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By: **Gregory P. Perreault** and Valérie Bélair-Gagnon

## Abstract

This study seeks to explore the motivations and labor of lifestyle, or “soft news,” journalists. Rooted in the lens of discursive institutionalism and through 30 interviews with lifestyle journalists in the United States, this study reflects on the aspirational labor -- the opportunity to “do what you love” -- that motivates entry into journalism but also can encourage disengagement. This study finds that while lifestyle journalists are motivated to enter the profession because of their own personal connection to the topic, their desire to be embedded in the topic and their love for the people in the genre, they also have to negotiate institutional expectations. Furthermore, lifestyle journalists seemed to reflect a sort of cognitive dissonance in their practices -- while drawn to the idea they would never actually work, since they were embedded in their passion -- in reality what many journalists described reflected that they had difficulty leaving work, given that even their passion had become work.

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# The Lifestyle of Lifestyle Journalism: How Reporters Discursively Manage Their Aspirations in Their Daily Work

Gregory P. Perreault <sup>a</sup> and Valérie Béclair-Gagnon  <sup>b</sup>

<sup>a</sup>Department of Communication, Appalachian State University, Boone, NC, USA; <sup>b</sup>Hubbard School of Journalism & Mass Communication, University of Minnesota-Twin Cities, Minneapolis, MN, USA

## ABSTRACT

This study seeks to explore the motivations and labor of lifestyle, or “soft news,” journalists. Rooted in the lens of discursive institutionalism and through 30 interviews with lifestyle journalists in the United States, this study reflects on the aspirational labor—the opportunity to “do what you love”—that motivates entry into journalism but also can encourage disengagement. This study finds that while lifestyle journalists are motivated to enter the profession because of their own personal connection to the topic, their desire to be embedded in the topic and their love for the people in the genre, they also have to negotiate institutional expectations. Furthermore, lifestyle journalists seemed to reflect a sort of cognitive dissonance in their practices—while drawn to the idea they would never actually work, since they were embedded in their passion—in reality what many journalists described reflected that they had difficulty leaving work, given that even their passion had become work.

## KEYWORDS

Aspirational labor; emotional engagement; lifestyle journalism; discursive institutionalism; digital materialities; newsroom innovation

## Introduction

Brian Moritz had found his dream job. As a sports journalist at a large news outlet in the northeastern United States, Moritz covered every major league sport: hockey, football, soccer, baseball, basketball. It was the fulfillment of a dream he found at age 18: to cover and live in the topic he loved. For more than ten years, he spent evenings in stadiums talking to players he had idolized and learning what made the world’s most accomplished athletes tick.

In 2006, a video message from his girlfriend—and later wife—changed his outlook on the field. Sitting in the stands for the Double-A Binghamton Mets, the grounds crew was still watering the field and the crowd was starting to file in as he watched the video message. It was a video of her niece’s ballet recital. He felt a mixture of pride, watching her dance so brilliantly, but also a wave of sadness. As he recounted on his blog after leaving sports journalism, “would this be how I connected with my daughter someday? Would I be watching her dance recitals on a laptop in the press box rather than from the front row?” (Moritz 2018).

Moritz knew the demands of sports journalism when he entered the profession. He was cognizant that being a sports journalist was a *lifestyle*. But what he said he couldn't have anticipated was the impact that would have later: when there was no separating work from play, family from duty, joy from occupation.

Look, being a sports writer is a great job. You get paid to watch sports. But it's still a job. One that requires a lot of night work, a lot of weekend work, a lot of travel. Every sports writer has a list of family functions that they've missed due to the job ... Gradually, I realized I didn't want to be a reporter anymore. I didn't want to be a beat writer first and a husband (and father) second. (Moritz 2018)

Sports journalism, as with much of lifestyle journalism, reflects a sort of aspirational labor, the opportunity to “do what you love” (Duffy 2017). As important as the *aspirational* aspect is to lifestyle journalism, it is equally *labor*—labor that is an institutional commodity, meaning that “doing what you love” becomes part of financially driven activities (Hochschild 2012). Our study seeks to explore the “lifestyle of lifestyle journalists,” journalists who report on what some consider the softer areas of journalism that tend toward an advice and guidance orientation (Hanusch 2012). In doing so, our goal is to understand what motivates lifestyle journalists to enter the field and how they conceptualize their work within lifestyle journalism. Through the lens of discursive institutionalism and aspirational labor, this study reflects on interviews with 30 lifestyle journalists in the US. We argue that while prior research often sees journalists placing themselves within institutions via their professional roles (Raemy 2020; Vos and Thomas 2018), lifestyle journalists discursively locate themselves within journalism through their personal identity. The following sections will unpack this argument.

## Conceptual Framework

### *Lifestyle Journalism*

When compared to hard news arenas of the journalistic field, lifestyle journalism has received less scholarly attention in journalism studies. Fields are commonly organized by dominant actors who enjoy definitional control “to apply or remove the label of journalism” (Carlson 2016, 2) and with this in mind, political journalism is considered to be the dominant actor within the journalistic field. Lifestyle journalism, by contrast, occupies a less robust field position and reflects the “the journalistic coverage of the expressive values and practices that help create and signify a specific identity within the realm of consumption and everyday life” (Hanusch and Hanitzsch 2013, 947). Relative to journalism in *hard news* niches, lifestyle journalism, like beauty, travel, gaming, sport, places more emphasis on advice-giving, entertainment, inspiration, and guidance (Hanusch 2019) and hence, has been considered to be more trivial or qualified as *soft news* in comparison to *hard news* specialties like political or crime journalism (Hanusch and Hanitzsch 2013; Sjøvaag 2015). However, an increasing amount of journalism is *lifestyle journalism*. And, as many studies indicate, despite their low evaluation with journalism, lifestyle journalism may be the means with which many journalists can most gently and perhaps most effectively discuss the tough topics of society (Banjac and Hanusch 2020a, 2020b). It is also worth noting that while cultural or lifestyle journalists systematically differ from other forms of journalism in terms of social and professional characteristics as well as perception

of influence, they do have different characteristics worldwide (Hovden and Kristensen 2021; Thomson, Perreault, and Duffy 2018; Golin and Cardoso 2009).

