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Working Through Trauma: The Use of Comfort Dogs in Television Newsrooms

Presented to the Faculty

Regent University

School of Communication and the Arts

In Partial Fulfilment

Of the Requirements for the

Doctor of Philosophy

In Communication

By

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Abstract

Journalists who have to cover traumatic events are exposed to the potential of having lasting psychological effects. This study explored one of the coping options that could be made available to more journalists through the use of comfort dogs. While journalists often are guarded with their emotions, that does not mean they do not experience the symptoms of Acute Stress Disorder and Post Traumatic Stress Disorder. This qualitative study focused on long-form interviews with broadcast journalists who covered the Pulse nightclub mass shooting in June of 2016. These journalists all had subsequent interaction with comfort dogs in the newsroom. The findings showed that the journalists who interacted with the dogs felt a sense of joy and relief, bringing a much needed distraction to a difficult week of news coverage. Others found that while the dogs were helpful, they were not enough to correct the emotionally unhealthy environment often found in newsrooms. In addition, the findings show that the dogs provided a catalyst for the journalists to be more vulnerable, therefore potentially opening the door for other mental healthcare options within newsrooms during traumatic news coverage.

Chapter 1: Introduction

> "As soon as the dogs came around me, it was just like a warm hug and I lost it. I had no idea how much I needed that. That's when I realized I wasn't the only one who could benefit from the dogs" (Robyn, personal communication, July 15, 2019).

Robyn is a former broadcast journalist in Orlando, Florida. Her story is an example of the effect comfort dogs can have on humans, especially humans who consistently deal with trauma or crisis. The dogs in Robyn's story are Golden Retrievers used by Lutheran Church Charities in its K9 Comfort Dog Ministry®.

Journalists around the world deal nearly every day with traumatic events as part of their jobs. Like first responders, journalists are expected to be on the scene of significant events. For the purpose of this study, "journalist" will be defined as a credentialed member of the media who works for a media outlet recognized by the Federal Communications Commission. This includes broadcast, print, and digital media outlets.

While journalists cover day-to-day stories like the happenings of city and county government and community events, education, and medical advancements, many of the stories journalists are expected to observe and report on are often violent and traumatic. Those range from covering car accidents to domestic disputes to mass shootings. This research specifically looks at media coverage of a mass shooting. The year 2020 brought about a big change in work and educational culture in America, with businesses and schools closing to accommodate social protocols for safety because of COVID-19, so mass shootings took on a different identity that year. While there were not any significantly large shootings, gun violence was at an alarmingly high rate due to skyrocketing unemployment, civil unrest, and children not attending school (della Cava & Stucka, 2021). According to CNN (2020), since the turn of the century, a growing trend of mass shootings has been emerging in the United States (U.S.).

Date	**Event**	**Number Killed (not including assailant)**
4/16/07	VA Tech	32
3/10/09	AL Shooting	10
4/3/09	NY Immigrant Community Center	13
11/5/09	Ft. Hood	14
7/20/12	Aurora, CO Movie Theater	12
12/14/12	Sandy Hook Elementary School	27
9/16/13	Washington Naval Yard	12
12/2/15	CA Business Event	14
6/12/16	Pulse Nightclub	49
10/1/17	Las Vegas Music Festival	58
11/5/17	TX Church	26
2/14/18	Marjorie Stoneman Douglas High School	17
5/18/18	Santa Fe High School	10
10/27/18	Tree of Life Synagogue Pittsburgh, PA	11
11/7/18	CA Borderline Bar & Grill	12
8/3/19	TX Walmart	23

The focus of this dissertation is the mass casualty shooting at Pulse nightclub in Orlando, Florida. This shooting was chosen because it is one of the few events known where comfort dogs were intentionally brought into a newsroom for the purpose of working with the journalists. A lone shooter shot and killed 49 people, making it the largest mass shooting in American history at the time (Abadi & Pasley, 2019). Robyn was one of several journalists working for television station WFTV in Orlando the night of the shooting. After her interaction with the comfort dogs, she became the driving force behind bringing the dogs into the WFTV newsroom, in hopes of helping her coworkers cope with difficult emotions they felt due to covering the story (Hare, 2016). Dogs are among the most recent means to facilitate coping being employed in newsrooms where journalists are covering or have covered a traumatic event; however, they are not being widely used. Therefore, this study argues that the dogs are a viable, yet unresearched, coping mechanism in the field of journalism.

Author's Experience

As a former broadcast journalist myself, Robyn's story brought back memories of covering a mass shooting at an Amish school in Lancaster, PA, on October 2, 2006. In that shooting, Charles Carl Roberts IV, lined up ten little girls against a wall and shot each one point-blank. Five of them died. Roberts took his own life as police arrived on the scene and worked to make entry into the schoolhouse. The extreme sadness that rode through the WGAL Television newsroom like a wave resulted in journalists, who are usually guarded in their emotions, breaking down in tears in the newsroom and live on the air for more than a week after the shooting. While we were encouraged to seek counseling and station management brought someone in for what management considered a debriefing, around two weeks after the shooting, specific coping mechanisms, like the K9 Comfort Dog Ministry®, were just not available to us at the time.

Journalists & Trauma Coverage

Studies have shown that repeated exposure to traumatic news stories can have lasting and sometimes devastating effects on the journalists who cover them (Dworznik, 2006; Keats & Buchanan, 2009; Buchanan & Keats, 2011; Marais & Stuart, 2005; Rentschler, 2010). As the world becomes increasingly violent, so do the stories journalists are covering every day of their careers (Dworznik, 2018). There is already research highlighting the damaging effects of war on war correspondents (Ricchiardi, 1998; Cote & Simpson, 2000; Brennen & O'Reilly, 2017; Anderson,2006, Morris, 2015; & di Giovanni, 2011), but domestic journalists appear to be more overlooked, yet they are the ones covering daily violence like murders, fires, and automobile accidents with the latter being the most traumatic for journalists (Newman et al., 2003). While some researchers (Backholm & Björkqvist, 2010) found that repeated exposure had less negative effect on journalists, McMahon (2001) found that age and longevity of journalism career, and therefore exposure, had a negative emotional effect on journalists. The contradiction should also serve as evidence of a need for further research in trauma and journalism as a whole.

There is also a culture in many newsrooms that discourages journalists from talking about their mental and emotional struggles (Carter & Kodrich, 2013; Matloff, 2004; Drummond, 2004; Dubberly et al., 2015; Beam & Spratt, 2009). This combination of the known impact of trauma and the fear of admitting it serves as justification for research in trauma journalism to continue.

For the purposes of this dissertation, mass casualty is defined as any incident where the number of victims or severity of injuries outpaces the resources available to meet the needs of the victims (What is a mass casualty incident?, n.d., para 1). Mass casualty incidents can arise from a variety of situations from car accidents to natural disasters to mass shootings. In this case, mass shootings are the focus. While there is no official legal definition of "mass shooting", the Federal Bureau of Investigation aligns "mass shootings" with "mass murder," defined as, "A number of murders (three or more) occurring during the same incident, with no distinctive time period between murder," (Federal Bureau of Investigation, 2008).

Not only is it important to have a working definition of a mass casualty incident for this dissertation, but it's also important to have working definitions of trauma and crisis. A trauma, by definition, is an incident that is so painful, emotionally or physically, that one tends to flinch away from it, not let oneself be aware of it, or, in Freud's terms, to repress it. It is the *flinch* and not the objective content of the incident that makes it a trauma (Volkman, 2007).

Crisis has been defined as:

> An event or situation that arises suddenly or reaches a tipping point in its severity that has the effect of significantly disrupting lives and threatening status quo, and that may also have long-term, harmful consequences on individuals or groups (Taylor, 2020, para 7).

Trauma and crisis both play a role in the types of traumatic events that produce a news story. Sometimes those stories emerge from events that take place somewhere within the 24 hours of a day, like the mass shooting at Pulse on June 12, 2016. Yet, continuous news coverage of those large-scale, single-day events goes on for months. The reporters, photographers, editors, producers, and managers who covered the Pulse mass shooting did not get to turn off the news. They had to force staff to take breaks from immersion in coverage of the mass shooting, but when it’s your job, that can be hard to do (Hare, 2016).

In this study, the term comfort dog(s) will be used to encompass all canine dogs used for psychological support including those referred to with terms such as “therapy dog(s),” “stress control dog(s),” “service animal,” “service dog(s),” “combat and operational stress control dog(s),” and any other descriptor of canine-assisted human coping.

Purpose of Study

The purpose of this dissertation is to contribute to the foundational trauma and journalism literature by investigating comfort dogs as a specific coping mechanism that may be useful to help journalists process traumatic stories. Results from this study have the potential to improve quality of life for journalists reporting on traumatic events by providing them with a functional, realistic, and healthy means of coping and give news managers a practical, immediate, and more readily acceptable tool to bring mental health help directly into the newsroom during or after a traumatic event. One of the reasons many journalists do not seek the help they may need after coverage of a traumatic event is a fear of appearing weak (Feinstein et al., 2002). Since the journalism field is so competitive, appearing weak could mean a journalist will not be given the next big story because managers become concerned that the person cannot handle it. However, dogs may be more likely to be accepted as a means of coping and could be less likely to be seen as a threat to the journalists' credibility among their peers for appearing weak if they openly display emotion in the newsroom (Shiloh et al., 2003; Yount et al., 2013; Charnetsky et al., 2004; Lass-Hennemann et al., 2018; Mims & Waddell, 2016; Menna et al., 2019).

Lazarus and Folkman's Transactional Model of Stress and Coping

This study will qualitatively examine the use of comfort dogs in newsrooms during and after the Pulse nightclub shooting through the lens of Lazarus and Folkman's Transactional Model of Stress and Coping (1984), which states, "successful coping mechanisms depend on the emotional functions related to the problem" (Chowdhury, 2020, para. 15). Lazarus and Folkman (1984) explain how a person experiencing a situation perceived by that person as stressful goes through two stages.

First, they must cognitively appraise the situation. This step includes primary and secondary appraisal. Primary appraisal requires the person to ask whether they are safe or in danger. It can also be a positive event in which a person would be asking whether they will benefit at some time from the event. Once this is completed, the person can assign whether the event should be categorized as a threat or a challenge. Secondary appraisal asks whether the person can cope with what is happening. In this step, the person would be asking themselves about available resources. They can be anything from health, social support and beliefs, to financial means.

Second, the person must work through coping with the situation. Lazarus and Folkman (1984) propose there are two types of coping: problem based and emotion based. Problem-based coping looks for practical ways to target the stressor. Emotion-based coping is focused on reducing the negative emotional responses associated with stress. Emotion-based coping tends to be the primary option for situations that are out of the person's control.

Focused primarily on the coping part of a person's interaction with a stressful (traumatic) event, Lazarus and Folkman offer eight options. The authors suggest most people fall into at least one of these categories as they process through a stressful event. These are a combination of problem-based coping and emotion-based coping strategies. Chowdhury (2020) explains the eight categories in the following manner:

1. *Self-Control* – where one tries to control their emotions in response to stress.
2. *Confrontation* – where one faces the pressure and retaliates to change the situation and bring it back to their favor.
3. *Social support* – where one talks to others and looks for social connections to help them survive a difficult time.
4. *Emotional distancing* – where one stays indifferent to what is going on in order to prevent the distress from controlling their actions.
5. *Escape and avoidance* – where one denies the existence of stress as a coping response.
6. *Radical acceptance* – where one resorts to unconditional self-acceptance for adapting to adversity.
7. *Positive reappraisal* – where one seeks to find the answer in the struggle and grow from it.

8. *Strategic problem-solving* – where one implements specific solution-focused strategies to get through the tough time and redirect our actions accordingly (para. 16).

Knowing that journalists are working in often stressful situations, Lazarus and Folkman's Transactional Model of Stress and Coping will provide a structured way to see where journalists' coping mechanisms fall. It is hypothesized that the comfort dogs will fall into the eight categories of strategic problem solving, though it is expected other coping means will also appear in the results.

Data collection for this study will use long-form personal interviews with a number of professional journalists who interacted with the comfort dogs in the days following the Pulse nightclub mass shooting. Thematic analysis of the results will determine if using the comfort dogs constituted a "specific solution-focused strategy," as described by the model, thereby validating comfort dog use as a coping strategy in accordance with the Lazarus and Folkman Model. Further details on the methodological approach to be used are provided in Chapter 3.

Significance of Study

The significance of this study is multifold. First, it is a step toward filling the gap in foundational trauma and journalism literature through investigating a specific potential coping mechanism for journalists reporting on traumatic events. Second, it will add to the knowledge of coping tools already known to be helpful for the general public but will instead be focused on journalists. This is important because, as research shows, journalists are exposed to potentially traumatic situations far more often than the general public due to the nature of their work. Finally, it will give news managers a practical and more readily acceptable means of bringing mental health help directly into the newsroom during or after a traumatic event.

Summary

Many journalists face trauma in their careers (Feinstein, 2006; Coté and Simpson, 2000; Santos, 2010; Massé, 2011). Some traumas are more significant than others, meaning some have more lasting psychological and emotional effects. Covering a mass shooting has the potential to strongly negatively impact a journalist on an emotional and psychological level (Fedler, 2004; Harvey, 1995; Garvey, 2009). While not all journalists recognize the need to care for themselves following traumatic news coverage or choose unhealthy ways to deal with work trauma, including avoidance, enough of them do that it warrants exploration of better alternatives, including solid support for a healthy coping mechanism (Buchanan, 2009; Fedler, 2004). Typically, news management, from either the local or corporate level, would be making the decision as to how to care for the mental health of journalists, including bringing in comfort dogs as part of the healing process. Therefore, providing news directors, assistant news directors, executive producers, assignment managers, and those serving in corporate positions over local newsrooms with some tools to help their employees during and after coverage of a traumatic event is critical to helping journalists get the help they need.

Journalists have covered stories about comfort dogs being used in unconventional places such as funeral homes, courtrooms, and even newsrooms, yet no academic research exists specifically exploring their effectiveness with journalists suffering traumatic stress. This study may provide support for the idea that the use of comfort dogs in newsrooms during and after coverage of a traumatic event is a healthy and accessible coping mechanism for journalists. These findings have the potential to help shape newsroom policy and crisis management to allow for better emotional and psychological support for journalists during trauma coverage.

Chapter Two: Literature Review

The purpose of this qualitative thematic analysis is to explore the lived experiences of full-time broadcast journalists from the Orlando Market who interacted with non-profit-provided comfort dogs after the trauma of the Pulse nightclub shooting. This review examines relevant literature regarding trauma care, full-time broadcast journalists, the Pulse nightclub shooting, and comfort dogs.

Trauma Care

A trauma, by definition, is an incident that is so painful, emotionally or physically, that one tends to flinch away from it, not let oneself be aware of it, or, in Freud's terms, to repress it (Volkman, 2007). Volkman (2007) describes trauma as the *flinch* and not the objective content of the incident that makes it a trauma. This is just one of a number of definitions for trauma. Researchers like Figley (1995), Herman (1992), and Black & Flynn (2021) have spent years defining the layers of trauma. Mental health diagnostic professionals such as psychiatrists, psychologists, and counselors are more likely to use the explanation of trauma-related disorders found in the *Diagnostic and Statistical Manual* (American Psychiatric Association [APA; *DSM-5*], 2013). It explains that exposure to a traumatic event can cause very different reactions in individual people, presenting in a range of behaviors from fear to anger. In the DSM-5, there are a number of trauma-related diagnoses. For the purposes of this study, I will specifically consider Post Traumatic Stress Disorder (PTSD) and Acute Stress Disorder (ASD). Definitions and symptoms for each of these conditions will be explained in more detail later on.

Mass Crisis Defined

Black and Flynn (2021) define a variety of types of crises. Of those, situational crisis fits best with the types of events journalists cover. Black and Flynn (2021) describe situational crisis as something that “arises out of unusual, unexpected, or unpredicted events like sexual violence, suicide, or an accident.” (p. 49). The authors go on to specifically mention mass shootings as falling under the umbrella of situational crisis.

When journalists are covering a large-scale traumatic event, nearly every employee is involved. Newsrooms in larger markets can have hundreds of employees in them. Even newsrooms in medium-sized markets often have close to 100 employees. Therefore, it would make sense that a large group of people would be experiencing the crisis reaction at the same time when a news team is covering a traumatic event, but they may not all be affected the same way. The following section describes how a traumatic event might psychologically affect journalists during and after news coverage of that traumatic event.

Psychological Impact

To understand the psychological impact of traumatic news events, the following sections discuss post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD) and acute stress disorder (ASD).

