How Entertainment Journalists Manage Online Hate and Harassment

Noel Warford, *Oberlin College;* Nicholas Farber and Michelle L. Mazurek, *University of Maryland*

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Noel Warford
Oberlin College

Nicholas Farber
University of Maryland

Michelle L. Mazurek
University of Maryland

Abstract

While most prior literature on journalists and digital safety focuses on political journalists, entertainment journalists (who cover video games, TV, movies, etc.) also experience severe digital-safety threats in the form of persistent harassment. In the decade since the #GamerGate harassment campaign against video games journalists and developers, entertainment journalists have, by necessity, developed strategies to manage this harassment. However, the impact of harassment and the efficacy of these strategies is understudied. In this work, we interviewed nine entertainment journalists to understand their experiences with online hate and harassment and their strategies for managing it. These journalists see harassment as a difficult and inevitable part of their job; they rely primarily on external support rather than technical solutions or platform affordances. These findings suggest much more support is needed to reduce the individual burden of managing harassment.

1 Introduction

As part of modern digital life, journalists often have public presences on the internet, through both direct publication and social media. However, when journalists report on things that engender a negative reaction in their audience, they may experience harassment as a result. Although significant prior work has discussed the digital-safety needs and practices of journalists when facing nation-state adversaries [16, 27–30], harassment—defined by Citron as "a persistent and repeated course of conduct targeted at a specific person, that is de-

signed to and that causes the person severe emotional distress, and often the fear of physical harm." [13]—has not been studied as much in this specific context within the digital-safety research community. In this work, we study the experiences and practices of what we term "entertainment journalists"—those who write about topics like movies, video games, and sports—when dealing with online harassment. Despite the less sensitive nature of their work, these journalists experience significant harassment online, which can lead to severe consequences.

We hypothesize that entertainment journalists can experience the intersection of two *contextual risk factors* described in Warford et al.'s framework for understanding the digital-safety needs of at-risk users: *prominence* and *marginalization* [51].[1] *Prominence* refers to users "who stand out in a population, because they are well-known publicly or have noticeable attributes;" *marginalization* refers to "[p]ervasive negative treatment or exclusion at a societal level, due to an individual's identity attributes or life experiences." Warford et al. calls for investigation into the intersection of *contextual risk factors*; this work seeks to answer that call.

We chose to study these journalists due to their experiences dealing with harassment, especially since the 2014 #GamerGate campaign. This campaign targeted feminist video games journalists[2] and developers; #GamerGate supporters claimed to be calling attention to ethics issues in the games journalism industry, but relied primarily on misogynist threats to accomplish that aim [1]. #GamerGate represented the start of a long-term shift toward more organized and pervasive harassment, necessitating stronger protective actions from the campaign's targets [4].

Given this context, we hypothesize that many entertainment journalists have already developed adaptive responses to mitigate harassment's harmful impact, especially if they were targeted by #GamerGate or later campaigns. In this study, we sought to understand harassment's impact on these journal-

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[1]We note that two of the authors of this paper are also authors of [51].

[2]We use "games journalist" as shorthand for "video games journalist" elsewhere in this paper.

ists and how they attempt to mitigate its harmful effects. Our research questions were as follows:

RQ1: How do entertainment journalists mitigate the negative effects of harassment, both proactively and reactively? How and where do these journalists learn these protective strategies? Are they effective?

RQ2: How is this harassment impacted by risk events (e.g., publishing something about #GamerGate, tweeting about a current controversy)? What are the characteristics of these risk events?

RQ3: How does institutional support play a role in these journalists' protective strategies?

RQ4: What *contextual risk factors* [51] do these journalists experience? How do these impact their experience of online harassment? If multiple contextual factors are at play, how do they interact?

We find that journalists experience particularly damaging harassment attacks, due to the combination of the need for a public profile to promote their work (*prominence*) and the increased impact of harassment on journalists who experience *marginalization*, following prior scholarship on harassment and marginalization [10, 47, 54]. Our participants viewed harassment as an inevitable and dangerous part of their profession. Its consequences included severe mental and emotional impact as well as legitimate fears of escalation to the physical world. Rather than use platform affordances or technical solutions, our participants tended to rely on external support, like colleagues, friends, or family, to manage the impact of harassment on their lives. Improving *external* support for entertainment journalists is critical; they should not have to bear the brunt of harassment alone.

2 Related Work

This work builds on prior scholarship on journalists, online hate and harassment, and #GamerGate, described in this section.

Journalists and digital safety. Journalists have particular digital-safety needs due to their profession. Investigative journalists must securely share relevant documents with trusted sources, but without the subject of investigation finding out [16, 30]. For the high-profile Panama Papers investigation, a customized system for collaboration controlled the flow of information on that investigation without leaks until time of publication, across many different journalists, organizations, and countries [30], but not all journalistic efforts receive an equally high level of attention.

Journalists must also protect their sources—a challenging task in the digital age [25, 27, 28, 38, 43]. Journalists often prioritize communication methods that are "most convenient for the source, including the platform on which [the] source is most likely to respond" [28]. This prioritization can lead to a conflict between the critical need to communicate and the secondary priority of preserving the security of this communication, especially when potential consequences of a security breach could be as severe as imprisonment (for the source) or serious reputational harm (for the journalist). Entertainment journalists may also need to protect sources from retribution, such as when covering topics like harassment [22], labor rights [23, 45], and industry sexual misconduct [20].

Journalists and organizational stakeholders (like editors and IT staff) also have different—and sometimes conflicting— priorities [29]. While both groups may share core concerns like protecting sources and preventing reputational harm, sometimes competing goals put these two groups in conflict. Journalists, for example, may prize collaborating through externally-managed cloud services like Google Docs, but organizational stakeholders may worry about those external services being subpoenaed and revealing sensitive information [29, 31]. Journalists will use technical solutions accomplish their digital-safety goals in high-stakes reporting scenarios [16, 30], so long as these solutions are both clearly valuable and usable.

Most prior literature focuses on journalists protecting sources from nation-states or similarly-resourced adversaries. However, entertainment journalists also face direct attacks from groups of otherwise-ordinary individuals. Their attackers use freely available features of the modern internet and social media in order to target and harass these journalists.