More so than in other beats, lifestyle journalism often struggles to attach itself to the normative expectations of journalism given a stronger attachment to the audience and a stronger attachment to the marketplace (Perreault and Vos 2018, 2020; Whipple 2022). This connection to the marketplace reflects lifestyle journalism's historical dependence on advertising, a closer relationship between editorial content and advertising and the often-extensive free products provided to lifestyle journalists (Hanusch, Hanitzsch and Lauerer 2017). Even as much of the journalistic field has struggled to adapt to the changing expectations of the marketplace (Perreault, Perreault, and Maares 2022), lifestyle journalism routinely finds itself on the cutting edge of technology in part of the strong orientation toward the audience (Banjac and Hanusch 2020a; English 2016; Foxman 2018; Hanusch, Banjac, and Maares 2020; Perreault and Bell 2022; Perreault and Vos 2020), reflected even in offering participatory opportunities to bloggers within their genre (Cheng and Tandoc 2021). This strong orientation has pushed lifestyle journalism to the periphery of the field. For example, Perreault and Vos (2020) argue that gaming journalists' close ties to *gamers* caused discomfort among traditional journalists who then perceived gaming journalism as unable to report neutrally. Fashion journalists also have granted opportunities to bloggers to use their platform: a manner with which they see themselves as empowering the audience by granting exemplary members of their audience a platform; and by extension granting professional identity to bloggers by granting them the legitimacy attached to their particular platform (Duffy 2013).

Lifestyle journalism is an appealing arena for many in journalism as it offers the potential to cover and live in topics that bring "joy." Duffy (2017) refers to the concept as *aspirational labor* of "work that is propelled by the much venerated ideal of getting paid to do what you love" (4). Yet as Duffy (2017) demonstrated in her research on lifestyle influencers, aspirational labor draws on the "market logics of audience building and ad-revenue generation that have long configured work in 'traditional' media industries" (222) in particular that much of it is built on unpaid labor that disproportionately has affected people along the lines of gender, race, and class (see also North 2016; Ross 2001; Gregg and Andrijasevic 2019; Irani 2019). Duffy (2020) notes the precarious labor of influencers who are "defined by their signature online following, distinctive brand persona, and patterned relationships with commercial sponsors" (1). Duffy's definition of influencers bears meaningful similarities with lifestyle journalists. Influencers avoid calling themselves journalists though both journalists and influencers would acknowledge similarities in their practice, such as in their use of social media and audience-informed content creation (Maares and Hanusch 2020; Perreault and Hanusch 2022). In this manner lifestyle journalists, as with influencers, reflect an "entrepreneurial imperative that calls on individuals to engage in strategic self-promotion" in order to overcome their economic insecurity (Duffy and Pooley 2019, 31).

The market rationale for lifestyle journalists' precarity would be that if you've been granted a free product or service—free beauty products, the chance to see a football game, first play on an anticipated video game—isn't that experience part of the payment? It would seem possible that working on a beloved lifestyle journalism beat would also allow for more precarious positions. In this paper, our goal is thus to show and denounce how the aspirational labor of lifestyle journalists can manifest itself and



highlight specific experienced aspects of the exploitation and domination of lifestyle labor.

### ***Negotiating “Doing What You Love” in Journalistic Work***

Journalism scholars have noted a rise in emotional work in news production (Wahl-Jorgensen 2013; Kotisova 2019; Holton, Bélair-Gagnon, and Royal 2021) as “personal, affective, and emotional engagement with newswork” is central to contemporary newsrooms (Beckett and Deuze 2016). Hochschild (2012) refers to emotional labor as the management of one’s emotion that certain professions like journalism or flight attendants ask of their workers. This labor meets organizational and industry demands. One example includes the management of anxiety associated with the need for journalists to attain metrics goals. Work, as opposed to labor, is a more general term that includes the production of goods and services, whereas labor involves mental and physical work which can be hard and exhausting. Soronen (2018) adds that in magazine work, emotional labor can be conceived within content production and co-operative work practices, and is at the heart of lifestyle journalism. Emotional labor is driven by an intimate and convivial atmosphere and is bounded by tight deadlines and goal-oriented teamwork. The context of the industry, such as the uncertainty of the magazine industry and increased personal workload, also leads to cruel optimism, meaning that they both enjoy being a magazine journalist but also suppress “feelings of strain” (290). For Pantti and Wahl-Jorgensen (2021), in journalism, “emotional work” refers more broadly “to relating to and dealing with other people’s emotions ... and is shaped by the changes in the industry and specific contexts in which they carry out their work” (1567). While it seems that there is an overlap between emotional labor and work, labor can be conceived as a broader category and oriented towards oneself, and following Pantti and Wahl-Jorgensen (2021), in journalism emotional work is oriented towards others like audiences and journalists.