Post-Traumatic Stress Disorder

PTSD is the most commonly discussed disorder in regard to trauma, especially in mainstream media coverage, primarily because of increased awareness associated with military members. The National Center for PTSD defines it as: “a mental health problem that some people develop after experiencing or witnessing a life-threatening event, like combat, a natural disaster, a car accident, or sexual assault” (PTSD Basics, n.d., para. 1). The American Psychiatric Association (APA) officially recognized PTSD as a diagnosable condition in 1980 by adding it to that year’s version of the Diagnostic and Statistical Manual of Mental Disorders (DSM-III) (Friedman, n.d.). One of the studies that was credited with paving the way for the creation of the PTSD diagnosis was written by Sarah Haley in 1974. She connected the atrocities of war with shame and determined that the shame of what was done or not done was the core of the trauma, which supports Volkman's (2007) definition of trauma discussed earlier in this chapter. PTSD is currently defined in the DSM-5 (2013) as:

> Exposure to actual or threatened death, serious injury, or sexual violence in one (or more) of the following ways:
>
> - Directly experiencing the traumatic event(s).
> - Witnessing, in person, the event(s) as it occurred to others.
> - Learning that the traumatic event(s) occurred to a close family member or close friend. In cases of actual or threatened death of a family member or friend, the event(s) must have been violent or accidental.
> - Experiencing repeated or extreme exposure to aversive details of the traumatic event(s) (e.g., first responders collecting human remains; police officers repeatedly exposed to the details of child abuse). (p. 271)

Today, symptoms typically associated with a PTSD diagnosis fall into three categories, according to the Anxiety and Depression Association of America:

- Re-experiencing the trauma through intrusive distressing recollections of the event, flashbacks, and nightmares.
- Emotional numbness and avoidance of places, people, and activities that are reminders of the trauma.
- Increased arousal such as difficulty sleeping and concentrating, feeling jumpy, and being easily irritated and angered (Symptoms of PTSD, n.d., para 2).

One of the key indicators of PTSD is longevity. A PTSD diagnosis is likely if the person experiences symptoms for a month or longer after the initial event. It is also important to understand that sometimes symptoms will not appear immediately after the event. Sometimes they take months or even years to appear (Symptoms of PTSD, n.d.).

One of the symptoms of PTSD that can cause distress includes having trouble falling asleep and staying asleep as well as reliving the trauma in the form of nightmares (Van Der Kolk, 2014; Herman, 2015; Kleim et al., 2016; Sopp et al., 2019). Specific to sleep troubles is the person's work environment (Walker et al., 2016). Angehrn et al. (2020) found in a study of first responders exposed to traumatic events that police officers and firefighters screened lower for the potential of developing PTSD than did paramedics and communications professionals. They also found that sleep health should be a primary concern for supervisors in the first responder industry as a whole because of varying work schedules and high stress occupations. Steinkopf et al. (2018) had similar results, indicating emergency dispatchers were at just as much, if not higher, probability of developing PTSD than police officers. Both groups were at higher risk than the general public. The military should also be considered in this group of first responders concerning and how to care for their sleep habits (Walker et al., 2016; Grupe et al., 2016).

Lack of sleep can affect cognitive abilities. That includes the displaying of behavior such as aggression (Crum et al., 2018), emotional numbing (Crum et al., 2018), and hypervigilance / heightened startle response (Greene et al., 2018; Herman, 2015; Gawlytta et al., 2020; Grupe et al., 2016). The hypervigilance / heightened startle response was so significant a reaction in test subjects for Greene et al. (2018), that the authors suggest specifically targeting the startle response for treatment in order to get all other PTSD symptoms under control.

Bringing the symptoms of PTSD under control can take a number of forms. Kleim et al. found that "sleep in the early aftermath of trauma may protect individuals from the development of intrusive memories" (2016, p. 2131). Trauma training specific to the person's profession has also been proven successful in lessening PTSD symptoms (connect findings to this in chapter 5) (Steinkopf et al., 2018). Counson et al. (2019) reported that practicing mindfulness worked well for Australian firefighters exposed to trauma. The effect of having supportive people around the individual is an area of recovery that a number of researchers have explored with some of the most recent studies showing the importance of a strong social support system in terms of successful trauma recovery (Steinkopf, 2018; Greinacher et al., 2019; Lawn et al., 2020). One other area of recovery involves trauma stabilization. This is when the mental health professional steps out of the listening role and assumes the job of educator, bringing the patient back to a place where he/she feels safe. The therapist or counselor teaches the patient how to recognize symptoms and how to manage them, as well as "decreasing the patient's shame, confusion, and sense of being crazy" (Fisher, 1999, p. 2). More recently, Eichfeld et al. (2018) found trauma stabilization to be significant in the reduction of PTSD symptoms. Stabilization happens when the victim of a trauma works through the emotions associated with the trauma, including using appropriate coping skills, before actually working through the trauma itself.

Acute Stress Disorder (ASD)

Another trauma related disorder is ASD, which is currently defined in the DSM-5 (2013) as:

> Exposure to actual or threatened death, serious injury, or sexual violence in one (or more) of the following ways:
>
> - Directly experiencing the traumatic event(s).
> - Witnessing, in person, the event(s) as it occurred to others.

- Learning that the event(s) occurred to a close family member or close friend. Note: In cases of actual threatened death of a family member or friend, the event(s) must have been violent or accidental.
- Experiencing repeated or extreme exposure to aversive details of the traumatic event(s) (e.g., first responders collecting human remains, police officers repeatedly exposed to details of child abuse) (p.280).

ASD is similar to PTSD, primarily varying only in length of symptoms. Typically, a person will experience ASD symptoms for no longer than a month. When the symptoms carry over longer than a month, PTSD must be considered as a diagnosis. Mental health professionals often see ASD as a precursor to PTSD (Acute Stress Disorder, para. 3; Fullerton, et al., 2004). Acute Stress Disorder has been part of the diagnostic manual since 1994. In 2013, it was reclassified in the Trauma and Stressor-Related Disorders section of the manual. As mentioned above, one of the tell-tale signs of Acute Stress Disorder has to do with longevity of symptoms.

> The diagnosis of ASD can only be considered from 3 days to one month following a traumatic event (commonly referred to as the acute phase). If posttraumatic symptoms persist beyond a month, the clinician would assess for the presence of PTSD. The ASD diagnosis would no longer apply (Acute Stress Disorder, n.d., para 2).

There is a significant difference, however, between PTSD and ASD in terms of symptoms. According to the government's PTSD website, some of those differences include:

- PTSD diagnosis requires meeting a certain number of symptoms within established clusters. For ASD, symptoms are not classified within clusters; therefore, an individual meets diagnosis based upon expression of symptoms in total.

- PTSD includes non-fear based symptoms (i.e., risky or destructive behavior, overly negative thoughts and assumptions about oneself or the world, exaggerated blame of self or others for causing the trauma, negative affect, decreased interest in activities, feeling isolated), whereas ASD does not.
- PTSD includes a dissociative subtype, whereas in ASD, depersonalization and derealization are included as symptoms under the dissociative heading (Acute Stress Disorder, n.d., para. 4).

When ASD was formally added to the DSM IV (American Psychiatric Association, 1994), it served two significant purposes. First, it allowed for an official diagnosis in the month after exposure to a traumatic event, which could lead to better healthcare, specifically in the United States where insurance carriers require a diagnosis in order for treatment to occur. Second, it was hoped that earlier treatment would lessen the severity of PTSD should it ensue beyond the first month after exposure (Bryant, 2013).

ASD has been tracked in a number of military and first responder personnel over the years. Bryant (2013) has a chapter specifically dedicated to this group of people in his book about ASD. Some points he makes that apply to the field of journalism include the high likelihood that the patients who have been exposed to many traumas over a period of time may be less likely to share their emotional experiences. This may be because of fear about who may have access to that information, or they may be working for supervisors who are unsympathetic to the mental health needs of employees. One other point Bryant (2013) makes that is worth noting is how people in military or first responder jobs have managed their emotional and psychological wellbeing over the years. If the patients have been in the first responder, military, or journalism fields for any length of time, they have been forced to learn how to manage their emotions. For many of them, that means emotional detachment (Buchanan & Keats, 2011; Coté & Simpson, 2000; Fedler, 2004; Freinkel, et al., 1994; Ricchiardi, 1998; Simpson & Boggs, 1999). In a 2020 study that explored the lived experience of journalists who covered Pulse, Petersen and Soundararajan discussed how journalists specifically compartmentalized or emotionally detached themselves from the events surrounding the mass shooting. Whatever the means of emotional and psychological management the patients have employed, it is important to acknowledge them while including the things the therapist deems healthy as part of the treatment for ASD.

Trauma & Journalism

Research in the area of trauma and journalism is fairly young, starting in 1994 with a paper penned by Frankel et al. about the execution of a California inmate. Eighteen journalists were invited to witness the execution in the state's gas chamber at San Quentin Prison. A few weeks after the execution, 15 of the journalists in attendance agreed to take part in the study. They explained what they had witnessed and personally experienced as a result of the witnessing the execution. Most journalists reported experiencing dissociative symptoms, with the highest frequency response of feeling disconnected from others in the days after witnessing the execution. This was the study that brought public attention to the notion that domestic journalists might be struggling psychologically with some of the work they were being asked to do as recorders of history.

Over the last few decades, as researchers have tested theories and hypotheses about how journalists experience and cope with trauma associated with their jobs, several areas have appeared as significant and in need of correction. The first is the belief that if a journalist admits he/she is struggling with psychological fallout after coverage of a traumatic event, it means the journalist is weak. In other words, discussion of this sort of emotional affect is typically not a part of the newsroom culture (Carter & Kodrich, 2013; Drummond, 2004). Besides fearing they will appear weak, journalists often do not admit to mental health challenges for fear of losing their jobs or not being given high-profile assignments (Matloff, 2004; Dubberly & Griffin, 2015; Beam & Spratt, 2009; Feinstein et al., 2002). Rentschler (2010) determined that the “dominant ideologies of the field – of psychological detachment and objectivity – deny the psychic and emotional dimensions to journalistic work, and the labor that builds public cultures to address trauma” (p. 470), supporting earlier findings of the effect of a stoic newsroom environment (Ricchiardi, 1998). Despite these attitudes that pervade newsrooms, journalists still need a safe outlet for psychological effects they may be experiencing (Dworznik, 2006). Mental health experts and researchers have encouraged journalistic leaders to rethink how employees’ mental health needs are being met in order to start the industry on a healthier track (Ricchiardi, 2001; Drummond, 2004).

Events journalists have to cover are increasingly more dangerous, putting journalists at an increased risk for lasting psychological problems (Dworznik, 2018; Ricchiardi, 2001; Feinstein et al., 2013). Fires, murders, and automobile accidents remain at the top of the list of daily news events covered in markets across the country. While some research has shown that the larger the event, the larger the emotional effect on the journalists (Backholm & Björkqvist, 2010), other research has shown repeat exposure to be a significant problem (Newman et al., 2003). Some journalists have reported feeling guilty when doing their jobs in connection with a traumatic event, sometimes simply because they could not help the victims during an emergent situation

(Backholm & Idås, 2015; Coté & Simpson, 2000; Browne et al., 2012). Either way, the assumed lack of support "is costing news media in terms of staff energy, productivity and morale" (Simpson, 2004, p. 79).

Frequency of exposure and type of event also plays a significant role in whether journalists are psychologically affected by the stories they cover. If someone has more personal traumas, they are more likely to be affected (Backholm & Björkqvist, 2010). However, the most significant factor determining psychological affect is exposure. The more a person is exposed to trauma, the more likely they are to be negatively affected (Backholm & Björkqvist, 2010; McMahon, 2001; Backholm & Idås, 2015; Simpson & Boggs, 1999; Pyevich et al., 2003). Among the most affected journalists are "foreign correspondents, general assignment reporters and photographers" (Ricchiardi, 1998, p. 36).

According to Monteiro et al. (2015), "It is apparent that…exposure to trauma is one of the most recognizable stress factors, and it emerges in a number of forms (whether in the frontline or editing images)" (pg. 18). Sleeplessness (Dworznik, 2020), traumatic memories (Coté & Simpson, 2000), "sadness, a perception of past failure, loss of pleasure, guilty feelings, self-criticism, suicidal thoughts or wishes, crying, loss of interest, indecisiveness, changes in sleep patterns, irritability, and a loss of interest in sex" (Feinstein, 2006, pg. 73) are all among the symptoms journalists may experience after witnessing trauma.

Post-Traumatic Stress Disorder in Journalists

These symptoms, among others, can lead journalists down the path to PTSD and depression (Backholm & Björkqvist, 2012; Marais & Stuart, 2005; Feinstein, 2012; Aoki et al., 2012; Dworznik & Grubb, 2007). The problem is that journalists often fail to realize just how deeply they are affected by the stories they cover and that can lead to a lack of self-care (Coté &

Simpson, 2000). Dworznik (2006) found that journalists in one particular study, while claiming to be detached, were actually much more emotionally affected than they realized. War correspondents reported a higher instance of PTSD than domestic journalists, though that does not mean domestic journalists are exempt from experiencing PTSD as well (Marais & Stuart, 2005; Feinstein et al., 2002; Feinstein 2004; Sinyor & Feinstein, 2012). Among those who reported having symptoms of PTSD, "The most intense PTSD symptoms included disturbing memories and dreams, hyper vigilance and difficulty sleeping. Sleep issues were also noted with depression, as well as feeling sad and lacking energy" (Dworznik, 2020, pg. 103).

Acute Stress Disorder in Journalists

While PTSD has received some attention among journalists, ASD has not. One study that looked at the reaction of a variety of journalist positions within the WGAL newsroom in Lancaster, PA following the Amish school shooting did note that a number of the journalists fit criteria for an ASD diagnosis (Garvey, 2009).

Further evidence of ASD in journalists is revealed in their memoirs. Not every journalist experiences trauma, and those who do experience it may react very differently from one another. Mac McClelland (2015) shares her experience with trauma, starting with a trip to cover the earthquake in Haiti in 2010. She talks about witnessing a rape then nearly becoming assaulted herself. That led to lack of sleep, trouble with relationships, and heavy drinking as a means of coping with her work in Haiti. These symptoms eventually led to a diagnosis of PTSD. Anderson Cooper (2006) writes about covering some of the biggest stories around the world since the 1990s. He intertwines his own emotional experiences, providing vivid detail from every war and natural disaster he covered. Cooper describes self-medicating with alcohol and angry confrontations on live television, including while interviewing the governor of Louisiana after

Hurricane Katrina. Molly Bingham, featured in Massé's (2011) book, details her experience in Baghdad as a war correspondent and subsequent arrest by security forces loyal to Saddam Hussein. After eight days of grueling interrogation and living in fear of torture, rape, and death, Bingham was freed. She talks about having "pretty minor PTSD" (p. 60) in the weeks following her release, including trembling when talking about her imprisonment and anxiety triggered by locations involved in her arrest.

Looking more specifically at PTSD in journalists, *Shooting Ghosts* (Brennan & O'Reilly, 2017), *The Evil Hours* (Morris, 2015), and *Ghosts by Daylight* (di Giovanni, 2011) each explore the stories of journalists who have worked in war zones including those in Iraq, Sarajevo, Afghanistan, and Somalia. Each author breaks down the harrowing experience of working in a war, often embedded with American military troops, and the fallout when they try to return to normal life at home.

Coping

When a tragedy happens, the first people on the scene are typically first responders: firefighters, police officers, and EMS workers. Alongside those first responders though are the journalists. They witness the exact same things as the first responders. However, many times, first responders return to their workplace and are offered mental health resources, whereas journalists typically are not offered the same care (Simpson & Boggs, 1999; Buchanan & Keats, 2011; Drummond, 2004). Because of the lack of leadership in the area of mental healthcare for journalists, the journalists themselves are often forced to take matters into their own hands, assuming they even recognize and acknowledge the need for help (Santos, 2010). Social support, including talking to one another, is one option (Santos, 2010; Greenberg et al., 2009; Berrington & Jemphrey, 2003; Coté & Simpson, 2000). Other selfcare options journalists have employed include solo activities such as going for a walk, listening to music, exercise or isolation (Coté & Simpson, 2000), and religion/prayer (Massé, 2011; Coté & Simpson, 2000; Santos, 2010).

Mental health experts have recommended journalists be allowed to discuss and assess their symptoms within 24-72 hours after coverage of a traumatic event (Hatanaka, 2010; Ricchiardi, 1998; Massé 2011). Pyevich (2003) recommends cognitive therapy interventions, but it is much more likely that newsrooms will choose to do a form of debriefing, which current research has supported as a positive option (Dworznik, 2006; Carter & Kodrich, 2013; Beam & Spratt, 2009; Keats & Buchanan, 2012). For some journalists though, the stigma attached to showing any type of emotion that could be perceived as weakness remains, and for them, debriefings would not be affective. Therefore, an additional treatment option allowing people to vent their emotions that has proven to be successful is talking with friends and family outside of work (Coté & Simpson, 2000; Massé, 2011). One research team made a recommendation that professional counselors should understand the newsroom culture before attempting to work in one. They write, “For those journalists who need psychological interventions, we strongly recommend that therapists have training and understanding of the culture of journalism and the types of assignment stress injuries with which journalists may be struggling” (Keats & Buchanan, 2012, p. 220).

Changes in regard to caring for the mental health of journalists are the responsibility of management within the news organization. Often news managers care for the physical wellbeing of journalists but neglect their mental wellbeing (Carter & Kodrich, 2013; Berrington & Jemphrey, 2003; Dubberly et al., 2015; Weidmann et al., 2008). As cited in Santos (2010), “As a result of such attitudes, journalists are at least twenty years behind other so-called first responders – police officers, firefighters, rescue workers – in dealing with the aftereffects of violence, says psychiatrist and trauma expert Frank Ochberg" (p. 61). Media managers need to more openly discuss the potential mental health damage of the industry (Petersen & Soundararajan, 2020), monitor all staff for potential behavioral changes (Petersen & Soundararajan, 2020; Masse 2011), and rotating crews and lightening the workload for those who have been covering a difficult story for an extended period of time (Dworznik, 2020; Keats & Buchanan, 2012; Feinstein et al., 2013).

