

“When can I get angry?” Journalists’ coping strategies and emotional management in hostile situations

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Abstract

Research shows that emotional management is often part of journalists’ decision-making in the news creation process and when dealing with attacks, insults, or harassment, which we describe by the umbrella term hostility. Some emotional management strategies can lead journalists to self-censorship or to mental health problems when they do not recognise and deal with emotions. Therefore, the aim of this study is to investigate how journalists react to hostility against them by using emotional coping strategies and emotional management. We carried out 18 semi-structured interviews with news journalists in Estonia from June 2021 to December 2021. The results showed that although hostility is a part of journalists’ everyday work-life, many lack a strategy to deal with it. We can say that there are three types of perceptions and reactions: (1) the thick-skinned journalist who does not see problems with hostility and, therefore, does not take any action against receiving the hostility. (2) The pragmatically conformist journalist who sometimes sees problems with hostility and believes the solution is to grow a thicker skin. (3) The journalist who is not a punching bag and sees a problem in being constantly bombarded by hostility, most of whom seek protection from it or help to fight against it.

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Introduction

More and more studies are looking into how journalists are attacked, harassed, and publicly insulted, both offline and online. Some journalists consider receiving this kind of hostility as part of the job, and if you do not have thick skin, then you are not right for the job (Chen et al., 2020; Martin and Murrell, 2021). The thick skin rhetoric among journalists is nothing new; it has been considered a coping mechanism for years (e.g., Steiner, 1994). However, as journalists, especially women, report more and more harassment, ‘thick skin’ is not a viable protection or preventive method (e.g., Chen et al., 2020; Holton et al., 2021; Eberspacher, 2019).

Ignoring hostility or manipulating how journalists feel about hostility to meet the expected standard of ‘thick skin’ behaviour could have a negative effect on journalists and their practices. Indifference to threats can lead to dangerous situations, mental problems, a decrease in job satisfaction, and thoughts of leaving the field (Riives et al., 2021).

Although we can see from these studies that hostility unsurprisingly provokes emotional reactions from journalists, authors rarely link the concepts of journalistic safety and emotion closely (cf. Stupart, 2021; Miller and Lewis, 2020). We see from the research that emotions and hostility influence how journalists work and the decisions they make (Ivask, 2020; Wahl-Jorgensen, 2016). Therefore, this study investigates how journalists react to the hostility against them within the framework of emotions, particularly focusing on journalists’ emotional coping strategies and emotional management.

We use the term *hostility* as an overarching term to describe journalists’ experiences with negative communication (offline and online), threats, attacks, and harassment. If a derogatory action is aimed at a journalist and the journalist perceives it to have a negative impact on them, we consider this to be hostility. If necessary, we will describe such incidents more precisely. We use the general term since our focus is not on the characteristics of hostility or differentiating them precisely, but rather on how journalists react to them.

We focus particularly on journalists’ *coping* – ‘cognitive and behavioural efforts to manage specific external or internal demands (and conflicts between them) that are appraised as taxing or exceeding the resources of a person’ (Lazarus, 1991: 112) – and journalists’ *emotional management*. According to Hochschild (1979: 561), emotion management is ‘the act of trying to change in degree or quality an emotion or feeling. (...) Note that “emotion work” refers to the effort – the act of trying – and not to the outcome, which may or may not be successful.’ We explore these terms in more detail in the literature review, which stems from journalism studies focused on the emotion framework.

Estonian journalists report being harassed, threatened and attacked, resulting in self-censorship (Himma-Kadakas and Ivask, 2022). According to Europe-centred reports by Council of Europe Platform to Promote the Protection of Journalism and Safety of

[Journalists](#) (2022: 33) and worldwide reports by [Reporters Without Borders](#) (2022), the trends we see in Estonia are nothing unusual. Because of the similarities in the trends internationally, the typology we suggest below can be tested and used as a tool for comparison in other (European) countries.

