Trial and error
 Lots of errors
 I've hurt people
 Tension between what works and what journalism ethics dictates
 Journalism is intrusive
 No one is prepared
 If not trauma informed, you don't get the story

Trauma informed because military, police, correctional services
 I've spoken to experts about how journalism can affect people
 Not enough awareness
 Not talked about how to approach people
 Too blunt or forceful or obviously fake
 Focus is on getting the story
 Not talked about in newsroom
 No opposition but no support or awareness
 Lack of awareness
 Resistance
 Old school editor culture of get the story, don't think about the person
 That's kind of changing
 Afzaal family has changed things
 Editors need to be on board
 Don't want to admit that we face trauma
 Has to be supported from the top and editors need to support it
 Can't be lip service
 Buy in from below and above
 Needs to be done in a safe way for journalists (so they can share stories of what they've done wrong)
 Ethics as a human being and for career potential
 Guidelines
 Check in afterwards
 Competition with other journalists
 All trying to get great quote or great scoop

People in emotional shock say things they shouldn't
 Editing out
 Protecting people from what they've said when in shock
 Competition is so intense
 Editors don't care about trauma if your competition has stories that you don't have
 Younger reporters more pressure
 More aggressive or assertive
 We don't train people for that
 Share yourself if needed
 Have courses,
 Hire more people
 Tone down the pressure
 Tension between pressure to get good story and being trauma informed
 Protect the people we're talking to
 Different than if 20 years ago
 We don't push like we did in the 90s
 Desire to get the story can get in your way
 You want the story
 It can be a hindrance
 Tension between wanting to get the story and being trauma-informed
 The culture is a hindrance
 Checklists can happen but culture needs to change
 Get the story regardless of what it takes or who it might hurt
 The culture is get the story
 Push and push and ignore people

Push for what people want
and get pushback from
editors (changing a picture)
Tension between editors
who don't understand and

reporter who need to deal
with the people
I look back in horror
Advice grows and changes
over the years

We need learning and
training

Appendix F

Memoing by category*MEMO 1: Person first, journalist second*

There is a tension between wanting to be a good journalist and also being sensitive to the needs of the person you are interviewing. There is also a tension between wanting to adhere to the rules, often unwritten, of the profession, for example, not showing the story to the person beforehand, pushing hard to get a story, being an unbiased recorder of facts versus an editor of someone's words, and wanting to be a human being who is an empathetic listener, someone who does not exploit the pain of others for their own gain or for their own career. This can create a tension between the journalist who works solo in the field, and is making decisions by him or herself based on what their editors told them they want or what they think their editors want, and what is actually the "human" thing to do. The journalist is checking for body language at the scene of a shooting, or calling multiple times and having initial conversations with people before the story is actually going to be published. This idea of the journalist working alone just emerged as I wrote this memo. The journalist has a set of guiding principles that he or she has picked up in journalism school or through years of experience, but their collection of data (interviews) is a solitary one, particularly at the beginning of a career, when they are sent out the most graphic stories as the most junior person. That means the most junior journalists are the ones working most alone. The more experienced journalist gets to take his or her time, gets to have a lead-up to the stories they're telling. It can be difficult to advocate for oneself to get more time to work on a story, particularly at the beginning of a career. There is a big element of empathy here. The journalist knows, because people have said to him or her, that speaking to people they don't know in a moment of intense grief or about an ongoing trauma that has changed their lives, is

strange. We don't usually, as a society, do that. We don't usually confess to strangers our deep emotions and yet that's what the journalist is trying to get. They are human, and they want to, but they are also under pressure to get it, get out, and write the story. The constraints include the pressures put on themselves to get the story, the editors/producers who want the story, and their own perception of who a journalist is or should be. There are also written and unwritten rules that the journalists find themselves breaking sometimes: listening to people who are having a hard time but who will never appear in a story (because you want to be a good person and listen to their problems); journalists are supposed to be unbiased, but inevitably when you hear from people who are marginalized and have suffered because of intergenerational trauma or systemic discrimination, you come to feel like an advocate for those people, or at least sympathize with what they're going through. Journalists are also supposed to be recorders of fact, without intervention, but inevitably they want to protect some of the people they're writing about, because they know that speaking in the media can come with negative blowback on social media, etc.

Memo 2: "Sorry for your loss," I want to be sensitive // Protecting the subject // journalists are jerks

This relates to the first category. The journalist doesn't want to say "I know how you feel" because they don't, having never experienced that particular trauma. They also want to be sensitive to the person they are interviewing, so they will leave out things that they perceive to not be important to the actual subject matter, for example, saying something racist during a grief-stricken interview. They want to protect the person because they know that they are coming from a place of pain, and they know that speaking to the media is not a common occurrence. This relates to the first category: they want to be people first, journalists second, by listening to what

their subjects are saying and protecting them from looking foolish in the media. They say they want to put people at ease and they want to treat the subject the way they would want to be treated during an interview. They read body language, so if someone is turning away, they don't pester them for more information. There's an awareness that not a lot of people have experience with the media. There's also an awareness that there's a perception that "journalists are jerks." Each person spoke about the stigma of the journalist (though did not say stigma), the perception of the profession as ambulance chasers, people who thrust cameras and microphones into people's faces in moments of intense grief, people who do not care about the people they are writing about. What emerged from these interviews is quite the opposite, that these people want their subjects to have a good experience with journalists. Each journalist is seemingly trying to rehabilitate the image of the profession with each interaction with the public, particularly those experiencing trauma. Several said they felt like they were supposed to want tears on camera, and selfishly they knew it would make for a better story, but on a human level they didn't want to make people cry.