As Pantti and Wahl-Jorgensen (2021) suggest, “journalists’ emotional work both operates alongside and sits in tension with expectations of objectivity associated with appropriate professional practice” (1566). The experiences and management of emotions in journalism are not unique to lifestyle or cultural journalism (see Dennis and Sampaio-Dias 2021; Stupart 2021). For example, Steinke and Belair-Gagnon (2020) found that “journalists that cover social justice topics seek to guide, motivate, and inspire audiences by utilizing emotion in the stories they choose to cover” and that emotions and emotional labor are central components of their news production.

Emotions are also becoming expected from a management perspective. As Lindén et al. (2021) found, journalists’ passion has become a commodity in “part of the recruitment standard language as a marketable skill” (1718), though ill-defined in the field and in practice. The scholars noted that “passion is less seen as a natural personal trait of journalists, but rather something that can be applied in different contexts as a strategic resource” (1718). Emotions of journalists are also represented in multiple ways, as Lünenborg and Medeiros (2021) pointed out, from “(1) *Form*: feature stories and their use of emotions, (2) *Actor*: emotional attributions to [other actors], (3) *Practice*: emotions as part of *editorial practices*, understood here as emotional labor in the newsroom, and (4) *Institution*: the description of the event and its affective implications for journalism as a

whole" (Lünenborg and Medeiros 2021). Lünenborg and Medeiros (2021) here reflect on the institution through the lens of news institutionalism in considering the institution to reflect "informal routines, scripts, rules or guidelines for behavior that span across organizations" (Ryfe 2006, 136). All of this together indicates that "media" is thus becoming a "passion project" as both a way of working and a part of identity (Deuze and Prenger 2018, 22). In other words, we live our lives within our media, rather than with it (Deuze 2011).

Scholars have thus noted a rise in emotion in journalism from the way it is commodified and used by managers to build their workforce (Lindén et al. 2021) to how journalists discursively talk about their motivations to do what they do (Steinke and Belair-Gagnon 2020). For example, in cultural reviewing, a signature genre of cultural journalism, Kristensen argues that "emotionality and a subjective style have become more important in recent decades due to media technological changes and changes in the organization of news work" (Kristensen 2021, 1590). In creative work, Waschková Císařová (2021) noted that "journalists tend to become emotionally attached to 'their' medium" (1665) and become part of their entire career history and local media engagement. The precarity of contemporary journalism jobs has however led to increasing dissatisfaction with their job they once loved, pointing to the importance of understanding emotional management (Lindén et al. 2021; Maares, Lind, and Greussing 2021). How might journalists working in the areas of culture or lifestyle then negotiate their own motivations for doing a labor of love with the realities of the field, namely institutional expectations such as the need to engage with audiences or to have robust digital skill sets?

As Wahl-Jorgensen (2013) argued, binaries of subjectivities versus objectivities or emotionality versus rationalities are not productive and rather "obscure the complexities of journalistic story-telling" (305). As sociology and journalism studies scholars pointed out, "emotional labor" (Hochschild 2012) and "emotional work" (Pantti and Wahl-Jorgensen 2021) occur at that moment when a worker includes or rejects emotions as part of their professional work and their identity (Pantti and Wahl-Jorgensen 2021; Deuze and Prenger 2018). While this process is shaped by institutions and social structures, there could be cognitive dissonance which highlights conflicts in such labor (Van Dijk and Kirk 2007).

Dissonance of emotional labor and work, meaning the conflict experienced between the emotions of workers and what the institutional expectations, has important consequences: it could affect the professionals' productivity or love for the job they had in the first place (Hochschild 2012). Such research points to the importance of culture, materialities, institutional pressures, and socio-political contexts in "doing what you love." It could thus be possible that lifestyle journalists' institutional pressures and digital materialities become central to these worker's emotional labor and work. Reflected in prior research in journalism studies, journalists individually feel the stain when newsrooms adopt new digital innovations (Ferrucci and Perreault 2021). They try to find ways to adapt new technologies often without the training necessary to effectively integrate those digital materialities (Ferrucci 2017; Ferrucci 2018; Schmitz Weiss and Domingo 2010). It is how journalists reconcile their own emotions with institutional expectations and digital materialities that this paper is interested in. Lifestyle thus offers a particular lens through which it is possible to shed light on the tensions between "loving what you do" and changing institutional pressures of contemporary journalism and the particularities of lifestyle journalism work.

### *Discursive Institutionalism*

Discursive institutionalism emphasizes the “role of discourse as an organizing force giving meaning to an institution” (Vos and Thomas 2018, 2002). This study is premised on the notion that journalism operates as a discursive institution (Hanitzsch and Vos 2017), which hence frames our empirical inquiry into the lifestyle of lifestyle journalists. In other words, central to this study is the “ism’ of journalism” (Vos and Perreault 2020, 471)—an institution anchored in beliefs and norms that are then manifested through discourse. This study considers lifestyle journalists’ discourse on their institution—and their place within it—in order to unpack the value system of the institution itself. Journalism is an institution in that it is “a site of systemized principles of action enduring across time and supervising a central area of social and political life” (Cook 1998, 15). These principles link actors—in this case, lifestyle journalists—through shared outlooks and experiences.