Journalists' reactions to hostility

Data from different sources show that journalists worldwide are subject to hostility – experiencing high rates of imprisonment, physical assault, intimidation, and harassment, including when covering protests and highly controversial topics ([UNESCO, 2021](#); [Reporters Without Borders, 2021](#)). Democratic countries are not exempt; in recent years journalists were murdered in Malta ([CPJ, 2017](#)) and Slovakia ([CPJ, 2018](#)). The statistics also show that female journalists report more experiences with hostility than their male colleagues ([Chen et al., 2020](#); [Posetti et al., 2021](#)). Even the content of hostility is different: male journalists receive comments or e-mails about their intelligence or age, while female journalists receive more sexual or gender-based insults or threats ([Ivask and Lon, 2023](#); [Riives et al., 2021](#)). This information offers context when analysing the results of our study.

According to [Berkowitz \(1993: 21\)](#), hostility is a ‘negative attitude toward one or more people that is reflected in a decidedly unfavourable judgment of the target’. Hostility can be delivered to the *target*, in our case the journalist, in several ways. Offline, researchers have documented journalists’ experiences with physical altercations, phone calls or messages, and face-to-face communication ([Holton et al., 2021](#); [Ivask, 2020](#)). Online, researchers refer to a phenomenon called *flaming* – the purpose is to attack and violate interactional norms intentionally ([O’Sullivan and Flanagin, 2003: 84](#)). The violation of journalists’ norms, which we consider sending hostility to be, can take place in the publication’s comments section or social media page, on personal social media accounts, and by email (including e-mails about the journalist sent to whole newsroom lists), and these acts of hostility can include threats and insults ([Chen et al., 2020](#); [Himma-Kadakas and Ivask, 2022](#)).

We also witness a trend of populist political parties and politicians expressing hostility to journalists via their own media channels and public press conferences and encouraging their followers to do the same. Their aim is to influence how journalism works or to undermine its credibility in the eyes of the public ([Carlson and Witt, 2020](#)). Journalists may react by self-censoring themselves, and therefore hostility can affect not only a single journalist, but journalism in general ([González Macías and Reyna García, 2019](#)). This represents a loss for society: if journalistic decisions are dictated by fear, then journalists may neglect their role as watchdogs and face a chilling effect (e.g., [Kim and Shin, 2022](#)). Some other reactions from journalists to hostility include leaving the field ([Binns, 2017](#)) or stopping use of social media ([Lewis et al., 2020](#)).

Given the various types of attacks and hostility, the question inevitably arises as to how journalists are protected in Estonia. Sexual harassment and stalking are mentioned in the Penal Code and the punishment is a fine or detention. The regulation on online hostility stipulate that a person who receives a threat or derogatory text can sue the author of the

text or the Estonian platform where the text was posted (e.g., as a comment), and demand compensation for damages to their brand, business, or well-being. Additionally, victims can turn to the police for help and the police can send a verbal warning to the person who initiated the threat or attack.

Shifting our focus to organizational obligations, we encounter the Occupational Health and Safety Act—an instrumental legislative framework designed to ensure workplace safety. However, organizations currently lack explicit regulation that mandate the protection of their employees beyond the immediate workplace, unless specifically outlined in work contracts. In conclusion, because of the clear requirements for organisations to keep their worker safe at all times, it becomes inevitable for workers to devise their own strategies to navigate safety challenges.

Journalists' emotional coping strategies and emotional management

There are particular stressors stemming from hostility, which can promote negative emotional responses in journalists, such as sadness, anger or anxiety – these can include dangerous working conditions, hate speech and online harassment, threats, or physical attacks (Feinstein and Nicolson, 2005; Hughes et al., 2017). These types of responses can potentially affect not only journalists' relations to their work (Ivask and Lon, 2023), but also shape the news agenda and how news content is produced, for example how journalists handle topics with a strong emotional message or how they avoid certain topics that may be potentially controversial (Wahl-Jorgensen, 2016).

Research shows different valences of journalists' emotions towards different objects, which we can sum up as both organisational and individual. For example, journalists tend to be positively emotionally committed to their work (Reinardy, 2011; Hopper and Huxford, 2015), with factors leading to job satisfaction including perceived organisational support, autonomy, the perception of work quality, and a reasonable workload.

Moreover, these emotions can be volatile – simultaneously oriented towards different objects – and can develop over time (Goyanes and Rodríguez-Gómez, 2018). The resulting contradiction can cause journalists to fall into a *passion trap*: a 'mechanisms of forced availability and forced acceptance of given conditions' (Morini et al., 2014: 71), or can lead to a deepening of negative emotions and passivity (Reinardy, 2011; Goyanes and Rodríguez-Gómez, 2018).