Keats and Buchanan (2012) found that "it is possible for managers and journalists to learn how to speak and listen to one another to create an environment of support and to challenge stoic attitudes by modeling or mentoring for effective communication" (p. 220). It is very likely that when a news team feels seen and cared for by management, the team will have better job satisfaction and morale (Dworznik, 2018). They need to know management cares (Beam & Spratt, 2009). Keats and Buchanan (2012) encourage news managers to offer trauma and selfcare training opportunities throughout the year. In addition, Idås et al. (2019) found that reframing the attitude toward mental health within a newsroom has "potential to underpin personal growth after traumatic assignments by developing a culture for discussions, reflections, and recognition" (p. 7).

A handful of major news outlets, including the British Broadcasting Corporation (BBC), the New York Times, National Public Radio (NPR), Hearst Newspapers, CNN, USA Today, and the Wall Street Journal, have attempted to care for the mental health of their staff (Himmelstein & Faithorn, 2002; Keats & Buchanan, 2009; Santos, 2010; Matloff, 2004; Ricchiardi, 2001). Most of these efforts were short-term, in response to coverage of the 9/11 terror attacks in America. The BBC and the New York Times were the only two reported to have an ongoing process for mental healthcare for journalists. While the BBC's program appears to be doing well, the program at the New York Times has not been well received, according to the director of the program (Himmelstein & Faithorn, 2002).

More recently, staff in two newsrooms in Pennsylvania worked to bring peer support programs to their newsrooms. One was so successful, it was expanded into two additional newsrooms in other parts of the country (Svachula, 2018). Organizations like the Radio Television Digital News Association (RTDNA) have put together a Newsroom Mental Health Resource Guide online. It is loaded with information for journalists, providing tips for successful long-term traumatic event coverage, self-care, and stress awareness (Newsroom Mental Health Resource Guide, n.d.). Other organizations, like Poynter, offer a range of articles to help journalists cope with stress and mental fatigue. It does appear that there are a plethora of resources available for working with traumatized victims but not nearly as many are available for journalists who may be traumatized themselves.

Often times, because mental healthcare is not readily available to journalists, they choose to self-medicate with things like drugs and alcohol, but those options often end up causing even more problems (Osofsky et al., 2005; Coté & Simpson, 2000; Underwood, 2011; Levaot et al., 2013). War journalists are especially at high risk for alcohol abuse (Feinstein et al., 2002; Feinstein 2006). Feinstein (2006) found that men who abused alcohol were also the group abusing illicit drugs. Sinyor and Feinstein (2012) found that the number of female journalists who were excessively drinking was “substantially higher than the rates reported in the general population” (p. 32). Underwood’s (2011) research found that around two-thirds of journalists have experienced trauma in their work, which seems to correspond with the close to 50% of journalists who admit to having used alcohol and drugs excessively. That’s double the rate found in the general population (Lim & Sweeney, 2016). Buchanan and Keats (2011) talked about how black humor, nightmares, substance abuse to avoid disturbing memories, and compartmentalizing and avoiding places that reminded the person of the event were all coping mechanisms used by first responders, including police, firefighter, and the military.

The similarities between the above-mentioned groups and journalists are clear. The difference is, in part, a lack of education for journalists in regard to coping with trauma. Dworznik and Grubb (2007) explain journalists "say they can handle the emotions of covering a tragedy, but they don't really have any idea what types of emotions they may experience. This type of attitude pervades the news industry" (p. 204). Some of that lack of knowledge falls on college and university classrooms. If trauma and journalism education were part of the regular journalism curriculum, significant change could happen in the industry when it comes to mental healthcare for journalists (Keats & Buchanan, 2009; Dworznik & Grubb, 2007; Petersen & Soundararajan, 2020; Hopper & Huxford, 2015; Dworznik & Garvey, 2019).

The mental wellbeing of war correspondents has received some attention in recent years, but domestic journalists appear to be somewhat forgotten when it comes to experiencing trauma on the job (Simpson, 2004; Dworznik, 2018). As Feinstein et al. (2002) found, "The data should therefore come as a wake-up call to the news organizations that all is not necessarily well with the men and women who, at considerable risk, bring us news of the world's conflicts" (p. 1574). Without question, the research has shown there is an urgent need to reimagine how news media outlets are caring for their employees during and after coverage of a traumatic news event (Hill et al., 2020).

Journalists often self-medicate to control unwanted reactions to traumatic events. However, looking to the field of professional mental healthcare, perhaps it is worth taking into consideration at least one of the methods for the general public when it comes to mental healthcare and traumatic events: dogs (Cobham, 2019).

Comfort Dogs

Dogs who work directly with humans can serve a number of different purposes. Dogs known as comfort dogs will be the focus of this study. Specifically, this study will focus on dogs who work with Lutheran Church Charities in its LCC K-9 Comfort Dog Ministry®. The organization defines its LCC K-9 Comfort Dogs as “working animals, trained to interact with people of all ages and circumstances who are suffering and in need” (LCC K-9 Comfort Dog Ministry, n.d., para 2). The American Kennel Club furthers the definition of comfort dog as a dog trained to respond to a crisis event (Burke, 2018). These dogs are trained to remain calm amid chaos in situations like natural disasters or man-made disasters (Burke, 2018).

Types of Aid Dogs

Today’s culture of aid dogs in American society can lead to some confusion as to what dogs do what jobs. To clarify, the American Kennel Club published an article in July of 2019 explaining many of the differences (Reisen, 2019).

Service dogs fulfill jobs like helping people with physical disabilities, such as blindness or deafness, safely navigate through day-to-day life. Service dogs also work with people who have diagnosed psychiatric or other conditions not outwardly visible like diabetes or epilepsy. Service dogs are protected under the Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA). The ADA defines a service animal as “dogs that are individually trained to do work or perform tasks for people living with disabilities” (ADA Service Dog Laws, 2018, para 3). People are discouraged from approaching, interacting with, or petting a service dog that is working and/or wearing a vest indicating it is working.

The working dog is also trained for a specific purpose but is considered more of a service to a community or an organization rather than to an individual. Working dogs perform jobs like search and rescue, explosives detection, cancer detection, and allergy alerts. According to the AKC, “Since working dogs are usually specifically trained to perform certain roles in certain locations, they are not often subject to legal ramifications” (Reisen, 2019, para 7).

While emotional support animals cover a wide range of species of animals, for the sake of comparing like items, dogs will be the sole focus of this section. Emotional support dogs are typically provided through a medical diagnosis from a physician or a licensed therapist for the purpose of providing companionship for individuals who have conditions such as “anxiety, depression, some phobias, or loneliness” (Reisen, 2009, para 12). Emotional support dogs do not require any special training; however, they are not protected under the ADA and do not have the same rights as service or working dogs. These dogs do sometimes wear vests and should not be petted unless the vest indicates that is appropriate.

Therapy dogs are trained for human interaction, but they are not trained to serve just one person like a service dog. Often, therapy dogs are found in places like hospitals, schools, and nursing homes “where they provide comfort, affection, and even love in the course of their work” (Reisen, 2019, para 8). Therapy dogs are very social and friendly toward new people and they adapt quickly in new environments. This is the genre in which comfort dogs fall. Therapy dogs do not have protection under ADA and, therefore, are limited as to where they are allowed to go. Therapy dogs should have proper training from a certified therapy dog organization, such as the Alliance of Therapy Dogs, They should be insured, and they should have a license from the organization under which they are serving. Unlike service dogs and working dogs, the purpose of comfort dogs is for them to be petted. They wear vests that say things like “Pet Me”, giving individuals permission to approach the dogs, interact with them, and touch them.

History of Aid Dogs

For thousands of years, animals and humans have worked together in a variety of therapeutic relationships (Morrison, 2007). In 1972, farm animals were used to “improve the attitude of mental health patients” (Macauley, 2006, p. 3). This became the first documented use of animals in a therapeutic situation. Dr. Sigmund Freud first noticed how positively his patients reacted when a dog was in the room during a therapy session did anyone start formally researching the use of dogs in therapeutic situations, though this was not formally studied. His discovery was not published until a few years after his death, as memoirs, including personal letters and notes, were published (Coren, 2013). While Freud did have dogs in his sessions frequently, the first person to actually research the effectiveness of dogs in therapy was Dr. Boris Levinson (Firmin, 2016).

Levinson had been hired by a mother to provide mental healthcare to her son who was not finding success with other doctors. Levinson was his last hope before being committed to a mental health institution. Levinson agreed to help the child. The mother showed up an hour early for the session and Levinson had not had an opportunity to put his dog, Jingles, in another room. The child and Jingles started to interact and that helped relax the child enough that Levinson was able to help rehabilitate him over the course of several sessions (Levinson, 1962). From this time, the use of animals in therapy began to gain popularity with mental health professionals. Levinson so strongly believed in the use of pets in relation to bettering human lives, he went on to write a book called *Pets and Human Development* (Levinson, 1972), where he explores specific interactions such as pets and grief, pets and child development, and pets and psychotherapy. It would be safe to assume this is the very first text in regard to the health benefits of human-animal interaction ever published. While Levinson is the first documented person to publish research in this area, Freud often gets the credit for creating pet-assisted therapy (Coren, 2003).

The first pet assisted therapy program was opened in 1977 at The Ohio State University by psychiatrists Sam and Elizabeth Corson (Coren, 2003). Between 1980 and 2000, Animal Assisted Therapy became a more widely accepted treatment option in the mental health field, which also increased the amount of academic research dedicated to the topic (Altschiller, 2018; Coren, 2003). Coren (2003) also writes that “the number of pet-assisted therapy programs grew from less than twenty in 1980 to more than one thousand by the year 2000” (p. 141).

Today, there are many different areas in which dogs can be of assistance to humans. One of the problems with this area of care though is a lack of consistent definitions (Shotwell & Karen, 2019). Therefore, the following areas will be defined and explored: Animal Assisted Therapy, Animal Assisted Activities, Animal Assisted Intervention, and Animal Assisted Crisis Response.

Animal Assisted Activities (AAA)

Animal Assisted Activities (AAA) is a broad term that encompasses a wide range of services offered by a wide range of animals. Dogs are not only the most common species used in therapy but also in trauma therapy (O’Haire, 2015b; Stewart et al., 2016; Dvoskina & Kole, 2020; Lass-Hennemann et al., 2018; Çakıcı, A., & Kök, M., 2020). This is because dogs have been found to be trustworthy, nonjudgmental, and comforting, making it easier for those in treatment to relax and receive the treatment they need (Bossard, 1944; Levinson, 1962; Serlin et al., 2019, Yorke et al., 2008; Hunt & Chizkov, 2014). Therefore, the research in this section will focus on a broad approach to animals involved in therapeutic situations, further setting the stage for the following sections which are more specific.

As acceptance of dogs as treatment options for people who are experiencing difficult circumstances grows, so do the places where dogs are working. From pediatric oncology floors to nursing homes, university campuses and courtrooms, the dogs' effect on the patients has been marked, primarily showing decreased anxiety, worry, and fatigue (Chubak et al., 2017; Shiloh et al., 2010; LeRoux & Kemp, 2009; Menna et al., 2019; Crump & Derting, 2015). Chubak et al. (2017) cited how parents and staff members even noticed a significant change in pediatric cancer patients after a visit with a therapy dog. For several of the parents and staff, "the dog visit was the first time the child had smiled or been happy in a long time" (Chubak et al., 2017, p. 338). Research has shown that the dogs play a significant role in social support for patients as well (Foreman et al., 2017; LeRoux & Kemp, 2009; Hall & Mills, 2019). Crump and Derting (2015) believe that part of the reason dogs are so successful in therapeutic situations is because people often see the dogs as friends, therefore creating a naturally more relaxed atmosphere.

Animal Assisted Therapy (AAT)

One of the more recent areas where AAT is being implemented is in the medical community such as in dental offices, nursing homes, and hospitals (Mims & Waddell, 2016; Firmin et al., 2016). Cruz-Fierro et al. (2019) found that dogs in dental offices helped ease dental anxiety, especially in patients who live with pets. These results have been duplicated in a number of studies like the one by Reddekop et al. (2020), where patients who owned pets were much more likely to ask for a visit from a therapy dog during a trip to an emergency department. Dell et al. (2019) found similar results as patients explained how the dogs' presence helped them relax and be distracted during an emergency department stay. Overall, patients expressed how the dogs allowed them to be relaxed, happy, comfortable, and joyful, even when in a place like a hospital where anxiety can be running high (Kamioka et al., 2014; Walsh, 2009; Marr et al., 2000). Again, animals are also finding success in more traditional medical offices like those of mental health professionals, "serving as a bridge between therapists and clients, lowering inhibitions and reducing anxiety" (Dietz et al., 2012, p. 655). These results have been duplicated in a number of other studies, further supporting the findings that interactions with dogs during difficult experiences helps improve mood and even bring healing to those who are dealing with significant diagnoses like PTSD, because the dogs help ground the person, giving him/her a chance to regroup emotionally (Crump & Derting, 2015; Kelly & Cozzolino, 2015, Fine et al., 2019; Mims & Waddell, 2016; Dvoskina & Cole, 2020; Parshall, 2003). Researchers have also recommended AAT for behavioral conditions such as drug and alcohol abuse, suggesting that interactions lowered the need for substance dependency (Rodriguez et al., 2018; Kamioka et al., 2014). One of the reasons dogs have been found to be effective in treating mental health conditions is that they give the counselor and the patient something in common about which to talk, creating a natural conversation and encouraging the patient to be more vulnerable, therefore opening the door for better and more accurate treatment from the mental health worker (Çakıcı, A. & Kök, M., 2020; Firman et al., 2016; Barker et al., 2015; Compitus, 2019).

There are physiological benefits to AAT as well. Studies have shown decreased levels of cortisol, lowered blood pressures and heart rates for patients following interaction with an animal (Barker et al., 2015). A study conducted by McCraty (2015) actually tested the heartrates of a 12-year-old boy and his dog to see if there was a physiological connection between the two. By having both participants wear ECG recorders, the researcher was able to measure a significant difference in the body’s response to presence and absence of both the dog and the boy. Results clearly show a much more relaxed state for both animal and human when in the room together.

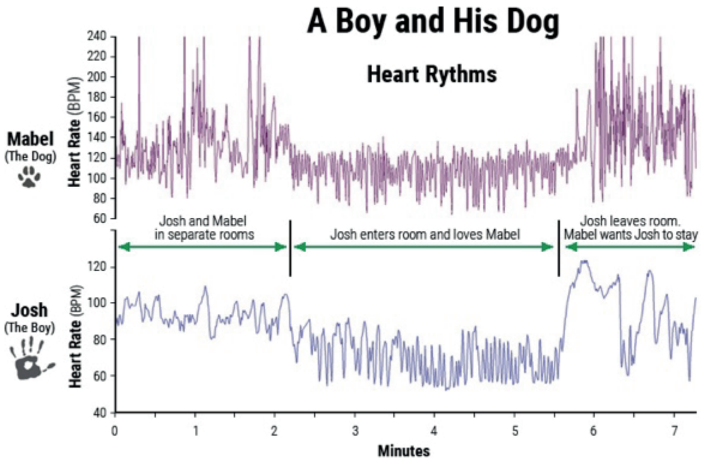

Fig. 1 Charts indicating heart rhythms of a child and a dog, indicating a measurable change in their physiological make-up when in the room together and when separated.

Animal Assisted Intervention (AAI)

AAIs have more formal delivery methods, often involving scheduled appointments and specific goals for habilitation, specifically psychological rehabilitation (Santaniello et al., 2020; O’Haire, 2015b). However, despite AAI having a slightly more formal purpose, the studies and findings are similar to those included in AAA and AAT studies, creating further proof of a need for specific language in terms of working with dogs. Specifically, O’Haire (2015a) found an overwhelmingly positive response to AAI for trauma survivors. In a second study, O’Haire (2015b) specifically mentions positive outcomes for those suffering with PTSD including “reduced PTSD symptoms, depression, and anxiety” (p. 6). In war veterans, specifically, O’Haire (2015b) saw results that pointed to long-lasting recovery “such as increased happiness, social support and better sleep quality” (p. 4). O’Haire (2015a) found in a systematic literature review that participants in six out of ten studies reported reduced symptoms of depression, making it the strongest result of AAI research. Reduced PTSD symptoms were found in participants in five of the ten studies, making it the second strongest result of AAI research and reduced anxiety was found in four of the ten studies, making it the third strongest result of AAI research. Altschuler (2018) also found that working with animals can significantly decrease a person's PTSD symptoms, to the point it actually may prevent suicides in PTSD patients.

As found in other AAA, health professionals are also attributing AAI with lowered oxytocin levels and other healthy physiological reactions (Beetz et al., 2012; Yount et al., 2013; O'Haire, 2015a; Serlin et al., 2019; Menna et al., 2019). All of these findings put together make a solid case for including animals in the treatment of people suffering from trauma-related conditions (Shotwell & Karen, 2019; O'Haire, 2015b; Pendry et al., 2020).