Discursive institutionalism builds on two central tenets. First, institutions reflect a system of beliefs, norms and rules (Parsons 2007) and these rules shape ideas about the experience of journalism itself as it should be practiced (Ryfe 2006). Second, it is through discourse—verbal and written—that this system is manifested (Schmidt 2008). Journalists are socialized into journalism through routines, beliefs, rules and norms (Hanitzsch and Vos 2017). Once learned, these then structure how journalists conduct and reflect on their work aimed at placing themselves within the institution. As Raemy (2020) argued, organizations tend to “reflect and adopt the myths of their institutional environment instead of the actual work performance and demands” (842). In journalism, these myths prescribe that “the way we do” things is the way “one should do things” (Schudson 2001, 152). One such example could be the modes of delivery journalists are expected to reflect daily (e.g., 24/7 news cycle, live shots), which may not be essential to the demands of the story or the needs of the audience. This is often done through tales of *good journalists* (Hanitzsch and Vos 2017). These *good* journalists in reality reflect institutional guidelines (Meyer and Rowan 1977) and such myths distort interpretations of journalism, journalists and journalists’ performance; hence, journalists attempt to reflect informal routines and guidelines from their institution as opposed to responding to the actual demands they see individually.

Hanitzsch and Vos (2017) argue that discursive institutionalism provides a bridge between the normative work essential to journalists and the importance of treating journalists as individuals. As Zelizer, Boczkowski, and Anderson (2021) argued, “the relevance of norms, the cues by which journalists do newswork, has eroded so fundamentally that journalists are repeatedly entrenching themselves as negligible and out of sync” (n.p.) Working in this environment enabled journalists to have to be committed to a profession beyond its traditional confines. As Deuze and Witschge (2018) argue, “in today’s post-industrial journalism, the affective and at times passionate engagement with newswork is expected in a profoundly precarious context and as such asks for rearticulation” (1). Thus, using interviews with US-based lifestyle journalists, this paper looks at and how these journalists discursively express their motivations to join the profession and how they negotiate this within institutional expectations of the field of journalism. While this study has implications for practice and education in how “doing what you love” can be enmeshed in institutional processes and practices, it also sheds light on how the labor of love is discursively constructed in lifestyle journalism. All of this together



leads us to pose three research questions (the first two we will answer in the results and the third, which clarifies our theoretical contribution, in the discussion):

**RQ1:** How do lifestyle journalists discursively construct their motivation in entering the field?

**RQ2:** How do lifestyle journalists negotiate their own motivations in relation to institutional expectations?

**RQ3:** What do these expectations say about the dissonance of emotional labor and work in lifestyle journalism?

## Method

To answer our research questions, this study employed in-depth, semi-structured interviews with 30 lifestyle journalists in the US. For recruitment purposes, lifestyle journalists were identified as those who conducted reporting on the expressed “values and practices that help create and signify a specific identity within the realm of consumption and everyday life” (Vodanovic 2019; Hanusch and Hanitzsch 2013, 947) and furthermore, journalists had to self-identify as a lifestyle journalist.<sup>1</sup> This is reflected in reporting on lifestyle topics such as beauty and fashion, gaming, health, cuisine and cooking, sports, family, technology, travel and celebrity (Hanusch 2014; Perreault and Bell 2022; Vos and Perreault 2020), beats which would seem to reflect a sort of *aspirational labor* (Duffy 2017) to the extent that they are “doing what they love” which is one of the major reason they get into this work in the first place.

An initial list of 267 potential participants was developed through a process of theoretical sampling (Koerber and McMichael 2008; Saldaña 2011) to represent a range of niches, states and locations across the US. The resulting respondent sample included journalists who worked for specific lifestyle publications as well as general-interest publications such as magazines and newspapers. The research team recruited participants via email and interviews were conducted via online video like Zoom.

It is worth noting that US lifestyle journalism does have distinctive elements—certainly the degree of precarity journalists experience is more acute given that the media system does not prioritize social infrastructure. This would be in contrast to a democratic corporatist media system (e.g., Europe) (Hallin and Mancini 2004). Similarly, prior research reflects that US lifestyle journalism tends to be inward focused, with cross cultural discussion seemingly reflecting “the West versus ‘the rest’” (Fürsich 2012, 21).

The interview questionnaire probed numerous aspects of the experience of lifestyle journalism, including their motivations, their practices, their use of digital tools and how their work connects with institutional expectations. These questions were guided by similar interview-based research on lifestyle journalism and labor in digital journalism (Hanusch 2014; Perreault and Hanusch 2022). The interviews resulted in a significant corpus of qualitative data, and for this study, we are analyzing data from two areas: (1) questions about journalists’ motivations to be a lifestyle reporter, and (2) questions about how their motivations fit with institutional expectations and digital materialities (e.g., uses of digital media). Specific interview questions included, “What motivates you to do this form of journalism?” “Why did you choose this form of journalism,” and “How have digital tools affected your productivity?” Interviews were conducted between September 2021 and November 2021. Semi-structured interviews lasted about 45 min to an hour and a half each. De-identification was granted to all



participants in part because we were only interested in generating themes and general concepts regarding their motivations and institutional expectations.

Participants reflected a considerable female presence in lifestyle journalism (Hanusch 2019), the sample skewing self-reported female (15). Interviews were conducted by trained research students from a mid-sized US university and conducted until the researchers felt they achieved the appropriate information power in regard to the study participants (Malterud, Siersma, and Guassora, 2016). Information power is “determined by items such as study aim, sample specificity, use of established theory, quality of dialogue, and analysis strategy” (Malterud et al. 2016, 1757). The research team applied three criteria in assessing the number of interviews: (1) the high quality of dialogue in interviews, (2) the relatively narrow aim of study (labor and motivation), and (3) a specificity of sample (U.S.-based lifestyle journalists). Interviews were then transcribed for textual analysis and analyzed by the authors.