To maintain their role, journalists use various coping strategies, such as positive or wishful thinking; self-control; talking to colleagues, friends, and family members; dissociation and detachment; denial and avoidance; flight behaviour; purging emotions; black humour; exercise and other physical activities; or substance abuse (Hughes et al., 2021). Folkman and Lazarus (1980) distinguish between *problem-focused coping* that aims to reduce or remove the risk of harmful consequences (e.g., rational reactions, such as seeking information, analysing problems, and finding a feasible solution), and *emotion-focused coping*.

At the same time, the choice of coping strategies depends on how an individual journalist thinks about hostility. For example, while some United States journalists

described attacks as having a negligible impact on journalistic practices or the institutional standing of journalism, others claimed that Donald Trump's hostility to the press resulted in numerous calls to continue to 'do' good journalism (Koliska et al., 2020). Some journalists prefer to deal with hostility by ignoring or downplaying it (Chen et al. 2020), as it is often normalised in newsrooms and looked at as part of the job (Miller and Lewis, 2020; Riives et al., 2021).

Several studies mention *thick skin* (e.g., Martin and Murrell, 2021; Everbach, 2018; Bradshaw, 2021; Hardin and Shain, 2006) as a coping mechanism – journalists claim that online harassment has forced them to emotionally gird themselves, adding another layer to their journalistic routines (Chen et al., 2020). According to research findings, the concept of developing a thick skin emerges as a prevalent coping mechanism among journalists across various countries. For instance, a study conducted by Chen et al. (2020) observed the same phenomenon among journalists in Germany, India, Taiwan, the United Kingdom, and the United States of America. Our study maintains a non-gendered approach but, akin to Chen et al. (2020), places emphasis on online hostility. It is also common in newsrooms to downplay hostility when talking to colleagues, or to use dark humour as a strategy to cope with difficult situations (Gudipaty, 2017; Ivask, 2020; Judah, 2019).

Another type of emotional response is active labour to change emotions – emotional management. Arlie Hochschild (1979: 561) considers two types of emotion management: '*evocation*, in which the cognitive focus is on a desired feeling which is initially absent, and *suppression*, in which the cognitive focus is on an undesired feeling which is initially present'. Emotional management involves manipulating or suppressing emotional reactions within a person (Hopper and Huxford, 2017), and to achieve this one can block certain feelings and evoke others to act properly according to what one perceives as being expected (Hochschild, 2012). Emotional management, at the same time, can mean managing emotions according to the expectations of the job or profession one is carrying out (Hochschild, 1983, 2012).

For journalists, the need to be objective as part of the normative ideal of the profession features most prominently in research about emotional management. In addition, there is a conflicting suggestion within the journalistic profession to be humane and at the same time neutral and objective, which can bring the personal and professional domains into conflict (Glück, 2016). So, 'thick skin' can be understood as the boundary between being human and being neutral, which is why journalists often rely on it, and also to show that hostility or aggression does not influence them.

Another layer to emotional management is added when journalists are covering traumatic or severe conflicts, where they are supposed to put on a facade of objectivity (e.g., Feinstein et al., 2002; Dworznik-Hoak, 2020). However, research shows that journalists deal with emotions and manage them in different stages of the journalistic production process (Thomson, 2021).

Based on our definitions, we therefore distinguish between coping strategies and emotional management as two different steps in the emotional response of journalists: the first step, coping, is an effort to handle specific emotional situations; the second step, emotional management, is actively working to change emotions – evocation those that are

desired and/or suppression of those that are unwanted. Therefore, our research questions are as follows: What coping strategies do journalists use in response to hostility? How do journalists use emotional management when reacting to hostility?

Methods and sample

We carried out 18 semi-structured interviews with reporters working for the Estonian writing press (including newsrooms focused on the newspaper, online newsrooms, and the converged newsroom). The interviews were from 30 min to one and half hours long. Most of the journalists in our sample covered Estonian news, had experience with multimedia, and some worked for the investigative newsroom from time to time.