Animal Assisted Crisis Response (AACR)

The final area of animal intervention to discuss is AACR. This is the area that is most applicable to the use of dogs in newsrooms as a coping mechanism during and after news coverage of a traumatic event. That is because AACR teams respond to emergent events. The first AACR team to ever be deployed was sent to the Alfred P. Murrah building bombing in Oklahoma City in 1995 (Greenbaum, 2006; Shubert, 2012). AACRs are primarily used by mental health professionals, counselors, clergy, and crisis intervention teams, so the approach is similar to AAT in the level of formality (Greenbaum, 2006). Just three years after the Oklahoma City bombing, a 15-year-old boy opened fire on his classmates at Thurston High School in Springfield, Oregon, killing two and wounding 25 (Wilson, 2018). Pet Partners, formerly known as The Delta Society, an organization that has used animals as therapeutic resources for more than 40 years (The Pet Partners Story, n.d., p. 1), reached out to two therapy dogs, inviting them to the campus to interact with the survivors and their families, a significant milestone as it created the groundwork for the creation of AACR (Shubert, 2012; Greenbaum, 2006). So while the creation of AACR is relatively new, there is already precedent for its existence and “a growing trend to use AACR animal/handler teams as part of an overall incident response program” (Greenbaum, 2006, p. 50).

Around 500 AACR teams were also present in New Jersey, New York, and Virginia after 9/11 (Greenbaum, 2006). One of those animal/handler teams was Cindy Ehler and her dog, Tikva (Crawford et al., 2003). Workers sifting through the ash and rubble around Ground Zero initially thought Tikva was a search and rescue dog. When they learned she was there to comfort them, their demeanor changed, allowing them to start to feel some of the emotion of the difficult work they were doing. A counselor on scene commented how Tikva had reached the workers in a very short span of time in a way that counselors had spent days trying to do. This is just one of many stories about how AACR dogs helped workers surrounded by chaos and sadness begin to cope with the situation. Tedeschi and Jenkins (2019) explain why AACR works: “Unlike traditional therapy, the brief and urgent nature of crisis intervention requires rapport to be established nearly instantaneously for a meaningful dialogue to commence. This is where the presence of a canine can be immensely beneficial” (p. 377).

The fact that AACR is a relatively new concept also explains the lack of published peer-reviewed research in the area. Greenbaum’s work leads the way for others who desire to add to this branch. This also helps make a case for this current study, seeing as how there is a need for additional research directly linked to crises. One organization that is leading the way in terms of AACR and comfort dogs is the K-9 Comfort Dog Ministry® with the Lutheran Church Charities. This is the ministry that was brought into the WFTV newsroom after the Pulse nightclub shooting on Thursday, June 16, 2016.

Lutheran Church Charities K-9 Comfort Dog Ministry®

The ministry, based in Northbrook, Illinois, started in 2008 and is described on the organization’s website as “a national human-care ministry embracing the unique, calming nature and skills of purebred Golden Retrievers” (LCC K-9 Comfort Dog Ministry, n.d., para 1). The dogs go through a minimum of 2,000 hours of training at one of the organization’s two training centers in Illinois and Nebraska, then they are placed with churches, ministries, and schools around the country. They are then assigned to caregivers, who also receive extensive training, and live in the homes of the caregivers across the country.

Within 24 hours of the shooting at Pulse nightclub in Orlando in June of 2016, twelve LCC dogs from seven states were deployed, along with their caregivers, to offer comfort to the survivors and the families of those affected by the shooting. While in Orlando, the LCC K-9 Ministry Teams visited hospitals, memorials, a 911communications center, and with first responders. The Orlando news media was among those first responders. Before discussing specific interactions between the dogs and the news media, it is important to understand the crime and the days that followed.

Pulse Nightclub Shooting

The Pulse nightclub shooting happened around 2 a.m. on June 12, 2016 in Orlando, Florida. Police later said Omar Mateen (Mateen) went into the nightclub to avenge the deaths of ISIL/ISIS fighters and leaders, specifically in Iraq. For hours, Mateen held hostages inside the nightclub while police tried to negotiate with him to surrender. Just after 5 a.m., police drove an armored vehicle through the side of the nightclub and engaged Mateen, killing him (Zambelich & Hurt, 2016).

Fifty people died, including Mateen, and 53 were wounded. At the time, it was the deadliest mass shooting in American history, only to be surpassed by a mass shooting in Las Vegas during a country music festival about a year later where 59 people were killed, including the shooter, and nearly 900 were injured (Santora 2016; Miller 2017). The severity of the Pulse mass shooting led the FBI to label it as an Islamic terrorist attack, making it the deadliest terrorist attack in the U.S. since September 11. While Pulse was a popular bar for the LGBTQ community, the FBI said it never found that the reason Mateen targeted the club was because of the clientele, which meant the shooting could not officially be labeled as a hate crime (Goldman, 2016).

Daily coverage of the Pulse shootings lasted for weeks. With each passing day, additional horrifying details and personal stories emerged in the media. As a result, many of the local journalists were constantly reliving the horror of the event and were repeatedly subjected to the violence of the shooting, the brutality of the crime, and the sadness of the community.

Comfort Dogs on Scene after Pulse Shooting

While the community found solace in memorials and moments of silence, some journalists found solace in the comfort of service dogs. The dogs appear to only have visited two newsrooms during their stay in Orlando: WFTV (Hare, 2016; Russon, 2016) and WOFL (Debra Baran, personal communication, October 8, 2020). The dogs' visit to WFTV was initiated by a reporter who covered a story about the dogs comforting people near the scene of the shooting, (Hare, 2016). The dogs only visited for around 30 minutes but "Asa saw smiles from people who hadn't had anything to smile about for the last week" (Hare, 2016, para. 15). Comfort dogs also visited The Dallas Morning News after five police officers were shot and killed in July of 2016 (Huang, 2016).

There is no academic research regarding the use of comfort dogs in association with trauma and journalism. Beyond a lack of academic research regarding the dogs interacting with journalists, there is very little written in trade publications about this treatment option for those exposed to a traumatic event. Sources cited above appear to be the only three that have written about the use of comfort dogs in newsrooms anywhere in the United States. This should serve as a catalyst for more research about this topic. Little academic research exists in relation to comfort dogs and first responders as well (Dvoskina & Cole, 2020). However, Graham (2009) makes a case for using comfort dogs with first responders as a means of distraction during their difficult jobs on the scene of traumatic events.

Other authors have captured the stories of comfort dogs working with first responders. Specifically, Crawford and Pomerinke (2003) include stories about dogs like Tikva, who was mentioned earlier. When Tikva and her handler returned home, a firefighter had sent them an email that read, in part, “Where are the comfort dogs? Those dogs were the only thing that helped me get through the day” (p. 30).

Stavrinides and Schlimm (2019) share a number of personal stories about comfort dogs and first responders. The dogs included in their book are part of a different branch of comfort dogs that serve with the Lutheran Church Charities. The organization has a group of K9 Comfort Dogs who work solely with police departments. The first dog in that group to work solely with the officers was Shiloh. She and her handler have been called to minister during funerals for police officers, including K9 officers, as well as to work with those in law enforcement after significant events. For example, they were called to Dallas, Texas, after the shooting in 2016 that claimed the lives of five officers.

A Case for This Study

The use of animals, dogs in particular, as coping mechanisms has been studied for years in a number of professions, but they have not been studied in journalists. O'Haire et al. (2015b) specifically called for additional research on specific demographics within the population as well as clear definition of those demographics. The hope is that with additional research, it would become clearer who benefits from AAI. O'Haire et al. (2015a) also discussed how it could be beneficial to have treatments developed to specifically meet the needs of different experiences. Morrison (2007) made similar suggestions, recommending additional research into a number of areas regarding AAI. She mentioned setting, animal type, and client population as areas that specifically need consideration in future research. Defining those areas would help continue growing the integration of AAI in healthcare.

Looking to existing research in trauma and journalism, Monteiro et al. (2015) called for additional research into coping, specifically, problem solving coping. They also recommend studies on stress variables, or identification of the stressor, and the coping strategies journalists use to work through that trauma. Beam and Spratt (2009) looked at the managerial side of the news industry, explaining how future research needs to consider how managers can better understand and help journalists navigate through traumatic news coverage.

Chapter 3: Methodology

Introduction

This chapter will describe the design of the study, participants and recruitment, data collection, data analysis, ethical considerations, revisiting the need for the study, and the timeline.

Studies have shown that repeated exposure to traumatic news stories can have lasting and sometimes devastating mental, emotional, and physical effects on the journalists who cover those stories every single day (Dworznik, 2006; Keats & Buchanan, 2009; Buchanan & Keats, 2011; Marais & Stuart, 2005; Rentschler, 2010). The purpose of this qualitative thematic analysis is to explore the lived experiences of full-time broadcast journalists from the Orlando market who interacted with the non-profit-provided comfort dogs following experiencing the trauma of the Pulse nightclub shooting. The aim of this dissertation will be to address the following research question:

> RQ1. What psychological and emotional reactions did journalists experience during and after coverage of the Pulse nightclub shooting?
>
> RQ2. What role did the comfort dogs play in assisting journalists with coping with their reactions to the Pulse nightclub shooting?

These questions will be explored through the lens of Lazarus and Folkman’s (1984) Transactional Model of Stress and Coping. Accordingly, topics that will be explored will include self-control, confrontation, social support, emotional distancing, escape and avoidance, radical acceptance, positive reappraisal, and strategic problem solving.

Design of Study

In order to be able to tell the stories and find meaning and connection in content, it was first important to understand the methodology by which data would be collected. The qualitative methodology, like quantitative methodology, collects data. What separates the two is the type of data collected. Quantitative relies on numerical data while qualitative relies "on text and image data, have unique steps in data analysis, and draw on diverse designs" (Creswell, 2014, p. 183). This was a qualitative study.

There are a number of different types of qualitative studies, including case studies and phenomenological studies. Case studies consider data from a specific grouping of people that has a commonality that can be observed or tracked. Sometimes there are case studies within case studies, so there are often times where case studies have layers of data (Patton, 2002). Creswell (2014) further explains case studies as "an in-depth analysis of a case, often a program, event, activity, process, or one or more individuals" (p. 14). Case studies examine a specific time period or incident and involve data collection "over a sustained period of time" (Creswell, 2014, p. 14). Phenomenological studies require the researcher to investigate the lived experience of a group of people who all experienced the same phenomenon and typically involve the conducting of interviews (Creswell, 2014). Within the phenomenological methodology, there is a range of types of interviews that can be performed to gather data including through focus groups, via phone or video calls, and in-person interviews (Creswell, 2014). While Creswell talks about how researchers typically ask open-ended questions, and very few of them, as to generate genuine experiences from the participants, it is important to realize that the phenomenological interview needs to have structure so that results can be measured and pointed back to the theoretical framework of the study. Van Manen (1990) and Moustakas (1994) both discuss the need for the researcher to remember the purpose of the interview and allow the structure to drive the questions rather than allowing the questions to drive the structure.

Participants and Recruitment

The participants for this study included journalists from the WFTV newsroom in Orlando, Florida. All of the participants met the following criteria:

- worked during the first week of coverage following the Pulse shooting on Sunday, June 12, 2006;
- were present during the visit of the LCC K-9 Comfort Dog Ministry® on Thursday, June 16, 2006; and
- interacted with the dogs and their handlers during the visit to the newsroom.

Age, gender, ethnicity, and job title were not considered, as this is a limited group of people and eliminating parts of the population could result in not having enough participants and data.

Following Institutional Review Board approval for the research project, recruitment of the participants followed several steps:

First, a list of potential subjects and contact information was gathered from an original source. The original source was instrumental in bringing the dogs to the newsroom and had firsthand knowledge of at least some of the people who interacted with the dogs during their newsroom visit. Additional sources were gathered throughout the interview process as participants recommended others who would be qualified to participate.

Second, all 30 potential subjects were contacted via email using a form letter that explained the subject of the research and their obligations should they choose to participate.

Obligations included dedication of a minimum of 60 minutes for an in-depth interview via video technology to accommodate current cultural expectations of social distancing due to a pandemic. In-depth interviews are expected to provide depth and rich description (Patton, 2002), giving insight into a phenomenon experienced only by a select group of journalists. The interviews were video and audio recorded, with verbal and written consent from the participants, and later transcribed for analysis. All interviews were recorded on an iMac laptop and on an iPhone as a back-up source. Interviews were stored in a secure, locked area and will not be made public. Confidentiality was offered to the participants as to encourage more open conversations, which often results in more descriptive, valuable information. Each of these steps is noted by Patton (2014) as a piece of successful fieldwork in qualitative research. The goal was to collect data from a minimum of 15 interviews, all from journalists who work at WFTV in Orlando and who met the above listed criteria.

Third, subjects were emailed a copy of the informed consent research agreement approved by the Institutional Review Board. They were asked to review the agreement and ask any questions or share any concerns they may have moving forward. At the start of each interview, I obtained verbal consent to conduct the study.

Finally, participants were scheduled, according to their availability, for the interview. They were provided with a date and a time as well as a digital code to join the video meeting. Once each of these steps was completed, data collection took place.

Data Collection

Moustakas (1994) outlines three steps he believes will provide clear and unbiased data collection in phenomenological research projects. Those steps are:

Step 1: Discover a Topic

In this step, the researcher should explore a range of topics until one is found that needs additional information in order to expand the field of knowledge. Of particular importance, according to Moustakas (1994) is to find a "topic and question that have both social meaning and personal significance" (p. 104). This dissertation has great social meaning and personal significance for the author. Being a former journalist who covered a mass shooting of children, the personal significance stems from my own experiences with trauma while working in the news media.

In order to establish a topic of both social meaning and personal significance, the following steps were applied. First, an exploration of current trends regarding mental healthcare for journalists was conducted. This included reading trade and academic publications for the most recent articles about trauma and journalism. Second, a discussion with a fellow researcher led me to explore the use of comfort dogs in newsrooms as my fellow researcher found that journalists talked openly and excitedly about them visiting a newsroom in Dallas after several police officers were murdered in 2016. It was at this point, upon inspection of academic journal articles that I discovered no one had formally studied the use of the dogs in newsrooms. Finally, after reading a trade article from Poynter, I tracked down the journalist from WFTV responsible for bringing the dogs into the newsroom after the Pulse shooting and had a conversation with her about her experience as a means of looking into whether there was enough content available to do a formal study.

Step Two: Conduct thorough review of literature

Before conducting the study, it was important to understand where the holes in the current research may be. Therefore, exploring all facets of trauma and journalism research was necessary, as well as exploring a number of other areas. First, a purpose statement was developed, which identified the areas of research that would need to be explored in the literature review. Four main areas as well as more specific topics were identified within each of the main areas. Second, a search on research for each of the main areas from the last five years also noted the key foundational researchers and their work. I read each article and highlighted quotes appropriate for making the case for this study. Quotes were placed onto a matrix, along with author name, publication name, and publication year. Keywords were used to organize the quotes. Finally, quotes were put into a logical order that helped tell the story of each of the main sections of Chapter 2, which helped synthesize writings and show where additional research could help enhance each subject.

Step Three: Locate research subjects

As mentioned earlier, talking to the journalist who brought the dogs into the WFTV newsroom helped open doors to additional subjects. First, the reporter was asked for a list of additional journalists within her newsroom who she knew had interacted with the dogs. She provided a list of nine potential subjects with which to conduct interviews. Second, additional historical accounts of the shooting in both the mainstream media and in the trade publications were reviewed to ensure selection of all potential participants. Finally, a spreadsheet was created with the names and contact information for each identified potential participant. This allowed the author to schedule interviews with each of the participants according to their availability and in an organized fashion.

Step Four: Provide subjects with instruction

Once the initial set of participants was identified, I followed specific steps to gather data. First, I established a date and time for the interview. Second, I had them read and sign the informed consent, then conducted the interview following steps outlined earlier in this chapter. Finally, I asked each participant for the contact information of others who interacted with the dogs during their visit to WFTV, thereby using the snowball method to find participants.

Step Five: Write an interview guide

Because this study used long-form interviews to gather data, having a guide to direct those interviews was crucial. Keeping in mind that open-ended questions are the best means for gathering rich explanations (Patton, 2002), I did the following: First, I wrote questions that created a chronological order so as to create responses that lent themselves to natural storytelling. Second, I ensured those questions flowed well into one another, as the more relaxed and natural an interview is, the better results will be. Finally, I looked for all potential avenues for questioning so as to provide the best possible responses. The interview itself is the primary means of gathering data so it needed to be conducted in a manner that would provide the best information for the research project. Moustakas (1994) suggests considering informal interviewing, open-ended questions, and topical-related interviews (p. 181). For this study, all three of these suggestions were employed.

Step 6: Conduct interviews

Once the interview guide was written and approved, the interviews were conducted. First, I set up the interview for a time and a place that best suited the subject. All interviews took place via digital means because of the pandemic. Second, I made sure the interviewee was at ease. Breaking the ice and having a more casual conversation before the official interview will often result in a more pleasant interview experience. This was also where I shared some of my story from covering trauma during my time in the media. By creating a connection with the journalists, they are more likely to accept me as “one of them” and are more likely to speak freely. Finally, I asked the subject if I may check back in with him/her as I am writing should I have any additional questions. Fifteen interviews took place between December 22, 2020, and January 12, 2021.