Online hate and harassment. Harassment has become more common over recent years, particularly for young adults (ages 18-24) and LGBTQ+ people, due in large part to "unintended applications of widely accessible technologies" [47]. Thomas et al. taxonomize several important features of modern online hate and harassment, categorizing attacks based on the intended audience, the medium, and the capabilities required [47]. Their threat model includes a *target*—used rather than "victim" in order to empower those who face abuse—and an *attacker*, whose goal is to "emotionally harm or coercively control the target, irrespective of other side effects."

Many other scholars have examined the particular impact of harassment in relationship to experiences of marginalization. Chadha et al. [10] describe how women employ a variety of strategies for dealing with harassment, which is often sexualized, that included normalization and self-censorship. Wei et al. [54] interviewed experts who provide advice for people facing harassment and found that generalizing advice for harassment is difficult, as it relies on the particular type of threat the target faces. For people experiencing marginalization, these experts often added *extra* advice on top of pre-existing best practices, creating an unfair burden for those who face the most severe harassment. In other countries, especially outside

of the Western cultural sphere, participants perceived harassment that damages one's reputation or the reputation of one's family as severely harmful [44]; this reputational damage may escalate into direct physical or sexual violence [42]. The theme of restricting free expression as the only or best option in the face of harassment is a troubling one for researchers who seek to address this problem.

#GamerGate. One specifically salient example of online hate and harassment for this work is the #GamerGate campaign. In August 2014, game developer Zoe Quinn was harassed due to a perception that their game Depression Quest "was lauded with awards, not because of excellent game design and execution, but because it symbolized the gaming world's movement to be more inclusive and progressive" [1]. Quinn's ex-boyfriend alleged an affair between Quinn and games journalist Nathan Grayson, and shared this allegation on the popular imageboard 4chan. This story served as the seed crystal for more severe attacks on Quinn, which then spread to journalists, like feminist games critic Anita Sarkeesian, and game developers, like Brianna Wu, escalating over time to bomb threats and investigation by the FBI [1].

This harassment demonstrates the impact of two *contextual risk factors* identified by Warford et al. [51]—*prominence* and *marginalization*. The "average user" does not usually have to contend with focused harassment from an online group, so targets of #GamerGate who suddenly became *prominent* were often ill-equipped to deal with these threats. This harassment consisted of "extremely offensive and derogatory" [1] language and imagery aimed at women and minorities. Although it is true that not every target of #GamerGate was a woman—for example, Christopher Kushner, founder of 4chan, experienced targeted harassment when banning discussion of #GamerGate on the platform [24]—many attacks relied on existing prejudices against women and marginalized groups.

Structures embedded into social media platforms enable harassment. Trice and Potts show how #GamerGate activists were able to "turn the Twitter experience into an inescapable GamerGate experience" [50]. Since targets were forced to read hateful messages, targets then had to choose between either suffering extreme online abuse or leaving the platform entirely. Massanari describes how the features of Reddit's platform policies—such as an inability to systematically report hateful content and the structure of the platform's homepage—might enable "toxic technocultures" [26]. Chandrasekharan et al. [11] show that banning certain subreddits devoted to hate speech did reduce the level of hate speech on the platform overall, but some users may have migrated to other platforms that were willing to host that content. Online hate and harassment is therefore a structural problem that requires structural solutions.

#GamerGate has also been linked to larger cultural trends in online life. Feminist scholars link the rise of #GamerGate to concerns about feminism playing a greater role in discussion about videogames in the 2010s [18, 19, 32, 49]—although this is not a new topic in feminist scholarship [3, 15, 41, 55], it ironically rose to greater prominence in cultural conversations around digital games in part *due* to #GamerGate [21]. Outside of the sphere of video games, Bezio places #GamerGate as a precursor to the modern "alt-right" movement, especially through the controversy's support by Milo Yiannopoulos and Breitbart [4].

Although the platforms on which this harassment took place have adapted their policies over the intervening ten years, targeted harassment is still an ongoing problem. We use #GamerGate and its influence on the landscape of online harassment to frame our work on entertainment journalists, many of whom were targets themselves during the height of that campaign.

3 Methods

We designed and conducted an interview study to answer our research questions, as described in this section.

3.1 Recruitment

We recruited participants via email and Twitter[3] direct message. We sent messages to candidates who met the following criteria:

- Current or former professional journalist covering media and popular culture (film, television, video games, music, sports, etc.)

- Can work either independently (e.g., YouTube channel, blog, Substack) or for a publishing outlet (e.g., Vice, IGN, Sports Illustrated).

First, we found journalists' contact information through video game websites, given the specific context of #GamerGate. By using prior knowledge and searching for news articles on popular video games, we made a systematic list of websites that publish journalism focused on the video game industry. We also invited interview participants to ask their colleagues if they would be interested in participating. This snowball sampling [34] was essential in getting more journalists to speak with us, given the sensitive nature of the project. As a result, we also interviewed journalists who covered sports, as recommended by our participants, who described sports journalists as common targets for harassment.

Our participants were experienced in the entertainment journalism industry and worked at a variety of outlets. One participant had less than 2 years of experience, one had 5-10 years, and the rest had been working for 11 or more years in the industry. All but one participant had experience at major outlets

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[3]At the time of recruitment, the social media platform X was still called Twitter, and many of our participants continued to call it Twitter. Rather than use both, we choose to use Twitter here for simplicity.

with many employees, which were often subsidiaries of large media companies with multiple publications, although several participants were freelance at the time of their interviews. Five covered video games (including some who also cover tech culture, tabletop gaming, and other related topics) and four covered sports (including both fan-facing and business-facing coverage). We opt not to present individual participant demographics in detail in order to prevent deanonymization, given these journalists' public presences.

3.2 Protocol

We conducted nine interviews via video conference between April and August 2023. All participants consented to have the interviews audio-recorded. As an extra step to protect participant privacy, we chose not use the audio transcription service built into our video conference software, as this requires sending the recording to a third party with no particular privacy guarantees. Instead, we used WhisperX [2], an open-source speech recognition model which transcribes long-form audio while also identifying distinct speakers.[4] This software was run on a University of Maryland (UMD) computing cluster, ensuring data was only accessible by project researchers and UMD system administrators. The protocol was approved by the UMD IRB.

Our interview protocol covered the following areas. The full protocol can be found in Appendix A.

- **Consent procedures**: Participants were shown the consent form, emphasizing our policies regarding recording, transcription, and anonymity (described below).

- **Warmup and career overview:** We asked about the background of the participant: years worked in the industry, areas of specialty, average readership, size of following on social media, etc.