Our main interest was potential risk groups such as journalists covering controversial topics. We used purposive sampling combined with snowball sampling. We created a sample with journalists who to our knowledge had experiences with hostility. We chose purposive sampling because the goal was to focus on the characteristics of a population of interest, which would best enable us to answer the research questions and discover journalists' reactions to hostility. Purposive sampling assumes that certain categories of individuals may have a unique, different, or important perspective on the phenomenon in question and their presence in the sample should be ensured. After a couple of interviews, some recommended more respondents for our sample whom they knew had had experiences with hostility.

Altogether, there were 11 female and seven male journalists in the sample. Their professional experience ranged from 2 years to more than twenty (the mean was approximately 8 years). Most of the journalists (13 out of 18) had experience working for other newsrooms, not only the one they worked for at the time of the study. The ages of the journalists in the sample ranged from 23 to 46 (the mean was 30).

To get an idea of the scale of the profession, according to [Statistics Estonia \(2021\)](#), there are 929 media workers in Estonia, 384 males and 545 females. However, there is a lack of more detailed statistics. Overall, more female journalists work in the newsrooms in Estonia, which helps to explain why there were more female journalists in our sample.

The interviews were carried out by three researchers who followed the same research questions, plan, and interview guide. The interviews took place face-to-face or online (via Skype or Teams). Although there were differences in data gathering methods (online communication, face-to-face) and subtle differences in how the interview plan was followed, the data is comparable as the data were systemised by the lead researcher, who worked closely with the other two researchers. The interviews were carried out from June to December 2021.

After conducting the interviews, the data were transcribed, and then we carried out a comparative thematic analysis, in which the researchers read through the data and compared the findings with each other. Thematic analysis was used to search for themes or patterns ([Braun and Clarke, 2006](#)) concerning journalists' emotional reactions to hostility.

Analysing and gathering the data were conducted according to the [Name removed for anonymity] University Research Ethics Committee guidelines. We explained the aim of the study to the participants and agreed on the extent of anonymisation. All our

respondents in this article are anonymous; we present them with codenames: Anders, Mihkel, Lennart, Hando, Henry, Villu, Jaan, Oliivia, Charlotte, Amelia, Laura, Mia, Evelyn, Emily, Emma, Anna, Sirje, and Jane. We chose to do this because the topic is sensitive, some media organisations forbid their workers from giving interviews for research purposes, and because the media workers' community in Estonia is small and, especially with particular profiles, it could be easy to identify a respondent if we reveal any more details.

Findings

On the basis of the interviews, we identified various kinds of emotional reactions and attitudes towards received hostility. Based on the similarities in (1) the emotional coping strategies used by journalists in response to hostility, and (2) journalists' emotional management when reacting to hostility, we were able to distinguish three types of journalists in our sample: *the thick-skinned journalist*, *the pragmatically conformist journalist*, and *the not-a-punching-bag journalist*.

When informed of this typology, some respondents said that they felt a certain way at the time of the interview, but their attitude might change depending on their experiences and level of fatigue, emphasising the volatility of their emotions (Goyanes and Rodríguez-Gómez, 2018). Also, if one receives a great deal of hostility in a short period of time and experiences a lot of negative stress (e.g., the newsroom not backing them in a public fight), a 'thick skinner' can move into the 'not-a-punching-bag' category. The boundaries between categories are therefore fluid.

In the analysis below, we first describe some of the overall experiences with hostility reported by all the respondents. As they said, if you publish something, you have to be ready for hostility, because you are putting yourself on the field where everybody can take aim at you. The respondents also referred to the trend of journalists and newsrooms being sued, which can be perceived as hostile behaviour. They described how in some cases litigation is not meant to 'correct the errors in reporting' but to intimidate journalists for covering a topic.

Some topics are socially very polarising, even causing quarrels in the newsroom. So, sometimes journalists receive hostility from colleagues, as well.

The thick-skinned journalist: Coping

The people who claimed to be thick-skinned journalists were older, more experienced journalists, with a high level of commitment and loyalty to their job: the medium, their organisation, and their role (Deuze, 2005; Himma-Kadakas and Ivask, 2022; Moran and Usher, 2020). They were not very engaged on social media (highlighting the generational difference), which might offer a context for their attitude: since a lot of hostility reaches journalists via social media, those who use it less may be more sheltered from hostile reactions.