The research team employed a constant comparative and iterative approach in order to address the research questions (Glaser and Strauss 1968). Fram (2013) argues that while the constant comparative method is commonly associated with grounded theory, the method is also well suited for both emic coding—driven by themes that emerge from the data analysis—as well as etic coding—driven by theory and literature. The analysis follows Yin’s (2011) methodology structure, aimed at reflecting “emerging concepts that may help explain human behavior” (8) through three steps. First, the research team read through the data as a corpus, considering responses that alluded to their motivations and institutional expectations. Second, through a series of meetings via a Zoom, the research team compared the themes that emerged in order to establish resonance and find associations, differences and similarities among them. In the third step, the researchers drew out quotes from the transcripts that were representative of the discursive themes that emerged (Emerson, Fretz, and Shaw 2011). The interpretation was aimed to contextualize the descriptive statements offered by participants.

This study was done in accordance with the Appalachian State University Review Board (approval #22-0035). Participants were verbally consented for participation—and informed their participation was voluntary—and all participants were deidentified. Hence, in the findings, respondents are quoted with a participant number, but are given additional context—niche, medium—where it may help with interpretation, while not jeopardizing the anonymity of participants.

## Results

This section presents the motivations journalists have to become lifestyle reporters. It then discusses how these journalists negotiate their own motivations and related subjectivities in relation to institutional expectations and digital materialities. Overall, we found that journalists are motivated by “doing what they love” and reporting on stories that are of interest to them. They also express that motivations are discursively constructed within the institutional and digital materialities of their profession.

### *Lifestyle Journalists’ Professional Motivations*

Our first research questions asked how lifestyle journalists discursively construct their motivation in entering the field. Participants argued that lifestyle journalism offers the

opportunity to do what they love, as a part of their work, reflecting the aspirational labor aspect of their everyday work. In regards to their specialties, journalists said “I love what I do now” (Participant 18) and that they “really love doing it” (Participant 17). They have to love their topic or beat that they cover in a way that they “want to just sit around and think about it all day” (Participant 5). Similarly, a reporter said they are “paid to watch and break down my favorite sport. It doesn’t always feel like a job, which I love” (Participant 16). Sticking with their passion as their position gave them the opportunity to “have an authoritative voice” (Participant 5).

Journalists had stories stretching back to their childhood that reflected their love for the specialty. As a reporter noted, “I chose this job because I have like all these memories attached to it, you know of college game day and watching with my family and the whole world shutting down essentially for me and my family on Saturdays” (Participant 5). In the same way, a music reporter said that since they were “five years old I’ve been obsessed with music” and hence, “interviewing artists, writing about music is fun to me” (Participant 11). That love for the specialty at times came from active involvement in it, as a reporter argued that they weren’t good enough to play sports professionally—but reporting on sports allowed them the next-best opportunity to follow their passion (Participant 23).

Journalists also argued that they were motivated by the stories of people they encountered in the specialties in that “I think that if you didn’t care deeply about your community ... you wouldn’t strive in this position” (Participant 10). Another respondent said:

[I love] Being able to tell stories about a lineman who has Asperger’s and just watching how he’s grown throughout his five years of college football from a kid who just did not want to talk to anyone. Me seeing him as a recruit and just noticing how his dad’s trying to introduce him to me, but he doesn’t want to talk to me. Then five years later seeing this kid, and—you would not know. Watching people grow and watching those unique stories of being human and of triumph, I think that’s what’s really made covering sports really interesting. The other athletes, that’s why most people care about those stories. It’s the stories behind the games, behind the sport that, to me, kept me in sports journalism. (Participant 23)

Journalists noted that their love of their specialty only grew over time in part because of their experience with the people in the specialty (Participant 15). This reporting allows journalists to reveal the “many interesting people and stories out there that never really get to see the light” (Participant 15). Knowing and understanding the people in the specialty allowed journalists to “have a really kind of varied pool of stories so that I really stretch all the writing muscles” (Participant 13). Hence, perhaps the most important skill a lifestyle journalist could have is in their ability to talk to people in that “a lot of lifestyle journalism is really dealing with human beings, you know, and a lot of these stories can be sensitive or it can be like a little bit hard to coax out interesting details out of them” (Participant 27).

Journalists articulated that a lot of what they did depended on their personal investment in the work, with the key word being “my” (e.g., *my* phone, *my* computer). Lifestyle journalists largely saw their lifestyle as respecting the life they’d been motivated to find—one intimately tied to their non-work passions; however, this came with the drawback that to some degree work became more difficult to disengage from. Journalists articulated—often without intentionally pinpointing it—that much of the digital work they conducted was with their own devices. Participant 5 for example noted that “my phone is always with me everywhere because we have to record. I have a recorder, I

usually use my phone just because it's easier, I always have it." Similarly, Participant 11 noted that "when I'm doing interviews, I have a tape recorder, [but] I use my phone. I do all my work on my laptop." Even without the digital skills, journalists argued that they were expected to produce much of the work start-to-finish, which meant that fact checking was also up to them (Participant 20).

Journalists said that much of what they experienced matched what they'd aspired to in their profession. As one beauty journalist put it,

There are a lot of perks. I literally—this is not a brag—I'm literally right now in my bedroom in my New York bedroom. Minimum \$25,000 worth of beauty products. Easily. That's how much stuff I get. It's great but it's also annoying, because it's like, once they find out who you are, they want to send you everything. (Participant 22)

Journalists reflected on their ability to enact professionally what they loved personally: travel, gaming, sport. Journalists also admitted that being routed in the same place personally and professionally "can be mentally taxing" (Participant 13). As a beauty journalist put it, the repetition of topics also made their ability to differentiate products challenging. The beauty journalist noted that in a story of the "15 best red lipsticks" they found it difficult to find news, unique words to describe 15 lipsticks, which by nature looked quite similar (Participant 22).