Memo 3: Riding on the shoulders of (negative) history

There's a tension between the idea that "grizzled veterans" are not affected in any way by the stories they have written and are writing, and a new generation of journalists who are sensitive to the needs of the people they're interviewing. These perceptions of grizzled vets are reinforced by the seeming insensitivity of some editors or producers, who push to get the story and to get it quickly, without regard for how the journalist will have to behave to get that story. Beyond the perception of reporters who are ambulance chasers, there's also the larger context of intersectionality and that journalists have not done a good job of reflecting intergenerational trauma or trauma that comes from systemic racism or discrimination. Newsrooms have been

predominantly white and male so there's a history of not paying attention to the needs of marginalized communities and their needs from a news-collection point of view, and from reflecting their ideas or traumas in a way that feels right to them. Many of the journalists talked about the increased emphasis given to telling the stories of residential school survivors and said they don't just want to "take" stories but to tell them in a respectful way. Historically, journalists have gotten the story and gotten out, so sitting for days or weeks with a person to tell their story is not something that is often practiced in the context of daily journalism. There's also very little time to do that kind of journalism, particularly when starting out as a journalist, because there is pressure to get the story right away. That pressure exists from the newsrooms that these reporters work for, from the journalists themselves, and from the competitive nature of the business, which puts an emphasis and awards getting the scoop, getting the story first.

Memo 4: Get the story // there's no time

The bottom line is that the journalists face pressures from their managers to get the story and then move onto the next one, because the industry has seen a massive contraction in the past few decades, and so newsrooms are stressed, taxed, under-funded and under-resources. Aside from the fact that there are few people to do many stories, there are also deadline pressures. Daily newspapers or radio shows much produce, or there will be white space or dead air, so there's a pressure to get the story as quickly as possible, which doesn't always align with a trauma-informed approach. There's also no time to rest in between stories, to take a breather and to think about one's own mental health and how the story went (or to share a link to the story with the subject) because there's a quick moving on to the next story. There's literally "no time for handholding" when a journalist is first young, and there's also no time once you know what you're doing, because if you're good at it, you'll just get assigned more stories like that (two

people talked about the fact that they're perceived in their newsrooms as being sensitive, so they get sent out to do stories about grieving families. They called this an asset and a curse). There's a very real tension between the needs of daily journalism, so interviewing someone and then getting the story out by the end of that day or early the next, and the actual time it takes to build connections and trust with the people you're supposed to be interviewing. The job requires a quick turn-around, but trauma-informed approaches often take time. Researching a particular community or issue beforehand, figuring out where a person wants to meet, what language they want to use, getting their whole story, choosing the words in your radio, television or print piece, all of it takes time, which is very limited because there are fewer reporters, newsrooms are strapped, and there's a sense of urgency to get things done and move onto the next story. Some stories do take longer, and reporters (often the more experienced ones) are given the time to do them, or ask for the time to do them, or work on the stories on their own time. These are the stories that are more complex, such as historical abuses or assaults, stories of systemic racism or discrimination, intergenerational trauma, etc. These stories are almost exclusively done by the more experienced reporters because the younger ones are doing the quick, daily stories. After a story is written, it also takes time for the journalist to decompress and take a breather, but they don't usually get that time because it's onto the next story, which might be just as traumatic as the last.

Memo 5: Learn by doing, it's part of the job

The youngest reporters get the most assignments that are spot news, in the moment trauma. That's because it's not seen as a great assignment, their older counterparts are working on longer more in-depth pieces, and there's a culture of 'learning by doing.' Each of the reporters I spoke to went to journalism school, but none learned anything about trauma informed practice, and the

lessons they had on speaking to people with trauma, or at traumatic moments, were very brief. There was a sense of, if you can't do it, you'll just leave the profession. The job is the job and you have to be able to do it, and if you can't you have to find a different job. The journalists talked about cringe-worthy moments they had where they were not prepared properly to speak to victims of trauma, but they did it anyway. One said they think about all the people they've hurt along the way. Others expressed incredulity that they were sent out to speak to people experiencing trauma without any prior experience. They all, however, said that that was just part of the job and just part of how it is. They don't know if you can teach that in a classroom. That's an interesting concept ... how much can you teach and how much do you have to learn on the job because that's just the way it is and there's no replacement for on-the-job learning. Perhaps there could be more on-the-job training, such as shadowing a more experienced reporter, to see how things can be done well. Although they all learned by doing, they did talk about the fact that resources would be really helpful, including guiding principles such as those that are available for reporting on mental health and suicide. The journalists also talked about the need for more time to gather one's thoughts after a difficult story, or guidance on how to think about trauma and how it can be effectively approached, although they doubted their superiors (editors, producers) commitment to that, and the ability to do that within the time constraints of the job. On the concept of learning by doing, each of the journalists reported elements of trauma-informed approaches that they'd developed on their own, without knowing about being trauma-informed, for example, meeting someone in a comfortable place, not pretending to know what they are going through, giving them power by telling them where their story would appear and when, sending them links to the story afterwards, debriefing or speaking afterwards if needed. Some talked about doing research beforehand, or going in with a knowledge beforehand of what

the person might have been going through, and several talked about breaking the rules of the profession (showing stories beforehand, not pushing people too hard) as a way to be more trauma-informed. All of this takes time, which is in short supply.