Journalists in this group emphasised that if journalists receive hostility for their work, then they must be doing something right, because it shows they have stirred up the

hornets' nest and made someone feel uncomfortable. Also, these journalists considered receiving hostility as part of the job, repeating the results of other research (Chen et al. 2020; Martin and Murrell, 2020). The respondents also mentioned that, if anything, journalists should be happy they receive attention, even if it is in the form of hostility.

The journalists in this group used emotion-focused coping (Folkman and Lazarus, 1980) as 'everything is in order, as long as I am visible'. They said they were not bothered by the hostility they received and believed that having a thick skin was necessary for the work. Because they had thick skin, they could handle any type of hostility, and sometimes they were even the source of it themselves in the newsroom. For example, they said they opposed people who took hostility seriously and did something against it. Hando added that in Estonia, journalists do not need to worry about the threats and hostility, and journalists turning to the police are weak.

Moreover, they actively provoked situations in which they publicly declared their coping strategy – for example, Hando described an incident in which he intentionally approached the person who was at the centre of a conflict-heavy story he had covered to see the source's reaction. For the journalist, it was an experiment. Hando received hostility from the source, and therefore his goal was accomplished, but he claimed that the situation caused him no harm.

Some respondents explained this by their gender: male journalists claimed to be less concerned about their safety and did not have the same reaction to hostility as female journalists. This touches on the topic of whether a female journalist can protect herself and/or her family if in danger.

Look, when a man would write to me a threatening letter and to my female colleague and we would meet up on an empty street, then the power dynamics are different between me and the harasser and a female colleague and the harasser. That is why females are more touched by the threats. (Jaan)

As one male journalist pointed out, female journalists are at a disadvantage when physically attacked, and therefore their reaction to hostility, including threats, is more intense, as it is laced with fear of 'what if it really happens' (Jane). This also explains why females reported having more experiences with harassment, threats, and insults; although males also received all sorts of hostility, their responses to it tended to be muted (Holton et al., 2021; Eberspacher, 2019).

The thick-skinned journalist: Emotional management

The communicative partners also showed how their emotional management (Hochschild, 1979) developed, as they emphasised that thick skin develops over time. 'You do not possess it right away'. The respondents said when they first started out as journalists, they were more affected by all sorts of 'more heated discussions' (Henry).

I have thick skin. However, when I was younger, I did not have much experience, then if someone yelled at me or refused to give a comment, I felt awful. I cried. Now I do not feel like this at all. (Emily)

Thick skin itself was for them a synonym for emotional management (cf. [Martin and Murrell, 2021](#); [Everbach, 2018](#); [Bradshaw, 2021](#); [Hardin and Shain, 2006](#)) – the journalists equated thick skin with not letting oneself feel emotions when they were attacked; since it was an everyday reality for them, it had become a norm. They had to evoke the desired feeling of their own importance and suppress the undesired feelings of fragility and weakness ([Hochschild, 1979, 2012](#)). The interviewees admitted they were trying to ‘regulate’ themselves so as not to be seen and taken as weak or submissive. They wanted to give the impression of a trustworthy journalist who does not back down. This is consistent with [Glück \(2016\)](#), who points out that journalists are sometimes strongly influenced by the normative ideals of the job.

I do not think that the safety question is a topic among Estonian journalists. If someone sends you an e-mail from a fake account and promises to do something to you.... (...) It goes along with the job and the journalist must consider that the audience reacts to their job either positively or negatively. (Hando)

These journalists stated that after some years, emotional management no longer involved knowingly manipulating the emotions; it had become an automated reaction, or lack of it. The interviewees said that whoever chooses the profession needs to learn to suppress emotions and reactions. Suitable people ‘have the capability of developing thick skin’ (Lennart), it is not given.

The pragmatically conformist journalist: Coping

Journalists in this category claimed to be used to hostility after working as crime reporters or covering controversial topics, but they were more cautious than the first group about threats and hostility, sometimes reacting to them, though in a muted way. This group did not dismiss their colleagues’ problems with hostility. Moreover, their attitude toward hostility was not as positive as for those in the first group – this group does not see hostility as something that proves they have done a good job. These journalists were already experienced in the field (five to 10 years).