Taken together, lifestyle journalists found the appeal in their niche in the lifestyle itself and in the people they encountered through the reporting. Journalists shared stories like those featured here of their connection to their specialty that emerged from their childhood, family traditions and early experiences. Yet the enduring motivation for specialty wasn't just in exploring their own passion but in seeing that passion shared by others.

### ***Discursive Negotiations of Motivations***

The second research question asked about the ways that lifestyle journalists negotiate their motivations, including the labor of love, in relation to institutional expectations. First, journalists saw institutional expectations for their digital work related to norms, practices and skills granting them the ability to produce better quality work. Journalists also expressed seeing newsroom expectations as a liability to having the kind of life to which they aspired. Similarly, journalists noted that the newsroom expectations granted some accountability to their work and "without some sort of, you know, other eyes, sometimes you're looking something in the eye that looks great ... And then you know, like, oh, maybe that didn't work" (Participant 26). That said, journalists conceived newsroom expectations as limiting their ability to exercise their norms as they deemed them best exercised, articulated through institutional expectations and digital materialities, namely skills and expectations to engage with digital audiences.

First, journalists saw newsroom expectations preventing them from living the sort of life that they wanted to live, especially in terms of freedom to do what they love and work-life balance. A journalist said that they couldn't be successful at their work if they were "tied or tethered to an office space" and so they made an effort to keep out of the office, to have priorities outside of work (Participant 2). At times, they felt as though their newsrooms emphasized a desire for journalists to capture different types of content without anticipating the labor it took for journalists to undertake.



I think that's something that too often, editors don't necessarily understand. I think reporters get it a lot, like editors sometimes struggle because 'now we need a video on this.' ... I think that part of the trade-off is just asking someone to do too many things at once, and then drags the quality down and all of those things. (Participant 24)

In other words, the journalist seemed to relinquish their newsroom's expectations in order to honor the level of quality they believed that the story required. They also expressed the feeling that their ability to hit expectations was hobbled a bit by their own personal commitments:

I had a guy who was helping me when I started on the [Miami] Heat beat, he was doing that at the [newsroom] and was showing me around. He said something to me I always thought was profound. He said, I had to accept, [since] I have a family and kids, I have to accept that I'm not going to be as good at this profession as some of the other people are in the industry because they will give their whole day and their whole week to this thing and I have commitments outside of the business and I'm not going to neglect them just for the sake of my work. (Participant 16)

Second, journalists expressed negotiating their digital materialities, related to skills and the need to reach a wider set of audience. While this may not come as a surprise given the power of platforms in journalism, this finding is particularly relevant because it highlights how lifestyle journalists' own work motivation ties in particular materialities of digital journalism. For example, a travel journalist argued that the expectations of using Zoom, the video chatting platform, in particular was revolutionizing their beat:

If you're doing travel journalism, you still have to go somewhere, but especially in the last two years, since people have started using Zoom ... Two years ago, if you were doing this, you may not have thought, "Oh I'll interview her on Zoom" ... I actually think that it has moved things forward. (Participant 19)

A reporter argued the expectation of digital work has helped their newsroom work cooperatively:

we're moving toward a more friendly, digital friendly system, which makes it a lot easier to pull in things like photos, videos, tweets, we embed tweets, sometimes we work closely with the video team, so that they can do a compliment. (Participant 3)

Journalists also saw the expectations for adhering to search engine optimization as limiting their storytelling, and perhaps, deceiving the audience a bit.

When it comes to SEO there's certain things that just tend to get a lot more clicks than others. So you need to be willing to have your story wear a headline that isn't necessarily the headline you think is the truest to what the content of the story is. (Participant 2)

This also related to the materialities of digital expectations as journalists noted that if they wanted to Tweet, they would have to hold so that the tweet could be shared on the website—for paying subscribers—first. In a way, this showed a motivation towards the market and profit potential of their job, a recurring theme in lifestyle journalism.

These materialities also came with their own share of challenges. Journalists expressed deploying digital disconnection practices as some of the materialities and institutional expectations (or perceptions of expectations) as they seemed to express dissonance between "doing what they love" and negotiating the expectation of the profession which both encourage the "doing what you love" mentality but at the same time is not

equipped to fully fulfill this aspiration. They used expressions including “get off the computer” (Participant 13), “put my phone down and just talk” (Participant 24) or “deleted, for periods of time, social media apps from my phone” (Participant 15). For example, participants constructed their disconnection processes responsive to social media in particular. Such disconnection is essential because as one participant put it, social media “is not the real world” (Participant 13). And “what people say to me on Twitter is not what my friends and family and people who actually know me think of me. And that goes for the good and bad, right?” (Participant 13). Similarly, for these journalists, it was important to “be able to turn off all distractions, whether it’s social media or if it’s someone texting you, or whatever” (Participant 15). In doing so, journalists seemed to be claiming to be gaining a sense of agency in doing their labor of love.

## Discussion

Brian Moritz is by no means the first journalist drawn to the lifestyle of journalism that later feels the need to leave journalism for that very lifestyle. An active Facebook group “What is your Plan B?” currently boasts 17,000 members for US journalists who have lost their job or are actively pursuing a new one outside of journalism. Stories like Moritz however tend to be uncommon given that Moritz’s lifestyle was *aspirational*—the opportunity to weekly view games that people normally would pay significant money to watch. Yet as this study reflects, it is that very aspirational lifestyle which can make the load untenable to practitioners.