- **Specific risk events:** We asked about the participant's experience with harassment: what factors seemed to influence their experience of harassment, how common or uncommon this was, and how they managed it. We opted to let participants define harassment for themselves, even as we use Citron's definition in our analysis [13].

- **Advice, given and received:** We asked about where and how participants sought (or gave) advice about dealing with harassment in their networks.

- **Debrief:** We asked participants to describe any relevant personal characteristics that may have impacted their experience, like race, gender, or sexual orientation. We decided *not* to report these systematically, in order to prevent participant deanonymization.

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[4] https://github.com/m-bain/whisperX

Online hate and harassment can be intensely emotionally challenging. We developed our protocol using a trauma-informed lens, using the following definition of trauma from the Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services Administration (SAMHSA):

> Individual trauma results from an event, series of events, or set of circumstances that is experienced by an individual as physically or emotionally harmful or life threatening and that has lasting adverse effects on the individual's functioning and mental, physical, social, emotional, or spiritual well-being [46].

Chen et al.'s trauma-informed computing framework for computing [12] and Wong's guidelines for trauma-informed care in qualitative research [56] both provide recommendations for conducting trauma-informed research. We adapted these recommendations into the below guidelines for this project:

- We conducted interviews online so that participants could talk to us wherever they were most comfortable.

- We conducted warmup and debrief sessions to establish rapport and regularly checked on participant well-being during the interview.

- We were transparent about the goals of this work.

- We prefaced sections of the interview which discussed difficult topics to give participants a chance to prepare their response.

Anonymity. Harassment events are highly public, so we took extra care in reporting on these events by not just removing names but other identifying details. After each interview, we asked participants if they wanted us to remove any details to protect their privacy and avoid inciting future harassment.

Reflexive thematic analysis. We use *reflexive thematic analysis* in this work to understand our data. First described by Braun and Clarke in 2006 [5], we engage with their most recent perspectives on this methodology [6, 7].

Reflexive thematic analysis posits that rather than excavating ideal truth from one's data, researchers instead create meaning as an active, creative process through the work of interpretation. This interpretation is deliberately situated in the researcher's inherent subjectivity, which is an important part of the process, rather than a bias that should be removed. Rigor is ensured, therefore, by describing the process and situation of the researcher in relation to the work that they are doing – the practice of reflecting on how one's assumptions and process impact the research is *reflexivity*.

Coding and theme development was conducted collaboratively by two researchers, guided by a combination of a

deductive approach—using the at-risk user framework developed by Warford et al. [51] to understand the data—and an *inductive* approach—using the data themselves as a way to understand our participants' experiences. The first two authors independently coded two interviews, discussed discrepancies, and resolved them together; the first author then coded the remaining interviews, and the second author verified these codes by discussing with the first. These authors then created themes together and discussed them with the third author.

Reflexive thematic analysis also exists on a spectrum between *semantic* meaning—focusing on the explicit content of the data—and *latent* meaning—focusing on the implied meaning of the data. On this spectrum, our analysis process tended towards the semantic, focusing on concrete practices and attitudes. However, we analyzed some latent meanings in relationship to how our participants made sense of their experiences of online hate and harassment.

While we bring a particular set of knowledge as computer security researchers, we do not have expertise on our participants' experiences. Rather, the goal of this work is to find the most productive union of the two – by combining the expertise of the digital safety research community *and* the experiences and values of our participants, we can reach the most effective solutions for the unique issues they face.

3.3   Limitations

We do not claim our results are representative of a general population, or even of all entertainment journalists, following appropriate guidelines for reflexive thematic analysis [9]. Instead, the goals of this study were to identify key themes related to our research questions and situate these themes in our participants' contexts and experiences. Accordingly, we did not seek *data saturation*, as that implies an approach contrary to the methods and goals of reflexive thematic analysis [8].

Since harassment is a highly-sensitive and often-traumatic subject, some potential participants with valuable perspectives may have declined to speak with us to avoid further psychological harm. In particular, most of our participants were cisgender men, or present as such online in a way that shields them from gender-based harassment. Many of our participants told us that women, people of color, and trans people experienced even greater levels of harassment than themselves (see Section 4.3). That perspective is largely missing from this work due to this challenge.

Our recruitment process (Section 3.1) also relied on public contact information via Twitter, outlet websites, and other public sources. However, some people who have experienced extreme harassment may deliberately hide their contact information to prevent further harm. Although some of our participants did experience severe harassment, we likely did not capture the full breadth of harassment experiences.

4   The context of harassment

We present our results in two sections. In this section, we describe our participants' understanding of **the context of harassment** across three core themes. In Section 5, we describe how participants choose **strategies for dealing with harassment.** We lightly edited participant quotes by removing some (but not all) filler words or repeated phrases, aiming to capture the tone and style of how our participants speak while still retaining clarity.

4.1   The inevitable price of admission

Our participants commonly described social media——most often, but not exclusively, Twitter——as essential for their jobs. They use social media to contact sources, advertise their work, and receive tips—all critical elements of their profession. However, a public presence on social media simultaneously exposes them to targeted harassment that is impossible to completely avoid. All of our participants had experienced harassment, albeit at different frequencies and levels of intensity; the most experienced participants often had a resigned attitude toward this problem, characterizing it as an inevitable feature of online life.

Participants referenced several platform features as making harassment particularly harrowing ,such as confusion over the effectiveness of moderation tools, shifts in Twitter after Elon Musk's purchase, and the general distortion of reality they experienced on social media. Some participants described looking for other platforms, like replacements to Twitter such as Mastodon or Blue Sky. Others had considered moving to more direct-to-subscriber business models—such as a paid Substack newsletter, a Patreon account, or founding new organizations like Aftermath, the subscriber-supported, worker-owned project from former Kotaku writers [36]—to reduce their need to be active on traditional social media.

Harassment is ephemeral. Although every participant was familiar with harassment, many characterized it as ephemeral, temporary, or impersonal. Many participants believed harassers will inevitably find a new target, particularly if you do not engage (further details on non-engagement as a strategy can be found in Section 5.1). P07 told a story about tweeting that it was important for more women to be involved in sports writing, describing the outcome as follows:

> Some right wing troll account that doesn't cover sports amplified it for whatever reason. And so for like three days I got people on Twitter yelling at me that I was anti-man or that I supported mediocrity in sports writing or four-letter epithets and everything. And just because I wasn't used to it, it really hurt my feelings. And to the point where like my colleagues were like, just give me your phone. And like, don't look at it. Or we're taking away your privileges here

for a little bit. And then, you know, in three days it goes away. Because the people yelling at me don't know who I am. They don't know what my beat is. And it goes away.