Another difference was that pragmatically conformist journalists leaned towards problem-focused coping ([Folkman and Lazarus, 1980](#)): they aimed to reduce or remove the risk of harmful consequences, discussing it with colleagues, friends, and close ones (cf. [Hughes et al., 2021](#)). Their reactions were mostly subtle – they did not turn to the police unless the hostility involved a very serious threat to themselves or their families. Nevertheless, some journalists in this group claimed they never attended work-related meetings outside the newsroom alone, always with a colleague to back them up; they had ‘panic buttons’ or some other danger-signals. These strategies came out in interviews with

journalists from one newsroom, while none of the journalists from other organisations described similar strategies.

The pragmatically conformist journalist: Emotional management

In terms of emotional management (Hochschild, 1979), this group of interviewees described a similar procedure as the first group – gradual development of a thick skin. However, in contrast, this strategy is used with caution. They still pay attention to their surroundings, including threats, whereas for those in the first group, journalists can even go and seek out hostility. The pragmatically conformist journalists still might react to the threat, but not as strongly as when they were less experienced.

When I started out, then yes, hostility had a bigger effect on me and sometimes I really thought if it is all worth it, maybe I should do something else. The worst situations are when someone threatens my family, my children. There have been quite a lot of nights without any sleep, just crying. However, time passes and so do my reactions to such situations. I guess I have grown a somewhat thick skin. I have learned to take notice of what is happening, but not to overreact and focus on it. (Mia)

But while the first group liked to display this ability publicly, pragmatically conformist journalists used it primarily in the company of colleagues to meet their expectations and fit in. The journalists said they were bothered by the hostility, but their aim was to repress the reaction and to be immune to the negativity, in short, to grow and maintain a thick skin that is praised in the newsroom. They remembered hostile situations and reactions well but said they could not allow themselves to be bothered by them, although sometimes they were. In their opinion, growing a thick skin was necessary since attacks are part of the job. Moreover, the job was so time-consuming, they simply had no time to think about hostility; they needed to produce content 24/7.

Life goes on. I understand that hostility has a deeper effect on me and of course I could work on it and work on my mental health, but I am just putting these things aside, I do not think about it, everyone does it in the newsroom. It is like a by-product of the job. (Villu)

One similarity between the first and second groups was the individuality in dealing with hostility, as many hostile situations occurred in a personal space (e.g., personal social media accounts, personal work email/phones). In their personal space they were alone anyway, so it was necessary to grow a thick skin since no one else was going to protect them. However, the difference is that pragmatically conformist journalists do not consider hostility to be a ‘normal’ part of the job, though it is inevitable.

The not-a-punching-bag journalist: Coping

The journalists in this group were mostly females, on the middle-ground experience-wise, from around five to more than 15 years of professional experience. They covered all sorts

of topics but especially polarising issues: the environment, politics, and alternative medicine. They used social media for work (to share their news, engage in discussions, search for topics etc.). Most had received hostility publicly, for example, on social media, and had suffered from job-related cyberbullying. They were vocal about how the hostility bothered and even angered them and used different coping strategies to balance their emotional responses, especially those they had the time and resources to do so.

The journalists in this category were open about their coping strategies at work. Particularly, they used a problem-focused approach (Folkman and Lazarus, 1980), bordering on self-censorship, such as avoiding highly polarising topics despite their newsworthiness (e.g., alternative medicine, politics of populist parties). In this they differed from the first group, among whom we did not witness such methods.

They avoided topics connected to sources known to be hostile when communicating, or who could mobilise followers to target the journalist with hostility via commenting or messaging on social media. Such coping methods demonstrate the need for individuals to protect themselves, because they have decided their personal well-being is more important than the public's need to know about an event that is newsworthy but potentially conflict-heavy, leading to hostility. This behaviour conflicts with the ideal that journalists are emotionally attached to their role (Deuze, 2005).

The journalists in this group reacted actively to hostility: several of them turned to the police after receiving threats or being a victim of doxing, others turned to the legal department of their employer. Although they said they were trying to fight against people who think hostility is acceptable, they admitted that thus far they lacked results. They said the police investigate only severe hostility on the internet or groups that send nooses to journalists; there were no other consequences (e.g., fines, formal warnings).

In a nutshell: suck it up and deal with it, you have chosen this profession. (Sirje)

In cases where journalists have sought legal recourse, the court has stated that the journalism profession means one is in the public eye, and therefore receiving hostility is part of the job.