Our paper asked two main research questions looking at the motivations of lifestyle journalists entering their profession and the negotiation of their motivations with institutional expectations. As Waschková Císařová (2021) argued, “journalists manifest[ed] deepening contradictions in their feelings towards work, the media organization” that employed them. Indeed, “the increasing volatility of their emotional responses has led to a general dissatisfaction and the growing importance of emotional management” (1665). From the standpoint of Lünenborg and Medeiros (2021), the emotions of lifestyle journalists were reflected at times through their views of the institution where they perceived their work at times trivialized as being *not journalism* or offering news that is less important with the institution. This took on an affective dimension in that journalists felt that institutional expectations both valorized their motivations and yet limited their ability to meet expectations such as through the digital materialities as represented in journalistic practices and digital skills (Lünenborg and Medeiros 2021; Perreault and Vos 2020).

Through the lens of discursive institutionalism, lifestyle journalists reflect on their identity in a different manner than prior research has indicated (Hanitzsch and Vos 2017). Conversant with Lünenborg and Medeiros (2021), lifestyle journalists also largely placed themselves within the institution as actors through their *personal* identity. While prior research has often reflected on journalists discursively placing themselves within the institution via professional roles, that journalists placed themselves as a personal actor reflects a degree of emotional investment. Journalists did this by denoting the implications of their institutional expectations on their time with families and pets (e.g., Participant 13 noted a difficulty in digitally disconnecting to spend time with her fiancé; Participant 16 felt he had to sacrifice excellence in his field in order to spend time with his wife

and children). Journalists also did this by reflecting on their motivations in journalism—not as tied to normative claims of the field, as is reflected in professional role conception—but rather as rooted in the experiences of their childhood and early dreams from their youth (e.g., Participant 5 noted that reporting Georgia football was “the biggest dream that I had. I grew up with my dad, he was a big Georgia football fan and so he and I would watch all the games.” Participant 11 similarly argued “Since I was five years old I’ve been obsessed with music. So it’s always been sort of a dream of mine to work in that industry”). In other words, rather than link their motivations to journalism to normative democratic contributions, lifestyle journalists were more likely to link it to a lifestyle, rooted in their personal identity.

If discursive institutionalism links actors in the field through shared outlooks and experiences (Cook 1998; Michael Ryfe 2006), then a central organizing trait for lifestyle journalists would be their passion for the lifestyle. It’s that passion that drives them to enter the niche, drives them to work to—and, at times, work beyond—their capabilities. It is also that passion that can cause disillusionment with lifestyle journalism and cause them to reconsider, as with Moritz, their commitment. If journalists are adopting the “myths of their institutional environment” (Raemy 2020, 842), then as participants indicate—one of those myths seems to be that by *doing what they love*, or engaging in aspirational labor (Poell, Nieborg, and Duffy 2022; Duffy and Hund 2015), they will never actually have to work. Hence, lifestyle journalism can be discursively constructed as trivial or the “toy department” (Perreault and Bell 2022)—through an institutional lens in part because they would seem not be doing the hard work of journalism. Yet this study reflects that their labor, driven by personal passions, in many cases precluded them from living the personal life they wished for themselves. For example, as participants noted, the expectations of journalism often kept them from getting to enjoy the passion they were covering (Participant 2; Participant 16; Participant 24). While the sports journalist does get to attend all of the sports games, they are working more so than participating in the game experience.

This study finds that while lifestyle journalists are motivated to enter the profession because of their own personal connection to the topic, their desire to be embedded in the topic and their love for the people in the genre, they also have to negotiate institutional expectations. These expectations include a need to be constantly available and consistently adaptable to new and emerging digital trends. In other words, that lifestyle journalists’ motivations draw them to lifestyle journalism, but that the realities of the lifestyle are catching up to them. In a sense, this is also aspirational labor, in that it represents the “do what you love” (Duffy 2017, 4)—and it is sold to them as such—but that the reality is more bleak, pushing some lifestyle journalists to find ways to disconnect. More specifically, journalists seemed wary of their own adaptability to digital materialities, from remote interviewing to search engine optimization—as noted most explicitly in Participant 2’s comment that headlines no longer functioned in the same manner given the need to address digital expectations. That said, this reflected a more widespread concern that some of the digital expectations of the field took the *fun* out of some of their reporting. While certainly the implementation of innovation would seem to affect a broad range of journalists—not just lifestyle journalists—lifestyle journalists would perhaps be the most liable to feel the strain of these expectations given that (1) many lifestyle journalism specialties tend to be on the forefront of innovation (Banjac and



Hanusch 2020a; English 2016; Hanusch, Banjac, and Maares 2020) and (2) lifestyle journalists are particularly invested in their specialty given that it often stems from their personal passions (Hanusch and Hanitzsch 2013; Perreault and Hanusch 2022).

Furthermore, lifestyle journalists seemed to reflect a sort of cognitive dissonance in their practices—while drawn to the idea they would never actually work, since they were embedded in their passion—in reality what many journalists described reflected that they had difficulty leaving work, given that even their passion had become work. While difficulty to adopt digital technology should not come as a surprise from a digital journalism research perspective (Belair-Gagnon and Steinke 2020) and (Belair-Gagnon and Steinke 2020), this reflects that far from being simply at play (Hanusch 2012) lifestyle journalists seem to perceive that they may actually be working harder than journalists in hard news areas in order to meet institutional expectations (Lünenborg and Medeiros 2021). Also, given this study is situated in a US-market approach to journalism, it is worth considering the degree to which journalists' personal love for lifestyles has been commodified (Cheng and Tandoc 2021; Fürsich 2012; Perreault and Vos 2018).