Here, P07 also describes a common strategy for managing harassment—having a colleague or trusted other take away your device so you can step away from the online world. Further detail on this strategy can be found in Section 5.3.

Harassment is dangerous. Some participants experienced dramatic escalations of harassment beyond abusive social media comments and hateful emails. P06 called to mind the E3 leak——an incident where the Entertainment Software Association leaked the addresses and contact information of hundreds of journalists attending the video game industry's largest trade show [33]—which exposed his home address. Describing the impact of this experience, P06 said:

> I've had people like paste, like in an email or a DM, just my address. And like, that's it. Like, they don't say anything. [...] They're just able to post that they like, "Hey, we know where you live." Um, that's just information that's out there. [...] It's warm out. It's summer. I don't close every window every night. It's nice to have air going, but you can't help sometimes but wonder. It's like, all right, well, you know, people out there have my address. All it takes is one person to [...] have the wrong idea. And it's like, oh, because I didn't lock the screen door last night, someone can just come into the house.

Participants with children especially feared exposure of their address. As P06 describes above, direct, physical danger could result from having an exposed address due to this leak. Other top-of-mind escalations were receiving upsetting mail or being swatted.[5]

Dangerous outcomes of harassment may also be more likely or more severe for women, people of color, and trans people. Although none of our participants described an escalation that they perceived as related to their identity, many participants believed that harassment is worse for people who experience marginalization.

Harassment has a persistent emotional toll. All participants described harassment as having at minimum a moderate toll on their mental and emotional well-being. For some participants, it was a constant reminder of a group of people who would constantly seek to denigrate them, at times leading to insecurity, as P05 describes:

> There is sort of like a seed planted of just like insecurity. Just like if I voice my opinion online, will

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[5]Swatting is a common colloquial term for a *false reporting* [47] attack where an attacker will call in a spurious police report in order to get a SWAT team to descend on the home of their target.

people get so mad at me that they're just gonna cuss out my entire existence?

Some participants developed complex post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD) or severe anxiety based on their experiences. P02 describes the #GamerGate campaign as having this type of severe impact:

> I have complex PTSD. I'm hypervigilant because it was a legitimate, long-time, traumatizing event. So in a really sad way, that hypervigilance is super helpful to anyone who is doing any of this stuff.

Here, P02 also points to the adaptive elements of this condition, discussed further in Section 5.2.

Tensions between characterizations of harassment. The three characteristics of harassment outlined above demonstrate a core tension: how can harassment be ephemeral on the one hand, but dangerous and emotionally draining on the other? These can all simultaneously be true. A specific harassment event, like an insulting tweet or a threatening email, may indeed be a one-time event, and social media furor will eventually pass. Despite this, the *pattern* of these individually-ephemeral events leads to genuine fear of physical harm and attendant psychological consequences.

Where some participants emphasized a "just a name on a screen" (P07) mentality, focusing on social media's inherent disconnection from reality, some instead emphasized that taking action was indeed important. P02, for example, contradicted the common advice to ignore harassment:

> Like you have to take steps. You might not want to engage, but you do have to take a step back or make some kind of statement. But just ignoring it does not help and will often make it significantly worse. Once that fire is going, you have to at least start digging trenches around it so it doesn't spread. So when people start to say, you can just let go and it will flare down, no. You have to do something. Even if it's just getting away from it and taking that step for your own safety. The don't poke the bears thing, yeah, I don't agree with that either. [. . .] I don't think there's a way to ignore the trolls and then they'll go away. We've proven that's not the case.

While P02 still mentions not engaging, here referring to arguing with or making fun of the harasser, he makes clear that *some* kind of action is still required. Shortly thereafter, P02 later vividly compared harassers to toddlers:

> It feels like dealing with a toddler who is trying to get their parents' attention any way they can. And it might, you know, start really innocent and sweet, and then if they're still completely ignored,

they might start pushing over lamps. And this is the version of pushing over lamps. And then once it gets to that point, the people who just want to push over lamps, like, yeah, f***ing game on.

4.2 Hurt people hurting people

Based on their experiences, our participants held very strong beliefs about who, exactly, was doing the harassment. Harassers were characterized as "angry", "lonely", "cowards", and generally poorly-adjusted. Some participants pointed out harassers might be seeking some sort of emotional need, often as simple as getting attention or having their voice heard, which occasionally engendered some compassion. P05 said, "There are a lot of instances where like I want to engage with these accounts and just say like "Are you okay?" Because these responses are not like coming from a person who's in the right mindset." It was not clear how these participants reconciled this more sympathetic framing with the real harms that can result from harassment.

Some participants made reference to fans of particular entertainment franchises or sports teams as common sources of harassment. P05, who covers college sports, described how making a small mistake about a team or incorrectly predicting the outcome of a game could lead to harassment far out of proportion to the perceived slight. P03 described the Star Wars and Game of Thrones franchises as attracting particular harassment, especially in relation to "spoiler-phobic culture."

4.3 White cisgender maleness is a shield

Participants who presented as White, cisgender and male on the internet emphasized that this presentation benefited them by protecting them from worse harassment. P08 expressed distress at this phenomenon and described how harassment has driven people without this shield out of his industry:

> The thing that bothers me the most, though, is that, like, I am a privileged cis white male and I have a lot more tools at my disposal that makes it easier for me to, when needed, kind of stand in front of this wind that blows occasionally. And a lot of women and a lot of people of color and a lot of folks less advantaged than me have not been able to do that. And they have had to, pick up and leave their lives and give real aid to those closest to them.

> And some of those voices are the voices that brought me to this career path. There are literally people that brought me into this field who are not here because they weren't able to kind of weather this storm. And it hurts to know that their voices have been silenced and that they are no longer doing this work because of what happened to them. And that hurts at a very intrinsic level because I

value this work so much and I miss them so much. So it lessens my own work not to have their work here next to me being read as well.

Presentation is a key element here. P07 mentioned that, despite having a stereotypically White name and lighter skin, he is Latino, which changed how people spoke to him:

> I'm half Brazilian, like literally whole Brazilian citizenship—mother was from São Paulo, have a Brazilian flag in my account. And so occasionally Latino things come up or about Brazil, I'll talk about those things, but because of my name and because a lot of Americans don't realize that Brazilians can be white too, or white-ish, [they] will feel very comfortable saying something pretty anti-Mexican to me before realizing, oh, he's an immigrant kid too.