The not-a-punching-bag journalist: Emotional management

Similar to the pragmatically conformist group, these journalists saw the problem as not only individual, but also organisational and reflected on the need for emotional management in the newsroom in response to hostility. They were aware of their practice of emotional management in circumstances when they could not show signs of fear or admit that the hostility had a negative impact on them, because some colleagues and bosses ridiculed them, called names, and minimised their experiences and reactions. There were conflicts with the thick-skinners, who pressured the not-a-punching-bag journalists to not react to the hostility or to take the hostility as a compliment. But this was not in the nature of the journalists in this group, so for them such reactions seemed incompatible and at times even inappropriate, and they refused to take the management of their emotions in that direction. Journalists can manage emotions within themselves, but they cannot make

others do it (Hopper and Huxford, 2017), unless they agree with the idea of needing to have a thick skin (like the pragmatically conformist journalists).

The not a not-a-punching-bag journalists found the overall culture within the newsroom to be disturbing in terms of hostility and harassment. In their experience, it was not rare for older colleagues to excuse some sources' behaviour, downplaying other journalists' need to react to hostility in another way (Gudipaty, 2017; Judah, 2019).

I remember how my female colleague said that oh my god, I would have never made any sort of statements to the police, it is normal and usual that someone threatens to kill you. (Oliivia)

These communicative partners' emotional management can be called 'openness and solution' – they did not follow a strategy of suppression of their feelings provoked by hostility experienced both outside and inside the newsroom; on the contrary, they acknowledged all the unwanted feelings and tried not only to openly resolve and prevent the hostility for themselves, but also systematically for others.

This group of journalists included the organisational level in their reflections. They claimed that the organisation influences both their coping and emotional management strategies, and they believed that they should receive protection and that hostility should not be simply accepted as part of the job. In fact, if it is part of the job, then media organisations should protect journalists or fight for their rights on a regulatory basis, showing loyalty to their employees and less to the medium, the organisation or the profession (Deuze, 2005; Ivask and Lon, 2023; Moran and Usher, 2020). Several journalists felt that there were no specialists in the newsroom who could listen to their problems and help solve them. In addition, they wanted to talk to people inside the system with the hopes of effecting change. Some journalists shared their experiences with colleagues, while others did not have this connection, or the culture in the newsroom did not favour discussing such matters.

I shared that a professor from a [name removed for anonymity] university wants to see me hanged. My colleague told me how people threaten to put him up to the wall and shoot him in the head and, well, that is it. (...) My older colleagues say that going to the court to defend oneself is nonsense, it is stupid, why would you, you will make a fool out of yourself. How much longer do I have to be the public punching bag? Where does the line go? When can I get angry? In a normal organisation people would ask from you if you are okay. (...). All we have is managers who are very concerned about whether I am going to have children soon, if I want a pay raise... I cannot even give feedback about my manager to anyone. (Evelyn)

The first reaction from the management is, do not pay attention to it, just grow a thick skin! I do not believe in that, I think that society needs to change, people who think it is okay to call names, mock, and threaten other people have to change, not me. (Emma)

Journalists in this group were critical of the behaviour of their colleagues as well as the organisational culture in terms of how hostility was approached and what kinds of coping mechanisms or emotional management were encouraged.

Concluding discussion

The aim of this study was to investigate how journalists react to the hostility against them within the framework of emotions, particularly focusing on journalists' emotional coping strategies and emotional management. First, we focused on the journalists' coping strategies in response to hostility. The journalists' expressed attitudes towards hostility indicate that although they had different perceptions of and behaviour in response to hostility, everyone in the sample admitted that they were the object of hostility, most of them daily. They said this was not news for anyone; it was well-known that receiving hostility and dealing with it was part of the job. Still, some journalists expected more intervention from the newsroom as they disagreed with the expectation that hostility and dealing with it was part of their job. They also refused to minimise their experiences with hostility.

The journalists described different coping strategies, considering that hostility by its nature can vary a great deal, and the people who receive it are different in their beliefs, stress levels, and ability to tolerate hostility. There are three types of coping strategies: *The thick-skinned journalist* does not see problems with hostility, and therefore pursues no action against it. Using emotion-focused coping methods, this journalist pretends everything is in order, as long as (s)he is visible, not bothered by the hostility, and believes that (s)he has the thick skin is necessary for the work; therefore, (s)he can handle any type of hostility and is even sometimes the source of it.