Step 7: Organize and analyze data

After all 15 interviews were completed, the data were ready for analyzing. First, all interviews were transcribed using an app called Otter. This app recorded the interviews and transcribed them in real time. During the transcription stage, I listened to each interview again, reading along with the transcription to ensure it was accurate. This also allowed me to add descriptive notes about tone, facial expressions, etc. that the app would not be able to convey but that could be valuable in providing additional detail about nonverbal communication from the subject being interviewed. Second, I used thematic analysis to identify themes that allowed me to determine, specifically, patterns of feeling or behavior among the journalists following the Pulse shooting and interactions with the dogs. Finally, I applied the themes to the current research in the area of trauma and journalism, to provide additional depth of knowledge regarding potential coping mechanisms for journalists who may be affected by covering traumatic events while on the job.

Data Analysis

For data analysis, Moustakas (1994) breaks down the process for phenomenological studies into seven steps, a variation of the Van Kaam Method of Analysis. Creswell (2014) has a six-step process for analyzing data, which can be used in a number of qualitative methodologies, including phenomenological studies. I used Creswell's (2014) structure but have included concepts from Moustakas (1994) as well.

Step 1: Organize and prepare the data for analysis

Once data were collected, the process of organizing it was critical to being able to move forward. Because the amount of data collected in qualitative research is significant, particularly through interviews, having structure would allow for better analysis. First, I transcribed all the interviews using the Otter AI app. Second, in the margins of the transcribed interviews, I made notes about nonverbal cues recorded on video during each interview. Finally, I started scanning the transcriptions for obvious similarities.

Step 2: Read or look at all the data

While the first step allowed for some generalities in terms of analyzing the data, this step required me to read each interview more closely. First, I looked more closely and more intentionally for patterns in phrasing or even body language. Second, I made some matrixes with generalized notes about each interview, again looking for similarities. Finally, I looked for specific similarities in tone and overall concepts presented by the subjects in their responses.

Step 3: Start coding all the data

This was the step where the generalities and the initial emergence of patterns, or potential patterns, started to take a more concrete form. First, I looked for similar feelings, reactions, and experiences that I noticed as being thematic throughout the interviews and assigned a color to each. Every time that word or phrase appeared, I highlighted it or underlined it in that color. I also created a legend where I assigned the color to the word or phrase so I could interpret the coding quickly when it was time to write. Second, I copied everything from a particular color and placed it into its own Word document. Having every grouping in its own document allowed me to present the results in an organized manner, assuring I had not missed any of them. Finally, I reviewed the quotes that were not categorized to either add them to the established sections, create additional sections, or discard them.

Step 4: Use the coding process to generate a description of the setting or people as well as categories or themes for analysis

Looking over the sections created, in this step, I decided which content was worth keeping and which was too thin or not relevant, according to the eight steps of Lazarus and Folkman's Coping Theory Model as described by Chowdhury (2020). My goal was to present between five and seven themes as major findings, as recommended by Creswell (2014). First, I reread all of the transcribed content and further analyzed whether any of them could be combined or connected in some way. Second, I took the printed pieces of paper and cut out each quote, making note on the cut pieces of paper which color (grouping) that quote initially belonged to. I then placed any quotes I felt could be merged with another topic within that group, first as a physical piece of paper and later digitally onto the actual document stored on my computer. By combining and connecting the identified themes, it created a depth of analysis and reflected back on the theoretical framework for the study.

Step 5: Advance how the description and themes will be represented in the qualitative narrative. (p. 200)

Explaining the thematic analysis takes place in this step. First, I designed a table listing every participant identified by demographical information and a number (e.g., reporter 1, 35 years old, male; reporter 2, 23 years old, female; photographer 1, 45 years old; female; editor 1, 30 years old, male, etc.). Second, I explained in a narrative the major themes that emerged. Finally, I connected the findings to the participants in a narrative form, using generalities.

Step 6: A final step in data analysis involves making an interpretation in qualitative research of the findings or results. (p. 200)

Connecting the findings to the research question and the theoretical framework takes on a more concrete form in this step. First, I offered my interpretation of the data, specifically connecting data to known research and explaining how what this study found adds to the current body of knowledge. Second, I applied each of the themes to specific steps in Lazarus and Folkman's Coping Theory Model as described by Chowdhury (2020). Finally, and what I consider most importantly, I was able to make suggestions for reform in regard to caring for the mental health of journalists during and after coverage of a traumatic news event. Each of these goals is identified by Creswell (2014) as a possible result of qualitative research.

Ethical Considerations

As with all research projects, there were ethical considerations to be taken into account with this study.

Informed Consent

The first of these considerations was informed consent. This requires the researcher to explain the purpose of the research, discuss the types of questions that may be asked, explain who will be reading the research, and what happens to the raw information collected (Patton, 2002). Informed consent also requires a signed document and, sometimes, verbal consent. The signed document has been kept on file with the raw data and the verbal consent was recorded at the start of each interview (Creswell, 2014).

Confidentiality

Patton (2002) explains the confidentiality as the next consideration. It is important to recognize the difference between confidentiality and anonymity. Confidentiality means the information stays with the researcher. Anonymity means the subject will not be identified. That could be through an anonymous survey or by the changing of the person's name in the study. For this particular study, it would be wise to offer anonymity, considering how sensitive journalists are about revealing any appearance of weakness or vulnerability. The researcher should also acknowledge what information cannot be protected such as illegal activity or abuse.

Withdrawal from the study

Participants should always be offered the opportunity to withdrawal from the study (Moustakas, 1994). This is a topic that Creswell (2014) also covers, emphasizing that subjects should never be forced to sign a consent form or verbally agree to participate in a study. Their involvement should be voluntary. Patten (2002) and Creswell (2014) also discuss an area that is relevant to this dissertation: how hard to push for sensitive information. The researcher must take into account how the questions being asked might affect the subject being interviewed. In the cases of sensitive topics, the interviewer will have to weigh the desire for descriptive information against the potential damage revealing that information may cause.

Data Security

The fate of the collected data was taken into consideration. A reasonable amount of time to store the data, according to the American Psychological Association, is five years. Once that time is up, the data should be disposed of in a way that does not allow anyone else to take it and misappropriate it (Creswell, 2014).

Revisiting the Need for This Study

The need for mental healthcare for journalists, especially during and immediately after coverage of a traumatic event, has been made evident through the existing research explored in Chapter 2. While caring for the mental health of journalists is being discussed more openly than ever before, there is still a long way to go. By providing journalists and news managers with realistic and easily accessible options for care, it stands to reason that the field of journalism could be enhanced and made to be a healthier career, in terms of mental health, than it has ever been before. Through in-depth interviews with journalists who experienced care from the LCC K-9 Comfort Dog Ministry®, it is my hope to add to what we already know about not only comfort dogs in general but also about their specific use in newsrooms, which is a topic on which there is not any peer-reviewed writing. There is a need for peer-reviewed research on this topic because research shows psychological damage does occur in journalists from repeated and/or extended coverage of traumatic events.

Thematic analysis of the interviews, looking for themes in word choice and shared lived experience, will expand what is known about the state of the mental health of journalists covering traumatic events, therefore increasing the opportunities to better care for journalists in those times. This information points toward a study that is necessary and valuable for trauma and journalism, an understudied but critical part of the country's fifth estate.

Participants are as follows:

Alias	**Gender**	**Job Title**	**Years in News**	**Time with Dogs**
Amber	Female	Producer	More than 15 years	30 minutes
Angela	Female	Producer	Less than 15 years	60 minutes
Brock	Male	Producer	Less than 15 years	5 minutes
Cameron	Male	Photographer	More than 15 years	10 minutes
Kevin	Male	Photographer	More than 15 years	20 minutes
Max	Male	Photographer	Not provided	15 minutes
Douglas	Male	Manager	More than 15 years	1-2 minutes
Miles	Male	Manager	More than 15 years	10 minutes
Kate	Female	Reporter	Less than 15 years	30 minutes

Layla	Female	Reporter	Less than 15 years	10 minutes
Monica	Female	Anchor	More than 15 years	30 minutes
Nora	Female	Anchor	More than 15 years	60 minutes
Robyn	Female	Anchor	More than 15 years	60 minutes
Kiersten	Female	Digital Editor	More than 15 years	10 minutes
Kimberly	Female	Digital Editor	More than 15 years	15 minutes

Projected Timeline

IRB permission was obtained by December 18, 2020. Interviews were conducted between December 28 – January 12, 2021.

Chapter 4: Results

The aim of this study was to determine whether comfort dogs could be a viable coping mechanism for journalists who are covering traumatic events. Fifteen journalists from WFTV in Orlando, Florida who interacted with the comfort dogs in the summer of 2016 following a week of intense news coverage provided their time and information to fulfill the interview requirement outlined in Chapter 3. All interviews were transcribed using the Otter app and checked for accuracy. Interview content was then analyzed for themes and patterns.

Those themes and patterns were then used to answer the research questions: What psychological and emotional reactions did journalists experience during and after coverage of the Pulse nightclub shooting? What role did the comfort dogs play in assisting journalists with managing their reactions to the Pulse nightclub shooting? A number of patterns emerged during the analyzation of the data.

Mental / Emotional Repercussions

As previously discussed, talking about weakness is not something that comes easily to journalists. However, when they are dealing with a run of significant and traumatic stores like those that happened June 10 – 17, 2016, it is difficult to imagine anyone would not feel some sort of emotional response. While this research was focused specifically on the mass shooting at Pulse nightclub, it was important to take into account the other events of that week to have a complete understanding of the scale of stories the news teams were covering:

- Friday, June 10th, 10:24 p.m.: Singer and finalist on season six of The Voice, Christina Grimmie, was shot and killed by what police call an obsessed fan while signing autographs after a concert in Orlando.

- Sunday, June 12th, 2:00 a.m.: Omar Mateen opened fire inside Pulse nightclub in Orlando, killing 49 people before police killed him in a shootout.
- Tuesday, June 14th, 8:30 p.m.: An alligator grabbed two-year-old Lane Graves, drowning him in a lagoon near Disney's Grand Floridan resort.

One of the participants talked about how the child being killed at Disney would have led network news coverage any other week. He was making the comparison that the number of big stories in the Orlando market that week actually pushed the news cycle off kilter. The comfort dogs from the Lutheran Church Charities' K9 Comfort Dog® program came to visit the WFTV newsroom on the morning of Thursday, June 16th.

Journalists Compartmentalizing

Research question 1 explored the emotional reactions journalists experienced in response to their coverage of the Pulse nightclub shootings. A number of patterns emerged during the interviews. The first was that seven of the journalists discussed feeling as though they compartmentalized the trauma. For example, a number of the journalists interviewed talked about just putting their heads down and pushing through the days, getting content on the air or on the web as quickly as it was coming in because their audience was relying on them for updates. The journalists described not really thinking about what they were writing or editing, focusing more on the task at hand. This is pretty typical for news operations. With deadlines looming, the adrenaline to complete the job can take over thought processes. In order to get the work done and get the news on the air, broadcast journalists often will put aside absorbing what they are covering as a means of getting the job done.

One note among the participants who said they compartmentalized and were not emotionally affected by the stories is that both of the managers interviewed fell into this category. As Miles stated, “Managers have to learn to leave some of it behind to be able to lead.” However, while two of the anchors said they were not affected, they both provided responses to later questions that indicated they were affected. One of them became choked up on air while watching the community response on live television and the other one broke down while interacting with the comfort dogs. While the anchors may have felt the effects of the mass shooting were not deep and lasting, to say they were not affected does not appear to be entirely accurate. In fact, it reinforced the notion that journalists often resist admitting, perhaps even to themselves, when they are affected by trauma.

Sleeplessness / Nightmares

One of the side effects of trauma is difficulty sleeping. This was certainly the case for several of the journalists who were interviewed for this project. They cited a number of sleep-related issues from not being able to shut off their minds to having nightmares. Angela, a producer, said, “Producers never really shut off. They’re trying to think of new angles for the next day, watching late night coverage, going to bed thinking about it and waking up thinking about it.” For Nora, an anchor, it was the inability to stop moving that affected her. She felt she needed to be at every event she was asked to attend. Some of this came from a sense of feeling helpless as well, but Nora also acknowledged that she was probably exhausted and that affected her ability to make sound judgements about which events she should attend. She said, “I couldn’t just sit there and talk about it. I couldn’t stop moving. It was ridiculous, and I think I was exhausted.”

For reporters Layla and Kate, bad dreams and nightmares haunted their sleep. Layla talked about how in her nightmares she was always in a mass shooting incident. She was never killed but she was always running. She still has nightmares occasionally to this day, nearly five years after the shooting at Pulse. Kate said, “I had bad dreams. I woke up and for like a split second felt like it didn’t happen but then remembered it did happen and had this, like, feeling of dread.” Both Layla and Kate reported from the scene starting shortly after the shooting happened in the early morning hours of June 12, 2016 and were on scene for days afterward.

It is not entirely surprising that someone who is witnessing a traumatic event in person would have lingering traumatic reactions. However, often overlooked are the staff working at the television station like producers, managers, and digital content editors. Kiersten was helping with the station’s website following the mass shooting. She struggled to go to sleep at night. “You can’t forget what you saw. I don’t care how many years you’ve been in the business. Those images will stick with you, you know, and the words stick with you,” she said. Angela, a producer, certainly experienced that as well. She said:

> I didn’t really sleep all that well because the video would replay in my head and it’s still the video that they use, like, on anniversaries. The only light in the footage is a streetlight and then red and blue flashing cop lights. There’s one shot of four people carrying the guy, you know, one on each arm and leg, carrying someone who was injured. There’s another shot of them putting someone else in a truck. These pieces that were put together are extremely strong and emotional pictures but because they’re extremely strong and emotional, they’re used over and over. So it replayed kind of in my head throughout the whole thing.

One additional note about the participants who discussed having trouble sleeping or shutting off their minds after work is that they were all women. None of the men noted this type of reaction to the coverage.

Crowd & Social Avoidance

While only three of the journalists who covered Pulse fell into this group, it is worth mentioning because it was a strong reaction. In the weeks and months that followed Pulse, three participants mentioned being very nervous about being in crowds for social events. Amber and Kate both looked for ways to escape while out in social situations like in a restaurant. Kate said for months after Pulse she was uncomfortable going into public places where she could not see the door. Layla talked about a specific event she attended that made her nervous:

> I don't really go to nightclubs or places like that, but we went for [a friend's] birthday. It was this place downtown that had a fog machine. I wasn't familiar with the building at all. People were shoulder-to-shoulder and I just stayed by the door because I didn't want to get myself in a position where I didn't know how to get out. I still think about that anytime I'm in a big place like that.

For Layla, this showed that while the intensity of the effects of covering a trauma as a journalist may be more heightened during and immediately after the event, those effects can remain in place for years. Six of the journalists cried during their interview for this project. Three of them mentioned how they did not realize it still bothered them until they were participating in the conversation.

Overall Sadness

Five participants specifically mentioned "overall sadness" as part of their reaction during that week. Amber said,

> I just felt like I went through all the stages of grief really quickly during that week and I just hit, like, anger really fast. I'm like, 'Oh, wait a second. People got murdered for

> doing nothing wrong. Like they literally…were in the wrong place at the wrong time…and there's no one to hold accountable for it.

Nora added that she felt guilt for doing her job that week. She said,

> The guilt of talking about it. I don't dare say I'm tired today. I was sad. I didn't dare say I was angry because who the hell am I? I didn't lose anyone in the shooting and so you do internalize it because you feel like you have no right to express any sadness or mourning or grief or shock or anything.

Varied Reactions

There were a number of other reactions that varied greatly, each only occurring in single cases. Some of those effects included a photojournalist feeling like he was walking around in a fog during the coverage, a reporter who had a significantly heightened startle response as well as irritability that was out of character, and a producer who decided it was time to leave the news industry.

Worst Part of Coverage

News stories often have layers to them, with some layers affecting journalists more deeply than others. Sometimes what one person feels is significant or traumatic, another person may not think is very important. However, when they are covering stories with the scope of the Pulse nightclub shooting, there are bound to be some similarities in what the journalists consider to be significant parts of the coverage.

Number of Victims

Four of the journalists talked about how the sheer number of victims rattled them. Initially, it appeared to be a random shooting at a nightclub, not an altogether unusual event in a city the size of Orlando. Kevin, one of the photographers, said,

> Just the updates. Twenty to 35 to 49. Just hearing the updates from officials, just seeing the magnitude. Going down there the next day and seeing it for myself, like, everything blocked off around the club. It was very surreal.

Brock, a producer, and Monica, an anchor, felt the same way hearing the numbers come from the press conference when police felt all victims had been accounted for. For Miles, a manager, it was the physical proximity that he found difficult to accept:

> I think the hardest part was every time you just took a step back and remembered how many people were there and, for me, it was just how close it was in a literal sense. You know, it always seems like these things are so far away, even if they're in your city. Often times they're way, way, way, way on the other side of town or something like that.

Pulse nightclub was located just six miles from WFTV. The Performing Arts Center was only about three blocks from WFTV. That was where a makeshift memorial began. That made it even more personal for many in the newsroom, especially when the stories of the victims and survivors started to emerge.