P03 mentioned the same phenomenon in terms of their gender identity——despite identifying as genderqueer and using both "he" and "they" pronouns, they were often perceived as a cisgender man. As they say:

> A lot of the time, by being White and presenting as a White guy, I think a lot of time people will take me a little more seriously or be a little less cruel to me than they might otherwise.

Neither P03 nor P07 described intentionally presenting as White or male in order to avoid harassment. Instead, they referred to this phenomenon as passively protective—harassers did not use their identity as a way to attack them, since they were not obviously part of a commonly-marginalized group.

In contrast, our participants who presented as people of color described racism as having a particular impact on their experience of harassment. P05 described needing to preemptively mute negative words relating to his identity as a Mexican-American child of immigrants, which required him to think through the worst names someone could call him:

> I can think of any hateful words to describe people, so like the way they antagonize me and like my people, I will add those to the list of muted words so that I don't see them randomly when I'm tweeting about sports or tweeting about like current events.

Even though muting hateful words protected P05 from future bad actors, the task required a significant amount of emotional resilience, as he goes on to discuss:

> It requires me to actually sit down. And at least for a little bit, when I'm in a good, like mental space to come up with as many ways to, you know, to insult me. And, you know, that's no fun either but at least I'm in like a good place to come up with all those as opposed to when I'm feeling down or when I'm currently being harassed.

5 Strategies for dealing with harassment

Now, we discuss how our participants mitigate the effects of harassment and why they chose these methods.

5.1 "Just ignore it": the best worst option

Many of the techniques our participants used to protect themselves from harassment involved some variation on simply ignoring it. As described above, harassment is ephemeral, yet dangerous and emotionally taxing. Nevertheless, most of our participants believed that rather than engage with harassers, it was better to try to ignore them and move on. Many participants stated that any kind of engagement, especially trying to call out harassers' bad behavior, would encourage rather than chastise the harassers—in P06's words, "The moment you start talking about your harassment, you are going to get harassed. [...] That's just fuel for people because they're noticing like, oh, it's getting to them." P03 also describes this in terms of their perception of the harasser's goal:

> These are people just trying to get a rise out of me. And if I give them that, then they get what they're seeking for. And if I ignore them, then they don't.

Participants often described this approach with considerable ambivalence. Although several participants perceive ignoring harassment as the best response most of the time, they did not want to diminish the impact of harassment on others, especially women, trans people, and people of color. Neither ignoring the problem nor confronting harassers seemed to be good solutions; ignoring the problem could feel like tacit endorsement, but confronting it could lead to greater harassment. P06 notes this, particularly when observing others' behavior:

> I have trouble squaring [ignoring harassment] [...] I don't consider that to mean I'm endorsing, like just letting harassment happen. But I do sometimes see amongst people like, they're getting harassed, and their response to it is to like, quote tweet a harasser, and be aggressive with them. Harassment tends to beget more harassment. And so unfortunately, it's like you have a person who is hurting and being harassed. And then, of course, what they're going to want to do is punch back because the platforms are not built in a way to handle this. That is the form of recourse that some people have is just to get angry in response and that frequently seems to just agitate, you know, that's what [harassers] are looking for. And so I don't like that my solution is essentially to just ignore it.

P08 also expressed the impossibility of ignoring harassment that reached a certain level of severity, calling to mind the earlier theme *harassment is dangerous*:

> At the same time that you can't engage, you do kind of need to keep your head on a swivel so that you're aware of what's going to be outside your door when you open it.

Blocking vs. muting. A key technical affordance of Twitter[6] is providing ways to block or mute users. Blocking an account means that account cannot follow you, see what you are saying, or tag you in their own tweets; it also prevents you from seeing the account. Muting, on the other hand, simply prevents an account from showing up on your feed-—-that user can still reply and see your account, but their activity will not be visible to you.

The primary difference between these two approaches, which have fairly similar outcomes from the perspective of the target of harassment, is that blocking is observable by the blocked user, whereas muting is silent. According to our participants, harassers often perceived being blocked as a badge of honor-—a sign that they had successfully gotten an emotional reaction from you and thus achieved their goal. Muting prevented the harasser from getting what they wanted; the target would not have given the harasser the satisfaction of a strong response. P09 describes this rationale:

> "When people see that they get like, blocked, they see it as like some like, badge of honor, like, look, we, like, defeated this person in some verbal spat, [...] some debate or whatever and [... they] see it as like a badge. So in a weird way, I'd like rather not give you that weird, like, victory in your head that you're right because I blocked you or whatever."

Participants were familiar with block lists-—-automated tools that block huge numbers of accounts that had been collated by others-—-but typically did not use them, due to false positives. Although they might get rid of large amounts of potential harassers at once, the tradeoff of potentially blocking a colleague or friend was seen as not worth the benefit.

Stepping away from the screen. Despite the potential physical danger of harassment described above, our participants often expressed that most harassment has little-to-no relationship with the offline world. When asked about what advice he would give other colleagues, P07 emphasized telling others that "it's important to remember that what you see on TweetDeck is not real life." Putting away your devices and connecting with loved ones in the real world were often crucial strategies for dealing with the emotional impact of harassment. P05 described the following when advising other members of his team, echoing his own strategy to step away during high-harassment events:

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[6]In this context, we focus on Twitter because our participants did. Other platforms have various blocking affordances that differ from what is described here.

You can scroll through Twitter or Instagram for so long, and then your brain just gets fried. So go outside, go take a break. It might seem counterintuitive for the manager of a social media team to tell you, but like, it's really important to just like log off, tune out and sort of refresh your brain in that way.

This distinction, however, remains difficult in the context of real physical threats. P06, who had experienced a variety of high-harassment events, still characterized harassment as being "99.9% online," despite purchasing physical security after his address was leaked to the public. This apparent contradiction suggests a pattern of low-probability, high-harm events when harassment escalates past insulting comments online.

Look for good-faith actors. A few participants described looking for good-faith actors amongst their social media replies. If someone unskillfully but honestly engaged with the participant's argument, rather than attacking their identity or character, the participant might engage with that person in turn rather than block them. This required energy that other participants were not willing to spend. P04 describes doing this with a surprising sense of playfulness:

> If someone's a little mean but comes in sort of wanting to have a conversation, sometimes I'll send one or two Twitter replies. [...] If someone takes the time to find my email address and sends, like, a mean email, I will sometimes get a little cheeky and be like, "thanks for reading" or, you know, "glad you liked it." Or one time I said, "so does that mean you won't be RSVPing to my birthday party?" You know, stuff like that, depending on the kind of mood that I'm in. If someone took the time to email me.