The pragmatically conformist journalist sometimes sees problems with hostility and sees the solution in growing a thicker skin. This journalist uses problem-focused coping methods (Folkman and Lazarus, 1980): (s)he aims to reduce or remove the risk of harmful consequences by discussing it with colleagues, friends, and close ones, but the reactions are mostly subtle.

The not-a-punching-bag journalist sees a problem in being constantly bombarded by hostility and needs and seeks protection from it or help to fight against it. If their needs are not met, they start searching for methods of self-preservation. These journalists use a problem-focused coping method bordering on self-censorship.

The groups therefore differ from each other by their coping strategies. The results showed that thick-skinned journalists focus on themselves, pushing down internal responses, while the other types deal with possible outcomes and are influenced by their outlook. The typology shows how emotional responses range from intrapersonal (within the person) to interpersonal (between people).

Second, we focused on the journalists' emotional management when reacting to hostility. Our interviewees repressed their emotions or negotiated/rationalised and normalised their reactions to hostility. For example, the thick skin rhetoric was very much present in the newsroom. Personal efforts to normalise and even minimise hostility by encouraging oneself not to give into it fully can be also considered a type of emotional management. Also, emotional management can function as a safety measure – when you say that you are not bothered by the hostility, maybe it will stop; but admitting being influenced may only encourage it. There are signs that due to emotional management,

some situations that could be otherwise considered hostile are downplayed and compartmentalised.

Our results show how personal peoples' perceptions of attacks and their reactions to them can be, but also illustrate how the 'culture' or 'environment' of the newsroom influences behavioural expectations. The layers of the organisation and the journalists' professional sphere are interconnected, and therefore some reactions are a result of emotional management – journalists trying to act according to the overall attitude in the newsroom.

Keeping journalists safe should start with recognising and admitting problems. But this will be problematic in newsrooms that encourage hiding reactions or not reacting at all. Even though the influence of hostility on journalism has been demonstrated (Koliska et al., 2020), our study adds journalists' reflections on the lack of systematic protection in newsrooms, supporting the results of other studies (Holton et al., 2021; Eberspacher, 2019). Journalists are not trained to deal with hostility or cyberattacks, and therefore in general they have not developed healthy safety mechanisms. 'Thick skin' emotional management of hostility does not protect journalists; it is a sign of loyalty to the profession, the medium, and the organisation. In contrast, 'openness and solution' oriented emotional management tries to openly resolve and prevent hostility (cf. Martin and Murrell, 2021; Everbach, 2018; Bradshaw, 2021).

The reactions can be natural and consistent with the overall rules and expectations of the organisation (Ashforth and Humphrey, 1993), the attitudes of the journalist and the newsroom harmonise naturally, or automatically – especially for thick-skinned journalists. Our interviews also indicated that journalists do not know what kind of help their media organisation employers could provide. Mostly they require safety in the workplace, which comes with the knowledge that they are not alone. It is also extremely difficult if their safety concerns are not taken seriously by their own colleagues. Considering future research, studying harassment and attacks quantitatively will be problematic as journalists will not admit to them. Nevertheless, since our emphasis was not on journalists' individual traits, such as their sensitivity levels towards hostility, we perceive it as a valuable subject for future exploration.

To conclude, our study diversifies the research on coping mechanisms and emotional management, and argues that besides 'thick skin', there are other types of emotional responses to harassment in the newsroom. This can help us understand how journalists who do not possess thick skin grow it over time – they can start from the not-a-punching-bag or the pragmatically conformist category and, as they manage their emotional responses over time, move into the thick-skinned journalists' category. In our group of respondents, however, there were journalists who did not see having thick skin as a solution.

We argue that the results partly reflect what is already known: journalism organisations do not see journalists' problems as their own (Holton et al., 2021), forcing journalists to search for solutions. Our typology shows that journalists who are the object of hostility are affected by it and find the answer in perseverance. Moreover, it is a question whether journalists should cover every topic without paying attention to safety because they serve the public and should do the work despite being attacked. While our study contributes to

the expanding body of research on the well-being and safety of journalists in Europe, an observation emerges when we contrast our findings with worldwide research conducted in this domain – a notable universality prevails (e.g., the pervasive “thick skin” attitude). It illustrates that a lot of the outcomes of the profession transcend national boundaries.

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