Victim Stories

For nine of the participants, hearing the stories of the survivors, their families and the families of the victims, was deeply troubling. Journalists are trained to tell the stories of their communities. In this instance, that obligation of coverage actually caused them pain. Florida Hospital Orlando was just a few blocks away from Pulse. A number of the victims were taken there for treatment. Two days after the shooting, two of the survivors took part in a press conference at the hospital while surrounded by their medical team. The survivors shared their stories, describing in great detail how the shooter murdered people one at a time or just randomly sprayed the room with bullets, taking out anyone unlucky enough to be within range, while others pretended to be dead just hoping he wouldn't come into where they were and start shooting again. Hearing the stories of these two survivors, among others who were interviewed in different scenarios in the days that followed Pulse, hit a number of the journalists at WFTV hard.

Layla, a reporter, said, "I think for me it wasn't that first day. It was the days that followed in interviewing survivors. That was the hardest part, hearing their stories that were unimaginable and from people who are so young." Nora is an anchor and also mentioned the ages of the victims as something that really was difficult for her to accept. She said, "The worst part of the coverage for me came later. It took months but when each and every single story started to unravel, you started to hear about how they were in the middle of their lives. These were young, vibrant people."

One of the photographers, Cameron, was assigned to talk to the family of one of the victims. When he arrived at what he thought was a family member's home, he was escorted in only to realize it was the victim's home. He said:

> The next thing you know, you see the dishes left on the counter and everything else so that was a whole other experience, to realize someone roughly the same age [as me] had just left, you know, figuring they would clean it up the next day and they never came back.

The victims' families were also a point of pain for the journalists. It is the job of the journalist to document events, which means they have to be in places they do not necessarily want to be, but they have a job to do and they take it seriously. For a photographer and a digital editor, the families were especially difficult to cover. Even a manager, Douglas, cited the families as being a tough part of the coverage because he was the one guiding the photographers on the scene. At one point, one of the photographers called Douglas, clearly rattled by the reaction from the families who had just learned their loved one had died. Douglas wisely instructed the photographer to just move back and give the families some space. While families who have members directly affected by the violence certainly have a reaction to the act itself, the community, as a whole, often has a reaction as well.

This is one of the areas many of the journalists brought up at some point during their interview: how the shooting felt like a violation of their home. One of the digital editors started to cry as she remembered driving into the station and seeing the "Orlando Strong" billboards lining the highways. Two of the anchors talked about how the Dunkin' Donuts they go to regularly is right beside Pulse. While a big story like this attracts national media attention, for the local journalist, this is their home. There is a different feeling of responsibility to cover a story thoroughly and well when it is in your hometown.

Multiple Difficult Stories

For many of the participants in this study, Pulse was difficult to cover, but it was the entirety of the week's big stories and the level of senseless tragedy that finally took them to a breaking point. Kate, a reporter said:

> It was the collective of the week because we had Christina Grimmie, then we had Pulse, and then we had this poor little boy who drowned at Disney, taken under by an alligator. That day broke me. I just started crying in the newsroom. There was so much pressure to cover Pulse, obviously, because you feel the responsibility to your community to be the go-to resource and getting the community answers on something that is awful.

The news business is a demanding, deadline driven business on a regular business day. Add in the severity of big stories, including the country's largest mass shooting at the time, the pressure was definitely mounting for the team at WFTV. Even one of the managers, Miles, noticed changes in the personnel by Wednesday. Newsrooms typically hold editorial meetings every morning. This is where stories for the day are discussed by the entire team and newscasts start to be built by the producers. Wednesday, the morning after the alligator killed the child at Disney, that editorial meeting was heavy at WFTV. Typically, these meetings are spirited discussions but that morning, no one talked. Miles said:

> That's where I saw people done. They were just done. It was interesting, especially the moms. I'm just telling you, I looked into their faces and I saw it. It wasn't just physical exhaustion either. I mean, you know, I know the difference. I mean, we've done, you know, 47 hours of hurricane coverage. I know the difference between physical exhaustion and mental exhaustion. This was mentally exhausted.

Story Comparison

Every journalist has at least one story that sticks with them for a long time. They remember faces, names, emotions, and details of personal stories and crimes sometimes for the rest of their lives. They know what they were doing and where they were when they were called in to work to cover a big story. There is no doubt Pulse will remain on the list of biggest stories the WFTV journalists will ever cover but not all of them will remember it for the same reason.

Magnitude & Difficulty

For six of the journalists interviewed for this research, the sheer number of victims and the fact that it happened in their home community were significant factors when comparing coverage to other stories in their news careers. In a market the size of Orlando, typically broadcast journalists are coming in with at least five years of experience, so many of them have covered difficult stories in other cities. Pulse was different. Kevin said, "It's the biggest story of my career." Kiersten said, "I think the difference was that it was such a huge massacre. So many people died so brutally, and it was right here." Brock, a producer, said, "It's probably the toughest story I've ever covered." Douglas and Kate both commented on the intensity and size of the coverage. Douglas called it "marathon coverage," not just because of Pulse but because of the compilation of big stories in a short amount of time. Kate said, "It's like nothing I've ever experienced. It just never stopped." To Kate, it seemed difficult to know when to let down her guard for fear of something else happening.

Proximity

There is no doubt the physical proximity of the nightclub to the television station played a role when journalists from WFTV look back and compare it to other stories they have covered. Both Brock and Robyn, a producer and an anchor, talked about how watching their community suffer hurt them as well. Kimberly, a digital editor, put that pain into words. She said, "It just felt deeply personal. That hurt a lot more than all the other things that I've done up to that point."

Other Stories

Layla, a reporter, said that while covering Pulse definitely affected her, it was not as bad as some of the smaller, individual stories she has covered. The violent death of a child and a brutal attack on a women Layla knew from around her former community were just two of the stories she described as the most personally impactful in her career.

A photographer, Cameron, compared the world's response to the mass shooting at Pulse to the world's reaction to 9/11. Obviously 9/11 is on a much grander scale but, as Cameron said, "It helped to know people cared." The other significant story two participants, Brock and Kate, mentioned was COVID-19. They said coverage of COVID has been intense and difficult. No doubt the span of time they have had to cover this story plays a role in that level of difficulty.

Comfort Dogs Visit WFTV Newsroom

Research question 2 asked how the comfort dogs helped journalists cope with their emotional reactions to the Pulse nightclub shooting. The dogs came to the newsroom the morning of Thursday, June 16, 2016. Robyn, a reporter, described the scene as, "a parade of golden retrievers who came in like an army of bandages." Throughout the interview process for this research, the tone of the discussions was heavy, until this section. The staff talked in detail about where they were when they found out about Pulse, how sad it made them to cover it – among the other difficult stories of that week, and how many of them struggled to process everything they were experiencing. About half of them cried during their interview, including Robyn, whose eyes filled with tears as she said, "It's been how many years [since Pulse]?...It still sits with you and I didn't realize that until this conversation with you."

However, when the conversation shifted to talk about the comfort dogs visiting the newsroom, the entire tone of the interview changed. During the interview, the participants immediately started smiling as they remembered back to the day of the dogs' visit. It was obviously a good memory in a week full of bad memories.

Interactions with the Comfort Dogs

The actual interactions with the dogs varied from person-to-person. Some were with the dogs for the duration of their visit while others visited briefly with the dogs and stepped back to allow other staff more time with the dogs. Some of the patterns that emerged from the journalists' responses included how the dogs were a welcome distraction, how they provided a safe place for the journalists to feel vulnerability, joy, and a sense of normalcy during a chaotic week.

Participants noted that when the dogs came in, there was a shift in the newsroom mood. Kiersten said, “They walked in and I mean, I think the whole newsroom just lit up. Everybody smiled and started petting the dogs. It was a change in the dynamic.” That sentiment was echoed by Cameron, who said,

> The handlers that were with them were eager to answer any questions or, you know, change the topic at hand. I think they had skill, too, and were trying to encourage other conversations so that was good. You know, it’s not the most fun place in the world so to see a dog roaming around, it changes the dynamic real quick there.

Amber talked about how having the dogs there meant they weren’t having to talk about the details of the crime, dead people, or bullet trajectory for a while. She said, “The entire room just changed.”

More than half of the participants talked about how the dogs’ visit was a very welcome distraction from the everyday busyness of the newsroom. Monica said,

> It was just incredible. They came in and the newsroom just stopped. Nobody cared that we had a newscast to get on. I was anchoring the noon that day so I should have been looking at scripts and writing scripts. I didn’t care. And the bosses were there. They didn’t say a word about work not getting done because everyone stopped, and we were on the floor playing with the dogs.

One of the managers, Miles, said, “It was a great diversion. It was just completely forgetting about everything for the 10, 20, 30 minutes or whatever they were there.” Kate said, “I just liked that it gave us a minute to not worry about deadlines and this terrible story we had to cover. It was just nice. It was just a nice little breather to see something sweet and good.” Douglas had similar thoughts. He said, “At the end of a stressful week and just give everybody a chance to kind of just take a breath, kind of just distract yourself from all the coverage." Angela mentioned how the demeanor of the dogs made a difference for her. She said, "It's a distraction and it actually is like a calming, almost because they were so mellow and so chill, even with all these strangers around them." For Kevin, the distraction was relaxing. He said,

> The dog was just laying in my lap. I was petting it and it really made me feel really relaxed. You know, it took my mind off what had gone on that week. It was just me and the dog.

One of the producers, Angela, said,

> At least for me, I think it helped just to kind of almost take a step away for a second. We all kind of felt refreshed when we went back to our computers. It was almost like they gave us a boost. It's just like, you just feel so heavy and after they came, that gave us a little boost of energy to push through. It was definitely a highlight at a dark time for us.

Nora talked about how newsroom employees, especially talent, can be a bit more sensitive toward how their reaction to traumatic stories is perceived. For her, the dogs were extremely helpful. She described burying her head in the neck of one of the comfort dogs and even crying a little bit. She said it felt safe because the dog wasn't going to tell anyone that, 'Nora was crying.' She said,

> It's unprofessional for [us] to break down in front of our coworkers but… this dog is gonna keep my secret in its neck where I buried my face. It felt very intimate and I felt like I could trust them to be myself. I remember thinking that over and over again. It was just this, like, release. This is weird but it was the anonymity of it… It truly was the first time that entire week that we felt like we could breathe and be ourselves, you know, and there's just no words.

Layla, also on-air talent, said something similar when she talked about how much more normal it is to hug a dog versus hugging a person, especially in a newsroom. Two employees, Douglas and Amber, really enjoyed seeing how the dogs made their coworkers so happy. Amber said, “It was nice for us to be united around something that wasn’t terrible.” So, while newsrooms can be highly competitive and highly stressful, there is also a familial element to them. No one understands the role of a journalist like another journalist and there is something in that reality that bonds people. It stands to reason then that newsrooms that have healthy bonds will perform better together under the pressure of intense events and deadlines. Yet, despite those bonds, current newsroom culture is not necessarily encouraging of employees showing emotions. That is one of the reasons WFTV journalists who interacted with the comfort dogs enjoyed the experience so much. They appreciated the privacy of it and how calm it made them feel. Nora said,

> They brought us back a little bit for a little while. It felt private. It was just like a private moment where it was okay for me to be sad, for me to grieve, and for me to do or say whatever I wanted because the dogs would keep my secret.

Several journalists mentioned the calm demeanor of the dogs. Brock said,

> It really just puts a smile on your face because they’re so calming. There’s something about those dogs and just being able to really sense and almost absorb some of your negative emotions and really kind of take that weight off your shoulders.

Monica said,

> We were playing with the dogs and that’s all that matters and then, you know, the people from the Lutheran Church organization were just so kind like, ‘We know you guys have

> had a tough time' and telling us about what they do. It was just such a calming, soothing moment with them.

Cameron said,

> They're so calm and they just look at you like they know what's up. That was really neat to see a dog there and kind of ground you, I guess, just real calming and feeling nothing but happiness when you see a dog. They're just the most joyful dogs ever.

Kiersten echoed Cameron's thoughts when she talked about how Golden Retrievers look like they're smiling all the time.

Joy was actually one of the strongest themes to emerge in the comments of the journalists. Three quarters of the participants specifically mentioned how happy it made them to have the dogs visit the newsroom. Layla said, "There's just like a sense of, here's a reason to smile again and it feels okay to smile." Monica said, "It was just such a joyous time." Amber said, "I remember it was kind of exciting to see them. You know, like, it was a little bit of joy at a very dark time." Kimberly said,

> These dogs are in the newsroom and everyone is just like freaking out and petting them. The dogs are just laying on the newsroom floor and people are around the dogs. I thought it was sweet.

Brock said, "It's something about those dogs that they're just able to really put a smile on your face and I think that's, to me, that was so helpful." Kiersten described her interaction with one of the dogs. She said,

> I think I needed it. I was just petting them, and they were so sweet. They put their head on you. They were just so well behaved. I think one of the anchors and I were just kind of

> hugging on them and everything. I was just so happy. …Like when you're a kid and you're crying, and your mom gives you ice cream. It was like that.

Amber said having the dogs there and sharing the experience on social media has helped her face the anniversaries of that week, years later. She said,

> I just felt like a little kid. I don't have a dog here. It just felt like the world kind of stopped, in a good way, for a little bit and we all just got to sit there. I have a picture that shows up in my Facebook memories every year and it's the three producers with Goldens just sitting there with us and we all just look like the happiest I remember feeling that whole week. It felt like that was the moment we were like, 'Alright. We're gonna be okay.'

While the dogs were visiting the newsroom, someone found a tennis ball on a desk and asked the handlers if the dogs would be allowed to play a bit. The handlers removed the dogs' vests so they would know it was time to play, not work, and then the journalists took turns throwing the ball down one of the station hallways. Long, golden fur blowing in the wind and tongues hanging out closely followed the ball as each of the dogs scrambled to get to it first and return it to the newsroom for another toss. Three of the newsroom employees specifically mentioned enjoying watching the dogs play with the ball. What is interesting is that the event was not mentioned during questioning, so the employees recalled on their own that the playtime as a significant memory from that day. One of the managers even recorded the dogs chasing the ball and put together a brief video. For him, it was a way to enjoy the dogs without taking too much of their time away from employees who worked under him. It was a selfless act, which was something both managers who participated in this study did without prompting from upper management. A newsroom is only as strong as its leadership so the success of WFTV appears to be at least partially due to the culture of service management has created.

There were a couple of other responses to how the dogs made the journalists feel that are worth noting, even if they were not among the majority response. A handful of employees talked about how the dogs made them feel a sense of home, which they found calming. Robyn said,

> It's a sense of home and when you feel like your home has been shaken, it's grounding. I think that's what the dogs do. They take energy away because they sense that, and they bring you back home to where you need to be. I think that for me it has worked well. It's like they took that angst that I was feeling day in and day out.

Kate said, "It really did feel like a sense of home for the first time in the whole week. It was just like a…comforter or a weighted blanket." Amber said, "It just felt normal."

Helpfulness of Dogs' Visit

While there's no doubt the journalists who participated in this study found benefit in having the dogs visit the newsroom, the bigger question is whether the dogs were actually helpful. All participants said the dogs did help the journalists during a very difficult week, but some felt the help was very short term.

Max said, "That third day, you know, you're pretty worn out mentally. It was a nice morale booster, put a little more pep in your step walking out the door [that day]. So it helped, definitely." Kiersten said, "I didn't seek out any help or anything because I didn't really…feel like I needed it. I wasn't emotionally struggling but I didn't realize that maybe a little part of me needed that kind of thing, innocence." A photographer, Cameron, said, "Yeah, for sure, for that day. It just took our minds off of it." Max and Douglas both mentioned how touched they were to have someone even think about how the news of that week might be affecting the journalists. As observers, journalists are not used to being part of the story, so to speak.

A few of them did mention that while the dogs' visit was extremely helpful, it was temporary. Kate said,

> I don't know about long term but, yeah, for that moment in that day it was nice to have them there and it's nice to see the memories come up on Facebook. It's nice to have a positive memory from that week.

Layla said, "At least for that day…it was a big release and took your mind away from all the horrible stuff. It gives you a reason to smile again." Miles, a manager who had limited interaction with the dogs said, "It was a great catharsis, you know, release of stress or steam for me for five minutes but then that's about it."

Individual Interactions with Dogs

While all participants of this study interacted with the dogs during their visit to the WFTV newsroom, what they were doing during those interactions varied. Even the range of time spent with the dogs varied. Some only had around five minutes with the dogs, while others felt they had probably spent 45 minutes to an hour with the dogs. The average time among the 15 journalists who participated in this study was 20 minutes. Just a couple expressed being emotional during their time with the dogs, but both had substantial emotional reactions. Max talked about how he thought he was fine but when he started petting the dogs, he learned that was not the case. He said,

> It was the first time in 20 years I've ever had therapy dogs show up for us, for me. That's when the emotions started, starting in my stomach, working all the way up to right here {grabs throat with thumb and index finger} and when it was right here, I had to leave. I

> had to go, take a minute. I ended up doing that twice… I mean, if I went to my car I would have probably ugly cried for 20 minutes. It was just that, it was that strong.

Nora's story was explored a bit earlier, describing how she buried her face in the dog's neck. She said,

> I just remember like {takes a deep breath and exhales}, breathing, like, deeply. It wasn't grief. I wasn't crying like I cry when I think of the victims. [It was] more of, like, a release of tension. I think it was a release of that tension of not letting anybody know how upset I was. There is a layer of stress that comes with this job, of being professional.