5.2 Constant vigilance

Potential harassment had a persistent impact on how our participants chose to use social media and how they approached publishing their work. Participants explicitly connected writing about sensitive topics, particularly when speaking with a politically left orientation, and harassment. In some cases, this led to a chilling effect; deliberate self-censorship was sometimes seen as necessary to protect themselves, even about issues important to the participants. P06 describes this effect with a tone of resignation, framing this decision in terms of protecting his family:

> [I have] not really weighed into certain topics to the degree that I might've done in the past, because [...] I have a, broader obligation to think about, which is my family. And there are younger people with more energy than me to sling those arrows and to take them these days.

When describing the impact of harassment on his behavior, P02 described himself as "hypervigilant," (Section 4.1) implying a watchfulness that went over and above what was needed to protect himself due to his prior experiences with severe harassment. He goes on to describe his strategy around *any* social media activity as follows:

> It's high stakes, low risk. It's very rare for a tweet or any message to blow up in a negative way. But if it does, everything's in play on all aspects of your life or the company [which hired you to run their social media]. So when you think about it that way, low risk, high stakes, it's like you kind of do need to bring that care to every single time.

Writing about issues of particular sensitivity would often lead to preparation for potentially being the target of harassment. As an example, when P01's outlet was preparing to cover a game that they anticipated would draw a lot of hateful commentary, they decided to turn off comments in advance and make sure that any journalists who covered the game would be prepared to receive harassment after an article was published. P01's strategy was the most concrete—many participants referenced simply being mentally prepared for harassment when covering a sensitive topic.

Other sensitive topics included the war in Ukraine, violence in video games, anti-racism, feminism, and trans rights, succinctly summarized by P04 as "any issue that's in the culture war at any given time." Participants took varying levels of care when reporting on these topics, depending on their perception of the likelihood and severity of potential harassment. P02 describes a strategy commonly seen amongst colleagues:

> You pay attention to what the big topics are. Right now, for whatever reason, trans athletes, we know that's going to be a big one. Anything having to do with Pride, we know that's going to be a big one. You just kind of keep a list of like things that everyone is talking about in a positive way and things that might be controversial. And most people I know who do this kind of work keep that list in their head. So do I. you just kind of get a sense for it.

Participants with children were particularly mindful of what they shared on social media. In addition to the above self-censorship, P08 took active care to delete images of his children from Instagram when Twitter, in his view, started to decline:

> Preemptively, as Twitter began to melt down, I went to my Instagram and I deleted every image of my children out of my Instagram to kind of sanitize that and make that a place where I could land professionally, if need be.

5.3 External support is critical

Participants relied on their social networks and employers in order to support them while experiencing harassment. This was expressed in two main ways: concrete support from employers and emotional support from friends and colleagues.

Concrete support. Our participants often relied on their news organizations as a primary vector for concrete solutions. These companies provided a variety of resources, often paying for protective tools and services. For more severe incidents, these organizations also provided legal support or paid for cameras to protect their journalists' homes. For P08, going independent (as opposed to working for a larger organization) would be terrifying, as not having "DC lawyers" on his side would make facing harassment vastly more challenging. As he described, "That's a good feeling to go to bed with at night, the next morning, no matter what happened at work that day. to know that there are some angry, smart motherf***ers with law degrees in my corner."

Not every organization always had these policies——P08 described how his publication did not have a concrete harassment mitigation policy until the #GamerGate controversy targeted him and his colleagues. However, this led to improvements for *other* publications in the same parent news organization who learned from P08 and his colleagues' experiences:

> Our expertise at [news organization] was actually crucial in supporting some of our other verticals[7] as they entered the 2016 election season, for instance.

Participants often mentioned data deletion services like DeleteMe[8]——companies that, as a service, will search the internet for one's personal details and get them deleted——which were sometimes paid for by their employer, and other times paid for by the participants themselves.

Colleagues and management also offered support mechanisms, both formal and informal. P01 and P03 both described a Slack channel where their colleagues could share stories, provide information, and seek support when facing harassment. Several participants made reference to giving colleagues their phones to perform triage in the face of severe harassment——this meant that the person who was suffering harassment did not have to deal with blocking, muting, and otherwise managing the incident; they could instead take some time for themselves to recover and let the incident pass.

Two participants mentioned local police, although in contradictory terms. P08 described educating his local police department about swatting (defined in Section 4.1). He remained in regular contact with his police department to ensure the threat was accurately understood. P06, on the other hand, described his police department as oblivious to this threat, despite repeated attempts to educate them. No other participants mentioned police helping to handle or track down threats.

Emotional support. Even more than the above concrete support strategies, emotional support from colleagues was essential. P03 describes their colleagues setting an example for how to respond to harassment:

> I remember when I came up on the college football team, 'cause that was, like, the work environment that really cemented a lot of how I approach things in me. You know, it was my first full-time job in journalism and [. . .] I was the youngest person on the team, you know?
>
> So it's like one of those situations where everyone else there, you're kind of looking up to them to set an example. And a lot of those guys were, really funny, smart, like the smartest, funniest people I knew. They were all kind of brash Southern guys who like were aligned with me on like morals and stuff, but also were like really into college football.
>
> And I say this stuff about them being the funniest, smartest guys I know, because then they would still just get so many stupid people saying just, like, heinous things to them on social media in the comments and the way they responded was mostly to laugh.

Our participants often described how simply sharing their experience with colleagues was valuable for keeping themselves healthy in the face of extreme harassment. P09 also referenced seeking out other Black games journalists, because their particular experiences around harassment and race were more specific, and therefore more useful.

> It just kind of became a thing where, like, if I ever had, like, a more specific kind of question about harassment and things that I face, I'd feel more comfortable to ask someone in this space who [...] would be Black and would probably have the same kind of, like, avenue of harassment that I'd face. So I kind of would reach out to them as like point people to be like, "so what can I expect getting into this role?" And I'd like kind of talk to [them] on and off kind of just about like specific harassment stuff. So like we'd kind of, like, be like go-to points for each other for the most part for stuff.