While in most respects lifestyle journalists in this sample responded to questions in relatively similar manners, it is worth highlighting a few areas that seemed to be distinctive. First, it made up the largest specialty focus of this study (9 participants) and so it's hence worth noting that sports journalists were much more likely to articulate the digital challenges in their profession. Participants discussed the difficulty in addressing the digital materialities necessary to reach their audience while simultaneously meeting institutional expectations. For example, participant 10 noted that she felt pulled simultaneously to both tweet recently released news and yet to also immediately write a brief directly to the website; sports journalists found it challenging to navigate both. Second, journalists in magazine newsrooms felt that there was a more robust emphasis on digital materialities in their production than journalists in other types of newsrooms. Finally, journalists in digital-only newsrooms tended to not identify digital materialities as a separate aspect of their work, perceiving it as integrally tied through the natural labor of journalism.

This study has its limits. First, what journalists say they do may not be exactly what they actually do. Given that this study relies on self-report, it's possible that there are aspects of a journalist's lifestyle left unshared here. Second, journalists' self-report did not get at Lünenborg and Medeiros (2021) representation of emotional labor in regards to the *form* (feature stories and uses of emotions). Third, research in journalism studies reflects that cultural differences play a role in how journalists think about their roles and hence, alternative samples could have reflected different findings for how journalists navigate their lifestyle (Mellado et al. 2017). And finally, future research should consider how aspirational labor in lifestyle journalism is understood and becomes part of editorial practices. For example, it is worth considering the degree to which the expectation of use of personal tools reflects the normalizing of the tools professionally; conversely, it is worth considering in lifestyle journalism the ways in which personal practices become the norm professionally. Future research might consider avenues to address the personal investment of lifestyle journalists—an investment that can be leveraged and put lifestyle journalists in precarious positions. Journalism studies research reflected on the need for journalists to consider strategic disconnection from their work (Belair-Gagnon et al. 2022), a practice that seems particularly pertinent for lifestyle journalists. Such

disconnection provides “a toolbox of options that journalists can exercise and that may help journalists to vent pressure that might otherwise lead to anxiety, overloaded stress, and burnout” (Belair-Gagnon et al. 2022, 3). Future research might also consider the exchange between the journalist and the audience—an exchange which can provide opportunities for professionalism to influencers and which lifestyle journalists perceive as enhancing their relationship with the audience.

Lifestyle journalists face the nearly impossible task: navigating the normative expectations of journalism, offering guidance to their audience, offering a close and personal look at a lifestyle—while held to expectations of objectivity (Pantti and Wahl-Jorgensen 2021)—and doing all of this passionately and creatively. If this emotional engagement is a part of work, it is perhaps no wonder why journalists would choose to leave the stadium stands and seek to reclaim their personal identity from the profession.

## Notes


1. At time of interview, five of the participants were not currently conducting lifestyle journalism (Participants 1, 14, 19, 21, 26). They were retained in the sample given that they primarily identified as lifestyle journalists and addressed questions based on their experience in lifestyle journalism.
2. As noted in the method section, all participants self-identified as lifestyle journalists although not all were practicing lifestyle journalism at time of interview. When not currently practicing, as in the case of Participants 1, 14, 19, 21, 26, journalists here reflected on the reporting they conducted that reflected their lifestyle journalist identity.

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## ORCID

Gregory P. Perreault  <http://orcid.org/0000-0002-6645-1117>

Valérie Bélair-Gagnon  <http://orcid.org/0000-0002-7756-1688>

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## Appendix. Participant table<sup>2</sup>

Participant #	Lifestyle specialty	Type of Publication	Gender	Experience
1	Community Culture	Regional, Broadcaster	Female	5 years
2	Travel	National, Magazine	Male	10 years
3	Health & Wellness	International, Newspaper	Female	30 years
4	Food	National, Magazine	Female	13 years
5	Sports	Digital	Female	Less than a year
6	Sports	International, Newspaper	Male	10 years
7	Sports	International, Newspaper	Male	24 years
8	Community Culture	Regional, Broadcaster	Male	12 years
9	Diverse communities	National, Newspaper	Female	5 years
10	Sports	National, Newspaper	Female	3 years
11	Entertainment	National, Magazine	Male	Less than a year
12	Art	National, Magazine	Male	6 years
13	Community Culture	National, Newspaper	Female	15 years
14	Arts & Entertainment	International, Magazine	Female	2 years
15	Community Culture	Digital	Female	3 years
16	Sports	Digital	Male	14 years
17	Travel	Digital	Female	2 years
18	Entertainment	National, Newspaper	Female	5 years
19	Travel	International, Newspaper	Female	32 years
20	Youth Culture	National, Magazine	Female	5 years
21	Science	National, newspaper	Female	5 years
22	Beauty	National, magazine	Female	3 years
23	Sports	National, newspaper	Male	10 years
24	Sports	Digital	Male	14 years
25	Sports	Digital	Male	18 years
26	Community Culture	National, newspaper	Female	24 years
27	Arts & Entertainment	National, newspaper	Female	4 years
28	Sports	International, newspaper	Male	4 years
29	Food	Regional, newspaper	Female	19 years
30	Arts & Entertainment	International, newspaper	Female	5 years