Some of the journalists chose to sit quietly with the dogs and just take in their presence. Kevin said,

> I didn't want to talk to anybody. It was just the dog and me. Yeah, it was just, I didn't talk to anyone. I was just, I was quiet. And I remember I was just dead quiet. Sometimes that's what you need is silence, to think and just be in the moment.

Others chose to talk while interacting with the dogs. Who they talked to varied from talking to the dog to talking to colleagues to talking to the handlers who accompanied the dogs. Kiersten lightly laughed as she said,

> I was just saying how cute they were, cute and sweet and pinching the cheeks because I don't know what it is about those dogs. They have these little cheeks and you just want to pinch them, so I basically treated it like a child.

One employee was new to the newsroom. Her first day was coverage of Pulse, so she stayed more to herself. She said,

> I was still so new, and I didn't really know anybody, so I feel like I was kind of really, like, talking to the dog and maybe the handlers a little bit about what they do and how

> they travel the country or go to different bad events and kind of try to help people out, but I feel like it was more of a quiet time or just sitting with the dogs.

Kate had to work to retrieve from her memory exactly what she was doing but she said,

> Knowing me, I was probably just talking to the dog. There were colleagues around. I remember sort of sitting, like, in a circle, which on the newsroom floor is really gross. We were, you know, sort of laughing, joking, but I don't remember exactly what we were talking about. Probably just the dogs and where they're from and that kind of stuff.

A majority of the journalists who interacted with the dogs said they found themselves asking the handlers questions about the dogs' training and how they conduct their ministry but also they talked amongst one another. Brock said, "I think I was, like, petting them and talking to colleagues just about how nice it was to have them in the newsroom at the time." Amber, a producer, said, "I think we're all chatting amongst each other and none of us had any idea how much training went into it, so they were explaining…the process about how to [train the dogs]." She went on to explain how the visit felt comfortable, like returning to a sense of normalcy, if even for just a few minutes. She said, "If we weren't in a dirty newsroom, it would have felt like just hanging out with my friends, like outside in a park with some puppies. It just felt normal."

Kimberly was able to describe in a bit of detail what was going on around her while she was petting the dogs. She said,

> I think I was talking to colleagues. I remember three of the anchors were around me. They were all, one of them was on their knees, the one who had done the story on the dogs for the first responders, so she was there and then the other one, I think we were all just sort of, like, giddily hanging around the dogs and just grinning and talking to each other.

Robyn earlier mentioned how the dogs brought her a sense of comfort, like going home to something familiar. That description carried over into this part of her interview as she described her interactions with the dogs and their handlers, saying,

> It was a mix of everything like, 'Oh my gosh, tell me about these!' It was a chance to divert our attention to something else. And so, to know they've been in places, other places that have been through similar situations, it was like an old friend coming back to you. You know, brings you back home, mentally and emotionally.

Cameron, a photographer, was doing his best to be social while petting the dogs but, deep down, would have preferred a different scenario. He said, "I was petting them and talking to people at the same time, you know, trying to act like I want to be in the conversation when really I just wanted to pet them."

Suggested Changes

Responses suggest the comfort dogs were a welcome distraction and brought entertainment and relief to the journalists who were in the newsroom during the dogs' visit. However, the journalists did have some suggestions for improving the experience. More than half of them would have liked the visit to be longer or to have multiple visits. Amber said, "I wish they could have stayed all day. It was just nice having the dogs here and it was just nice that somebody did something kind for us. It was a nice little surprise." Nora said, "It was a highlight of my life, to be honest with you, to have them there at the moment. I wish it could have lasted longer." Layla felt the same way. She said,

> It would have been nice to have a little bit more time with them. I'm in the middle of my workday and I don't really feel like I can go spend a lot of time with the dogs. I kind of felt like, you know, just spend a moment with them and then get back to work. So I think

> [it would have helped if managers said,] ‘Hey, you’ve got a 30 minute break.’ But, instead, it was kind of like, ‘Am I gonna get in trouble for being with the dog because I need to be working on my story for the day?’

Miles, a manager, had several suggestions. He said,

> Maybe forewarning to the staff. We didn’t give staff any warning or head’s up. Maybe [have them stay] a little bit longer. Maybe scheduling a time when everybody could have [had] some interaction with the dogs would have been beneficial.

Working the dogs into the various schedules found in newsrooms was something a number of participants also mentioned. Since newsrooms operate 24 hours a day, it is important to not forget about those who might be working second or third shifts. It is also important to consider the news cycle and be aware of the ebbs and flows within a newsroom. Nora said, “I don’t think everyone in the newsroom got to experience it and I think there are people that needed it for sure.” Kiersten suggested bringing the dogs in intentionally during the down time during the day. Of course, breaking news is unpredictable, but most newsrooms have times during their day that are a bit more quiet than others. Kate would have appreciated having a designated place to spend time with the dogs, outside of the newsroom. She said, “Maybe bring them back or have a place where you could go and spend some time with them or something if it’s not feasible to bring them into the newsroom all the time.” Robyn talked about how she would have liked to have more frequent visits saying, “I do think maybe once a week for the first month would have definitely been helpful.” Kimberly felt that the dogs were a wonderful diversion, but their presence was a missed opportunity by management to educate everyone about more long-term resources for mental healthcare. She recommended future newsrooms make it an open door to normalize caring for oneself during and after traumatic news coverage.

Brock said he would not change anything about the dogs' visit. He enjoyed the surprise element. Miles suggested considering different breeds of dogs since not everyone likes long haired dogs or big dogs. Cameron really enjoyed watching the dogs play ball in the hallway and suggested handlers bring toys along to the visits.

Viable Resource

Since they have had interactions with the comfort dogs, the journalists in this study are qualified to make recommendations as to whether the dogs should be considered a viable resource for other newsrooms covering traumatic events. All 15 participants felt the dogs were a viable resource that other newsrooms should employ.

Robyn said,

> I'm saying 'yes'. I think dogs in general are a valuable resource. If that type of organization is not available, I would suggest to journalists maybe volunteering some of your time at a pet rescue. Having that serve as an outlet really is very therapeutic for the soul, allows you to give back. You know, have someone listen that doesn't listen but listens, if that makes sense, because sometimes all you need is to talk to something and sometimes having that, even without a response, makes all the difference.

Monica said, "People love pets but there's something about dogs. When those dogs were in there, it was like all the stress went away." Amber felt similarly. She said, "It was just nice to have a little bit of levity and a break from everything." Nora, an anchor said that some of the benefit was where the interaction with the dogs took place. She said,

> There is value in them coming in our space rather than being told, 'Hey, the dogs are at the community center, you know, why don't you go down there and spend some time with them?' There was something about them in our space that was even more healing

> and helpful. I guess I should say maybe it was more helpful like that the newsroom was just so dark and heavy that week, and I didn't want to be there. It was too much. It was too much and then they came in and just lightened the air for us. Bringing them here to this place, to this dark and heavy place, it really made a difference. It felt like somebody hitting the reset button. It was invaluable.

A few of the journalists said that there are things to bear in mind if other newsrooms plan to use the dogs. Being aware of people with allergies and people who do not like dogs are two of those suggestions. Angela said, "I think it's definitely nice and fun, but I feel though like the [executive producer] who pulled us back was not a dog person, so he had no qualms [about telling us to] get back to work." Kiersten also addressed the concerns of people with allergies, suggesting that the dogs be placed somewhere inside the station that is not the newsroom, where people have the choice as to whether to be around the dogs. Miles, a manager directly involved with bringing the dogs into the newsroom, said,

> I recommend… I wouldn't say it's the be all, end all, but that's because… I don't think we had them there long enough to find out. I don't see why they couldn't work in newsrooms. I mean, you know, journalists tend to be open minded. You know, could use a little fun and we're certainly willing to blow off steam. That's the kind of thing the dogs could help with.

Layla, a reporter, voiced concern about how the newsroom managers would react to anyone who might show that they were affected by the trauma of the stories from that week. For her, having managers be more vocal about permitting interactions with the dogs would have been helpful. She said,

> There is just this sense of ‘I don’t want my boss to think that I’m, like, messed up after this and I might need help.’ If I knew my boss is like, ‘Hey, it’s been a crazy time. We’re going to give everybody like 30 minutes or 15 minutes, or whatever it is, like, go and just hang out in the space over here and just, like, relax and chill with the dogs, get your mind off everything that’s going on’, I would have felt so much more open to doing that instead of, like still a little bit stressed that I wasn’t supposed to be spending time with them.

Kimberly also felt the dogs were helpful but could have been used more effectively to normalize mental healthcare for journalists. She said,

> I do think they’re a viable resource. It’s nice to have them on hand to do exactly what they did, which is break-up the tension and help spark people… give them a little bit of energy. I think they’re good in that sense but they’re not the be all, end all solution. So it’s a good way to physically show the newsroom that you’re thinking about their well-being but it also should be a door opener for more.

Kevin brought up the 2020-2021 culture surrounding the COVID pandemic and how comfort dogs could be helpful in newsrooms as the pandemic has been stressful to cover over the last year. He said, “It’s one of the most comforting things that you can go through.”

For Max, while there are other coping mechanisms available, it was the dogs that made the difference for him. He said,

> Just allowing those reporters and those photographers that, you know, [have] a heavy weight on their shoulders from covering whatever it is, just let them, you know, bond with that dog and have a moment. I don’t know what it is…why dogs help with that type of grief of whatever you call it, but something happens with the dog and that person. I

> don't know but it's great. I think…they just need to be there, to show up and let the dogs do what they do.

There is some consistency in responses about how management holds the key to whether any coping mechanism in a newsroom will work, but that is especially true for when comfort dogs are brought in. The journalists need permission to not be okay and to be allowed to take a break from their work to take advantage of the resource being offered to them.

From the participants' responses, it can be concluded that the dogs were an effective means of coping during a difficult week of news coverage. It can also be concluded that the journalists felt validated because management saw the value in bringing the dogs into the newsroom. Suggestions for improvement include longer time with the dogs, more frequent visits with the dogs, and a space dedicated to visiting with the dogs outside of the newsroom. Respondents also suggested using the dogs as a means of beginning to normalize mental healthcare in the field of journalism.

The final chapter will further present the major findings, discuss suggestions for further research, and identify limitations associated with the study. I will also provide a personal reflection as a former journalist who has covered a mass shooting.

Chapter 5: Discussion

This chapter will further explore the findings presented in Chapter 4, connecting them to existing research and applying them to professional practices. This chapter will also include limitations of the study, recommendations for further research, and personal reflection from the author.

The purpose of this study is to contribute to the foundational trauma and journalism literature by investigating comfort dogs as a specific coping mechanism that may be useful to help journalists process traumatic stories. While there is currently no published academic research about the use of therapy dogs in newsrooms during and after traumatic event coverage, Hart (2016) makes a case for using the dogs as a means of reaching people by giving them something in common to talk about, therefore creating an opportunity for natural dialogue, which could lead to easier mental health treatment. Cobham (2019) also supports using dogs in newsrooms as a coping mechanism. The case for looking specifically at television journalists' risk is found in a publication from Simpson (2004) where he discusses how broadcast journalists are more at risk to struggle with difficult story coverage because of the stigma in the industry that if you show you are having a difficult time, you are weak, and are therefore, unable to complete the job. In the current study, there were a number of findings that warrant further discussion.

Sadness, ASD, & PTSD

Something nearly every participant mentioned feeling the week after the shooting at Pulse was sadness. It was a heavy weight in the newsroom that week, with one sad story coming in after another. Some of the employees at WFTV also mentioned crying, having trouble getting to sleep or staying asleep, loss of interest, and irritability. These are all symptoms Feinstein

(2006) cited as a possibility for journalists covering traumatic news. The findings of this study support what he found. Many of the symptoms also fall in line with the description of ASD, according to the DSM-5 (2013). ASD happens when a person directly experiences a traumatic event, witnesses a traumatic event, learns that something traumatic happened to a friend or family member, or is repeatedly exposed to the details of a traumatic event, such as a first responder who is working a crime scene or investigating a case of child abuse.

In the case of the journalists who covered the mass shooting at Pulse, several of the participants fell into a number of these categories. Those who were called to the scene were there to hear the loud boom of police using an armored truck to breach one of the club's walls, then the gunshots as police engaged in a shootout with the suspect inside the club. While none of the journalists who participated in this study had friends in the club, they did have friends who frequented the club. There was also the satellite truck operator on the scene who discovered a friend had been killed in the club. While he did not participate in this research, his colleagues clearly were affected by his loss. Obviously, they all experienced repeated exposure to the details of the story. This happens to journalists every day but is especially prevalent during large scale events like natural disasters and mass shootings. For those who covered the mass shooting at Pulse nightclub, the fallout was significant as intensive coverage, and therefore exposure, lasted for at least a week.

Seeing as how many of them fit into at least three of the four criteria listed above, while not providing a diagnosis, it would be safe to say that they could have easily fallen into the category of having ASD. In that case, it would have served them well to have some sort of formal mental healthcare following this week of stories.

Duration of symptoms is one of the determining factors for ASD diagnosis versus PTSD according to DSM-5 (2013). Only three of the participants talked about their symptoms lasting for more than a month. Symptoms lasting longer than a month typically leads to a diagnosis of PTSD. Considering the three who specifically mentioned symptoms lasting longer than a month, they discussed experiencing all three of the categories from the Anxiety and Depression Association of America listed above for an extensive amount of time. For two of them, the symptoms lasted several months. For the third, some of the symptoms continue to this day – nearly five years after the shooting. These three certainly should have had their mental health cared for directly after that week of news coverage in order to prevent long-term effects. One of the three regularly sees a mental health counselor and seemingly processed through the effects more quickly than the other two, further supporting evidence of the effectiveness of counseling for journalists after traumatic event coverage. It also supports research that says treating symptoms quickly after the event can prevent PTSD from developing. I believe, although the journalist who was seeking mental healthcare did so quickly after the mass shooting, that the length of duration of her symptoms was evident because she spent more time than others in the community. She is bilingual. Because the Hispanic community was directly affected by the shooting, she was called on to be a bridge more often than any of her colleagues.

Again, while not making a formal diagnosis, it is also important to discuss how many of the participants fell into the categories from the Anxiety and Depression Association of America. Seven of the journalists talked about compartmentalizing that week especially, which is a direct connection to emotional numbness. Three of them talked about intentionally avoiding crowds, clubs, or large gatherings. They went so far as to talk about how, if they did go into a public setting like a restaurant, they were only able to relax if they could see the door. They needed to know there was a way out if something happened. While their symptoms did not last longer than a month, perhaps some consideration needs to be made into the validity of ASD in newsrooms. It does not get as much attention as PTSD, but that does not mean it does not have a detrimental effect on the journalists. It stands to reason that journalists might even be open to the idea of mental health treatment if they knew the difference between ASD and PTSD. Knowing that ASD does not last as long and can help prevent having to participate in mental healthcare for an even longer period of time might help encourage the journalists to take care of it sooner than later. Research has also shown that treating ASD can prevent the formation of PTSD. As Steinkopf et al. (2018) found, additional training and education on PTSD and ASD could be beneficial in helping to lessen symptoms in journalists.

Social Support & Coping

Another area that stood out as helping the journalists process what they experienced that week was having the support of colleagues. Santos (2010), Greenberg et al. (2009), Berrington and Jemphrey (2003), and Cote and Simpson (2000) all recommended journalists look to social support for working through coverage of traumatic events. While there is value in turning to other journalists for support, there is also the remaining concern that revealing any sort of struggle in doing the job might indicate that the journalist is not strong enough to work in the business (Carter & Kodrich, 2013; Drummond, 2004; Rentschler, 2010; Ricchiardi, 1998) so this is not always a great option.

However, in this particular study, the dogs helped bridge that gap and normalized the journalists talking about their struggles. The dogs gave the newsroom something positive around which to unify. Walls came down and the team talked to one another more freely than perhaps they would have without the dogs. As two of the journalists noted, the dogs brought a sense of home and, with that, a sense of security and safety for emotional release in the form of talking or crying. Over recent years, clinicians have found the animals involved with AAI create a calm environment and provide a mutual topic for discussion between the mental health professional and the client, therefore opening the door for healing to begin (Fine et al., 2019; Morrison, 2017; Shotwell & Karen, 2019; Muela et al., 2019; Pendry et al., 2020; Bernabei et al., 2013; Çakıcı, A. & Kök, M., 2020), which is exactly what happened with the journalists at WFTV. As Furst (2016) found, "A relationship with a dog does not pose the same emotional risk as with a human" (p. 55).

Weidmann et al. (2008) found that social support from family and friends could be especially helpful for journalists following coverage of a natural disaster but also suggested that more research needs to be done in terms of social support from colleagues. The current study also reflects the need for additional research to be done in this area. This concept will be further explored later in this chapter.

Management's Role

As mentioned before, so much of the change needed in newsrooms in relation to trauma and journalism lies with management (Clay, 2020). Petersen and Soundararajan (2020) specifically discuss how "newsroom leaders can be more open about the mental health dangers with the job. By talking about it more, the stigma of seeking help might fade" (p. 84). Simpson (2004) cited how during professional workshops, television journalists especially, talk about how there is a sense that newsroom managers "do not want to open the door to discussion of the effects of assignments" (p. 79). As Dworznik (2018) and Beam and Spratt (2009) found, when a news team believes that newsrooms managers see the need and acknowledge the need for intervention, the team feels valued. In the instance of WFTV, that's exactly what happened. The reporter who made the initial inquiry into bringing the dogs into the newsroom had to clear it through newsroom management.