Some participants experienced severe mental health consequences and sought external support from therapists. Sometimes this was helpful, but P04 describes a therapist dismissing his concerns after a period of intense harassment:

> I even went to therapy because I was bothered so much by [harassment]. Therapist saw me once and

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[7]In this context, a vertical refers to a news site that is dedicated to one particular topic, often covering it in more detail and with more analysis than a generalist news publication.

[8]https://joindeleteme.com/

said he wouldn't see me again because this wasn't actually a mental illness. I was like, "yeah, that's fair." But I was looking for any tips on how to deal with it because I was letting it occupy too much of my brain space.

Support from family and friends was also crucial, especially when stepping away from the screen and thus from the source of the harassment.

5.4 IT hygiene

Our participants' toolkits included a certain amount of basic "IT hygiene" (P04). Some mentioned multi-factor authentication as a useful tool, particularly to prevent a harasser from taking over their account and causing severe reputational harm. P05 describes his approach:

> The one thing that I'm sort of more focused on sort of in conjunction with harassment is just getting my accounts hacked by people who sort of want to troll me or just want to take it a step further. And because of that, I've just gotten into just having my accounts as secure as possible, whether it's like setting up two-factor authentication or physical security keys, so that even if somehow my accounts get hacked, they still won't be able to access stuff and post as me, impersonating as me, so that they ruin my professional and maybe personal life because I've seen instances of that.

P05 then described watching for malicious links and limiting which devices were logged into his accounts. Perhaps surprisingly to the digital-safety research community, only P04 and P05 referenced traditional security advice. For targets of harassment, security advice may need to be more contextual to be useful, as prior work has demonstrated [39, 54].

6 Discussion

In this work we show that entertainment journalists experience severe harassment—while any *individual* insult may be ephemeral, the *pattern* of harassment exacts a severe emotional toll and can escalate to real danger. In response, our participants largely adopted an "ignore it and move on" attitude, choosing to disengage in order to protect themselves. They rely on external support to help manage this, both practically and emotionally. We also investigate the intersection of *prominence* and *marginalization*—harassment directed at entertainment journalists who experience marginalization may target their identity, leading to more severe outcomes. These findings echo the taxonomy of harassment presented in Thomas et al. [47]—our participants experienced *toxic content* (e.g., bullying, threats, sexual harassment), *content leakage* (e.g., revealing personally-identifiable information, doxxing) and

overloading (e.g., forcing the target to triage hundreds of notifications). They were also worried about the possibility of *false reporting* in the form of swatting.

6.1 Targets of harassment often must fend for themselves

Many protective strategies described by our participants emphasized individual action in the face of harassment. From muting hateful words that targeted one's identity (Section 4.3) to blocking users who send harassing comments (Section 5.1), our participants' strategies required taking personal responsibility for managing online harassment. Since the attackers in this scenario are anonymous online mobs, this is inherently unbalanced.

This finding echoes prior work on harassment of *prominent* individuals. Content creators (defined as "social media personalities with large audiences on platforms like Instagram, TikTok, and YouTube" [48]) also characterized harassment as unavoidable. Like our participants, they experience harassment largely in the form of *toxic content* and *overloading*, which generally must be managed individually. Even security experts who understand the severe burdens of managing harassment tend to provide advice that is focused on individual action rather than systemic change [54]. Mandating individual responsibility for dealing with harassment can lead to perpetuating these patterns by dismissing the societal factors that lead to *marginalization*.

In part due to this imbalance, both our participants and other *prominent* individuals rely on distancing behaviors and their social networks to manage this threat, rather than technical solutions; for people who experience *marginalization*, this is even more pronounced (e.g., [48]). This reinforces the findings of Warford et al., who describe distancing behaviors and social strategies as core pillars of at-risk users' response to digital-safety threats [51]. Technical solutions may indeed be useful, but they must be relevant, targeted, and discoverable.

Importantly, in contrast to prior work, we find that our participants often rely on *institutional* external support, in addition to friends and colleagues. We show that news organizations can provide concrete, useful supports like legal and financial assistance to their employees (Section 5.3). Many participants described how having external support increased their peace of mind, both in terms of concrete assistance from their employer and emotional support from their colleagues. This is an important element to consider when developing solutions to prevent or mitigate harassment; tools and techniques that rely solely on individual action rather than leveraging their communities may be missing a key piece of the harassment mitigation process.

6.2 Moving toward collective responsibility

The imbalance of responsibility we discuss in Section 6.1 suggests that a rebalancing is necessary. Our results suggest several potential avenues for improvement.

Community support and mutual aid. One promising avenue of solutions might be mechanisms for explicitly supporting mutual aid among colleagues. Community resources, like shared lists of muted words, could relieve some of the burdens faced by *marginalized* individuals. Muting hateful language, as P05 described (Section 4.3), is a difficult and draining task; if communities could conveniently create and share crowdsourced lists of muted words, this could alleviate some of that burden. Although it would not solve the entire problem—after all, someone would still need to add words to this list—methods like these could allow individuals to rely on their communities more effectively for support.

P09 additionally described commiseration with other Black writers as supportive, both preemptively and after experiencing harassment (Sections 4.3 and 5.3). This required P09 to reach out individually to trusted others, which again required him taking personal responsibility for this societal problem. It might be useful to create formal social structures that are run by and for people who experience harassment. Especially for independent journalists, having a community of supportive colleagues could provide the emotional benefits described by our participants.

Changes at the platform level. Our participants did not use many platform affordances to mitigate harassment. Even when they did, they described these affordances as often unhelpful or unclear, suggesting platform-level improvements are necessary. For example, social media sites could build in tools to allow users to assign someone else to triage their account. Currently, our participants described handing over their entire phone or social media account; even a well-meaning helper might see something they did not intend under this model. If developed properly, these systems could limit access to certain apps, restrict access to only desired parts of platforms, automatically revoke access after a certain amount of time, or some configurable combination of the above. These systems could be approached with an eye toward mutual aid—users might take shifts or work ad-hoc to help others in their network, using these tools to triage high-harassment events.

High-quality moderation can also help, but that carries its own costs—shifting the labor of dealing with hateful speech from the targets to the invisible-but-indispensable commercial content moderation workers who already act as the first point-of-contact for hate and harassment [40]. Automated hate speech detection and intervention is also a promising area of future work [17, 37, 53], but challenges of accuracy and equity remain [14, 35, 52].