The fact that the managers, including the news director, approved the dogs' visit sent a very clear message to the journalists. A number of them mentioned how touched they were to just be noticed. As professional observers, they are not used to being noticed. In fact, they are taught that it is their job to *not* be noticed in most cases. They are not the story. In this instance though, the managers did notice. One of them recalled seeing a physical change in the staff as the week's stories developed. It became clear that some sort of change was necessary. The dogs seemed like a great resource, so the managers were willing to give it a try.

Newsroom managers have the ability to change the culture when it comes to acknowledging and normalizing taking breaks during the busy news day. Especially in some larger markets, where newscasts happen more frequently and there is more of a demand for constant information on digital platforms due to a larger audience, it is not unusual for journalists to not take breaks for fear of missing something. In the heat of breaking news, this can become a poisonous behavior.

Recommendations for Practice

With all new concepts, there is always room for change. Having the dogs visit newsrooms is no exception. As many of the participants in this study acknowledged, more time with the dogs would have been helpful, whether that be longer periods of time spent in the newsroom, multiple scheduled visiting times over the course of a few weeks, or both. It quickly became apparent this was something the journalists enjoyed and felt they needed. One person mentioned he would have enjoyed having some toys with the dogs so he could play with them.

Many of the participants specifically mentioned how they felt comfortable enough with the dogs and the handlers to carry on conversation during the meeting, though that was not the reaction for everyone. That speaks to need to consider all potential interactions with and reactions to the dogs. Some people will be more comfortable talking with the dogs and handlers in public while others may desire a more private scenario. The K9 program does not require conversation with the handlers, allowing those to whom the dogs are ministering to set the tone of the visit. However, it would be beneficial to offer a place where people could just sit quietly, without colleagues around, with the dog(s) and pet them or maybe lay on the floor with them. Having mats to take into places where the floors are not regularly cleaned – like newsrooms – would be helpful. They could be easily sanitized after use and folded up for storage.

Of course, consideration must be given to those employees with allergies related to dogs and to those employees who may have a fear of dogs or just not be comfortable around them. In those cases, it would make sense for the dogs' visits to be held in a designated area outside of the newsroom. Reddekopp et al. (2020) found that "individuals who currently have a pet dog or have experience with dogs were more likely to indicate [they wanted a visit with a therapy dog] compared to those without a dog or dog experience" (pg. 7). That said, a study by Shiloh et al. (2003) found no difference between animal lovers and those who lacked in experience with animals in the success of interaction with therapy dogs. As there are conflicting results, this warrants additional research. All of the participants in the current study either had dogs as children or were past or current owners of dogs. None of them were lacking experience with dogs as pets.

Newsroom Culture

Beyond the suggested physical changes to the dogs' visits, there also needs to be change in the newsroom culture surrounding the concept of self-care. Two of the participants mentioned feeling the need for management permission to take a break, even though some of the managers were interacting with the dogs as well. Newsrooms are competitive places, even when there is not a big breaking story. Often times, journalists are competing against themselves or the clock, but there is nearly always a constant fear of not hitting deadlines in most newsrooms. Because of that culture, the need for managers to step in and verbally normalize taking breaks could cause a healthy shift for employees to care for themselves during the workday.

It could also be beneficial for visits with the dogs to be more of a scheduled event, where the team members take turns so work is still being done and no one feels like they are abandoning the team to visit with the dogs. This option offers permission to the journalist to disengage with work and focus on themselves for a little while. Scheduling visits with the dogs would also mean having a constant rotation of refreshed employees attending to the work that needs to be done. The news business is a round-the-clock operation, which means crews are coming and going at all hours of the day and night. When the comfort dogs visited the WFTV newsroom, they were only there in the morning, so a small number of the staff were able to interact with the dogs. Consideration for people on all shifts should be included when scheduling the dogs' visits.

At least two of the employees in the WFTV newsroom, including one of the managers, mentioned how much they enjoyed being with the dogs, but that it was not enough to actually treat any lasting mental health concerns. As mentioned earlier, Hart (2016) supports the use of dogs to open conversation. In the case of newsrooms, if management wanted to provide on-the-spot counseling, the dogs would be an excellent buffer. If journalists are given a private space to visit with the dogs and a counselor who understands the newsroom culture, the natural assumption would be that as the journalists are petting or playing with the dogs, they could be more likely to talk with the counselor about what's troubling them. It is a similar concept to physicians who use distraction, like conversation about mundane things, while performing a procedure on a patient (Dr. William Denton, personal communication, March 3, 2021).

Also similar to medical practice is the need for education. Medina and Khawand-Azoulai (2021), Whitman (2015), and Guo (2014) all discuss how educating a patient before and after a medical procedure can help lessen the level of anxiety the patient feels. An argument could be made for something similar in the field of journalism. Dworznik and Garvey (2019) found that there is a lack of trauma education in colleges and universities. That would be a perfect place to start long-term change in the industry. If future leaders are better educated and better prepared for trauma in the workplace, it could potentially play less of a role in the lives of those covering the trauma.

Theoretical Implications

This concept falls in line with one of the categories outlined by Chowdhury (2020) in Chapter 1 in terms of Lazarus and Folkman's Coping Theory Model. Strategic problem solving, where one implements specific solution-focused strategies to get through the tough time and redirect actions accordingly, would be directly in line with bringing comfort dogs into newsrooms. It is an intentional, specific action / solution, even if it is only temporary. Having all of the journalists from WFTV who participated in this study say the dogs are a viable resource for newsrooms also falls under the strategic problem-solving category. They agreed the dogs were a welcome distraction.

Continuing to follow Chowdhury's (2020) description of the eight categories people can fall into when coping with stress or trauma, another significant group fell into the emotional distancing category. That is where one tried to control their emotions in response to stress. In this instance, the number of journalists who talked about compartmentalizing to just get through the days of that week would place them in this category. They made a conscious effort to separate themselves from the content on which they were reporting. A number of authors have cited this as typical journalist behavior (Buchanan & Keats, 2011; Cote & Simpson, 2000; Fedler, 2004; Freinkel, et al., 1994; Ricchiardi, 1998; Simpson & Boggs, 1999). The job of a newsroom is to inform the public, so the journalists must remain focused while covering the story, no matter the difficulty of the subject matter. There is a job to do and it must get done by a deadline. For many journalists, the only way that will happen while covering a traumatic story is through compartmentalization or, in the case of the theory, emotional distancing.

The third major connection to the eight categories in Lazarus and Folkman's Coping Theory Model is social support. This category is where one talks to others and looks for social connections to help them survive a difficult time. While journalists work in a competitive industry, they often maintain friendships with their competition. They often lean on one another for comfort and understanding. This goes against the macho attitude often found in newsrooms, but it's where these connections happen and with whom they happen that provide some clarity. Many journalists do not show that emotion in the newsroom. They do it on their personal time.

In the case of the journalists who participated in this study, a few of them mentioned leaning on specific co-workers after work to help them process what they were covering. They chose co-workers they trusted and with whom they felt comfortable being vulnerable. In relation to the dogs, they found the interaction a form of social support. Again, it gave them something around which to unite. They talked to the handlers or the dogs, providing an outlet for some personal expression in a safe place.

Limitations

While this study had some clear and beneficial outcomes, there were also limitations that should be addressed. First, the focus was on one very small, select group of people in one newsroom. The dogs have not been widely used, so options for newsrooms were extremely limited. WFTV was chosen because it was one of the few stations where I was sure the dogs were brought in specifically for the sake of the journalists, not as part of a news story. To my knowledge, comfort dogs have only been used in newsrooms as a result of three specific incidents in recent history: Dallas, TX in 2016 when a gunman killed five police officers and wounded nine others; Roanoke, VA in 2015 when a reporter and photographer were killed by a former colleague during a live shot; and in Orlando, FL in 2016 after the Pulse mass shooting.

Something these events all have in common is a large number of employees affected by the trauma. It would be worth additional research into the everyday occurrences that news teams cover and whether smaller scale trauma could also cause a need for some mental health intervention. In fact, a few of the participants in this study mentioned smaller events they had previously covered and how those events affected the journalists almost as deeply as covering something like the Pulse mass shooting. For journalists who cover the crime beat or end up on a breaking news story that is traumatic in nature, the dogs could possibly be beneficial. It does not have to just be large scale events.

Second, ideally, qualitative research is conducted in person with first person observation. In this case, the dogs visited the newsroom four years prior to this study, so first-hand observation was not possible. I did look at photos and videos from the dogs' visit, which the journalists shared. The timing of the study was also a limitation. Since the visit was four years prior, there were times when the journalists incorrectly recalled the timeline of events from that week or struggled to recall some of the details of the visit.

Third, some of the questions included in this study should have been more focused. For example, additional information could have been gathered on social support and the different ways this happens. Some of the participants were roommates, neighbors or married couples. Had questions been written differently, additional depth could have been added to this significant finding. This was not known until the interviews were conducted.

Finally, due to the 2020-2021 culture surrounding the COVID-19 pandemic, in-person interviews were also not recommended by the CDC. Because of this limitation, all interviews were conducted via Zoom. While it was helpful to be able to see the participants live during the interview, the interpersonal communication and connection was missing from the interviews.

Recommendations for Future Research

Further research should be conducted in the area of effective coping mechanisms when it comes to journalists covering traumatic events. Specifically, it would be helpful to do a more thorough study to include a larger number of participants in a variety of markets. It would be wise to focus on those who have allergies to dogs or lack experience with dogs to see if their experience during the dogs' visit was positive. Those who are not considered "dog people" also may have some further suggestions for making the interactions more successful for everyone.

Social support among journalists also needs additional scholarly research, with support both from family and friends and from colleagues. As mentioned earlier, some of the participants were roommates who would decompress with each other after work; others were neighbors, and some were married couples. In each of these scenarios, there was a level of social support. Determining some of the pitfalls/dangers and some of the successes of these scenarios would be beneficial in helping journalists down the road as they are looking for healthy ways to process traumatic event coverage.

One of the questions raised during this study was why some journalists are affected and others are not. There was also a wide range of severity of affectedness among the participants. In order to better understand whether some journalists are more at risk than others, it would be helpful to have research that uses a scientific measurement of previous life experiences. Existing research in other fields of study deeply connect previous traumatic experiences with how at risk a person may be to react to trauma later in life, but similar research in journalists does not exist. One idea would be to use the Adverse Childhood Experiences (ACEs) test to identify early life experiences that could be indicative of later reaction to trauma.

Conclusion

This study suggests the comfort dogs were helpful to the journalists at WFTV that week in June of 2016; however, it appears that the dogs are just the starting point to correcting a problem that has existed in newsrooms for decades. They brought the newsroom together, giving the journalists something about which to smile and just take a break from the intensity of the coverage. Normalizing mental healthcare among journalists is the only way the culture will change. The only way to bring healing to the journalists is to normalize the need for mental healthcare in the news industry. That change starts with newsroom management and station ownership. Education is the key. When an emergency occurs, the first responders on scene typically receive care for the trauma they witnessed. It is time to start including journalists in that list of first responders. Without them, history does not get recorded. The time to make that change is now. For the participants of this study, adding comfort dogs to the toolbox of effective coping mechanisms was beneficial.

Appendix A: Interview Guide

Qualifying Questions:

1. Were you working with WFTV the night of the mass shooting at Pulse or in the subsequent days?

2. Did you interact with the comfort dogs during their visit to the newsroom?

Interview Guide:

1. What is your job title?

2. How long have you worked in news?

3. How long have you been with WFTV?

4. How long had you been with WFTV when the shooting happened?

5. What was your job during the coverage of the mass shooting at Pulse?

6. What was that experience like? (I think this gets at the "tell me your story" angle you all agreed was necessary.) RQ1

7. What was the worst part of the coverage for you? RQ1

8. Did you experience any sort of mental or emotional struggle during the coverage? If so, what was it? (This is where I would include follow-up questions specifically about symptoms like sleeplessness, irritability, nightmares, heightened startle response, etc.) RQ1

9. How was it covering this compared to other stories? RQ1

10. Did WFTV or Cox Media Group provide any sort of mental or emotional assistance to the team in the week or so after the shooting? If so, what did that look like?

11. If mental or emotional assistance was offered to the team, did you partake? Why or why not? If you did not partake, did you seek assistance for mental health on your own or did you find comfort in another outlet? Describe that.

12. Before Pulse, to what extent would you have felt comfortable discussing your emotional reactions to a traumatic event you were covering with your colleagues? In what ways did that change during or after Pulse?

13. You said earlier that you interacted with the dogs when they visited your newsroom. How did the dogs make you feel? RQ2

14. What did you like/what didn't you like about them visiting? RQ2

15. Did you feel that they helped you? Why or why not? RQ2

16. How long did you pet them? RQ2

17. What else did you do while petting them? (Just sit quietly with them, talk to colleagues, talk to handlers, etc. If you talked, what did you talk about?) RQ2

18. Do you think they are a viable resource for other journalists who may cover something traumatic? Why or why not? RQ2

Appendix B: Informed Consent Document

PROJECT TITLE: Working Through Trauma: The Use of Therapy Dogs in Television Newsrooms

INTRODUCTION

The purposes of this form are to give you information that may affect your decision whether to say YES or NO to participation in this research, and to record the consent of those who say YES.

RESEARCHERS

Adrienne S. Garvey; PhD Candidate at Regent University; adriga1@mail.regent.edu

DESCRIPTION OF RESEARCH STUDY

While there have been some studies conducted in the 27 years since trauma journalism research got its start, there have yet to be any studies conducted specifically on the use of comfort dogs as a means of coping during and after news coverage of a traumatic event.

If you decide to participate, then you will join a study involving research of broadcast news journalists working at WFTV in Orlando, Florida, during the coverage of the Pulse shooting. Participants will be from a variety of jobs from within the newsroom and will be from a variety of ages, ethnicities, and experience levels in broadcast journalism. If you say YES, then your participation will last for 30 minutes to an hour as part of an in-depth interview to be conducted via electronic means in order to be in compliance with CDC recommendations for social distancing during a pandemic. Approximately 15 subjects from the WFTV newsroom will be participating in this study.

EXCLUSIONARY CRITERIA

To participate you should have been working the night of the Pulse shooting or over the week that followed. You also should have directly interacted with the comfort dogs that were brought into the newsroom following the shooting.

RISKS AND BENEFITS

RISKS: If you decide to participate in this study, then you may face a risk of emotional distress as you discuss memories from covering the mass shooting. The researcher tried to reduce these risks by engaging in numerous training sessions regarding the handling of trauma victims. As with any research, there is some possibility that you may be subject to risks that have not yet been identified.

BENEFITS: The main benefit to you for participating in this study is providing experience with comfort dogs as a means of coping, which could open the door for them to be used in more newsrooms around the country during and after news coverage of traumatic events, therefore caring for the mental wellbeing of your colleagues.

COSTS AND PAYMENTS

The researchers want your decision about participating in this study to be absolutely voluntary. There is no compensation for participating in this research.

NEW INFORMATION

If the researchers find new information during this study that would reasonably change your decision about participating, then they will give it to you.

FUTURE RESEARCH

The researchers may remove identifiable information from your results in order to use this information for future research without further informed consent.

CONFIDENTIALITY

All information obtained about you in this study is strictly confidential unless disclosure is required by law. The results of this study may be used in reports, presentations and publications, but the researcher will not identify you.

WITHDRAWAL PRIVILEGE

It is okay for you to say NO. Even if you say YES now, you are free to say NO later, and walk away or withdraw from the study -- at any time. Your decision will not affect your relationship with Regent University.

COMPENSATION FOR ILLNESS AND INJURY

If you say YES, then your consent in this document does not waive any of your legal rights. However, in the event of emotional or psychological harm arising from this study, neither Regent University nor the researchers are able to give you any money, insurance coverage, free medical care, or any other compensation for such injury.

VOLUNTARY CONSENT

By signing this form, you are saying several things. You are saying that you have read this form or have had it read to you, that you are satisfied that you understand this form, the research study, and its risks and benefits. The researchers should have answered any questions you may have had about the research. If you have any questions later on, then the researchers should be able to answer them:

Adrienne Garvey, PhD Candidate: 717-394-4570

Dr. Stephen Perry, PhD, Dissertation Chairman: 757-352-4082

If at any time you feel pressured to participate, or if you have any questions about your rights or this form, then you should call Dr. William Brown, the current HSRC chair, at 757-352-4216.

By signing below, you are telling the researcher YES, that you agree to participate in this study. The researcher should give you a copy of this form for your records.

Subject's Printed Name & Signature / Date

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INVESTIGATOR'S STATEMENT

I certify that I have explained to this subject the nature and purpose of this research, including benefits, risks, costs, and any experimental procedures. I have described the rights and protections afforded to human subjects and have done nothing to pressure, coerce, or falsely entice this subject into participating. I am aware of my obligations under state and federal laws and promise compliance. I have answered the subject's questions and have encouraged him/her to ask additional questions at any time during the course of this study. I have witnessed the above signature(s) on this consent form.

Investigator's Printed Name & Signature / Date

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