Assisting organizations in supporting their employees. Providing institutions with the knowledge and resources to support their employees would also be helpful. As described by many of our participants, the backing and support of formal institutions was supportive. For example, in Section 5.3, for example, P08 describes sharing strategies for mitigating harassment with political reporters to build capacity for managing harassment across the entire organization. However, not all news organizations already have this institutional knowledge, so researchers could create resources to help these organizations learn how to provide needed protections to their employees.

Support organizations like Tall Poppy[9] and PEN America[10] exist to address these concerns, but our participants did not mention them in the context of support strategies. To date, these organizations have focused on other areas: Tall Poppy has mostly worked with streaming providers like Twitch or Spotify, and PEN America focuses largely on literature and free speech. Both organizations' expertise, however, could be very useful to journalists, both in entertainment and elsewhere. A bidirectional relationship between support organizations and news organizations would therefore be beneficial; this would mean that news organizations do not have to develop new expertise, but can rely on the previous experience of these organizations.

7 Conclusion

Entertainment journalists experience severe harassment online. Although this harassment is pervasive, dangerous, and constant, entertainment journalists see it as the price of admission into their chosen profession, since they need to use social media platforms to promote their work. At present, the technical tools available to these journalists are insufficient; platform affordances do little to prevent the flood of harassment these journalists experience. Many participants found simply ignoring the harassment was the best and only option, rather than engaging with the harassers. As a result, participants relied on external support — colleagues, friends, and family — to ameliorate the negative effects of this experience. Therefore, a greater emphasis on *non-technical* solutions to sociotechnical problems could be of great value, in addition to continued development of technical approaches.

Acknowledgements

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[9] https://www.tallpoppy.com/
[10] https://pen.org/

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A   Interview protocol

Introduction. Hi, my name is [researcher name], thanks for agreeing to participate in this research - we really appreciate your time.

First, let's quickly go over how this study will work. I will be interviewing you and [I/my colleague] will take notes. I expect the study to take approximately one hour. . One thing I'd like to mention is that the research interview process is somewhat different than the journalistic interview process - rather than seeking pull quotes or particularly interesting stories, we are instead looking for common themes between an entire corpus of interviews, even if those themes seem at first to be mundane.

[Describe everything on the consent form.]

We may cover some sensitive topics during this interview, so if you become uncomfortable at any time during the study and wish to withdraw, please let me know. You are also welcome to skip any questions you do not wish to answer, and you only need to provide as much information as you're comfortable with. Do you have any questions so far?

[Give the participant the link to the consent form.]

This consent form tells you who to contact if you have any problems or want to report any objections. Please print a copy of this consent form for your records.

[point out places the subject needs to mark checkboxes]

We would like to record the audio of this interview with your permission in order to properly represent your statements and point of view. However, recording is optional - if, either now or after the fact, you would like us to not use or delete the recording of this interview, please let me know. I'm also happy to answer questions about how we store and use these recordings. We will also be taking written notes during the interview. Do you give permission for us to audio-record this interview?

[If they agree, the interview was recorded. If not, the interviewer took notes.]

Warmup/Career summary.

1. Can you please describe your career in media journalism?

2. How did you get started?

3. When did you get started?

4. What outlets have you worked at over the course of your career?

5. Do you have a particular specialty, like esports, a particular media property, interviews with creators, opinion pieces, or something else?

6. Can you tell me about something interesting you've been working on recently?

7. Could you tell us a little about your online engagement with readers/viewers?

8. What social media platforms do you use today? About how many followers on each platform did you have? How many readers or viewers do you usually reach?

Questions about Specific Risk Events. In the next part of the study, we are going to ask you about your experiences with harassment. We emphasize that we do not view any harassment as justified, but we also acknowledge that sometimes the amount of harassment one experiences might vary at different times or when writing about certain subjects. For the purposes of this study, we are going to define a "high harassment event" as a short period of time with an unusually high quantity or intensity of harassment.

1. Please describe your experience of online harassment on a day-to-day basis.

2. In the past two years, have you experienced any high harassment events? Please describe it in as much detail as you feel comfortable.

3. What patterns, if any, have you noticed in how and when high harassment events occur? [below prompts if necessary]

    (a) External events - either related to your industry or not

    (b) Publishing articles or social media posts about a certain topic or issue (For example, when I tweet about X, I get a ton of angry DMs)

    (c) Publishing any kind of article or social media post

4. How do you typically respond when you experience online harassment? [the following questions may be asked as needed for each protective strategy]

    (a) Did you take this protective action because you anticipated an increase in harassment, or after the increase in harassment started?

    (b) How effective did you feel [this strategy] was? Why do you feel it is effective/ineffective?

    (c) Do any colleagues or friends or people you know employ [this strategy] Is it effective for them? Why or why not?

    (d) How did you learn about [this strategy]?

5. There are all kinds of strategies people use in situations like this - certain strategies work for some people, but not for others. Are there any harassment protection strategies you have heard about / considered but did not take? [the following questions may be asked as needed for each protective strategy]

    (a) Why or why not? [Prompts follow if the participant has difficulty answering]

    (b) Does [strategy] not work generally? Why?

    (c) Is [strategy] not applicable to your particular situation? Why?

    (d) Does [strategy] have costs or downsides that make it difficult/unrealistic/undesirable to implement? What are those costs or downsides?

    (e) Did you ever employ [strategy] in the past? Why did you stop employing it?

6. Are there any tools or technologies you use to respond to harassment? This can include affordances of various platforms (like blocking an individual on social media) or external tools (like blocklists that can be shared amongst users).

7. Just like strategies, different people use different tools and technology to deal with harassment for different reasons. Are there any tools or technologies for responding to harassment that you know about but do not use?

    (a) Why or why not? [Prompts follow if the participant has difficulty answering]

    (b) Does [tool] not work generally? Why?

    (c) Is [tool] not applicable to your particular situation? Why?

    (d) Does [tool] have costs or downsides that make it difficult/unrealistic/undesirable to implement? What are those costs or downsides?

    (e) Did you ever use [tool] in the past? Why did you stop using it?

8. In as much or as little detail as you like, could you please describe the impact of this experience on your life? You're welcome to discuss either specific events or your general experience of harassment.

    (a) How does it impact you, emotionally?

    (b) How does it impact your career?

    (c) How does it impact your relationships with others?

Advice, Given and Received. Now, I'm going to ask some questions about specific strategies and advice you may have heard of or used when managing harassment.

1. What security advice have you received in the past that's relevant to your experience? [for each item, ask the following if needed]

    (a) If unsure what I mean by security advice: Some examples of security advice might include "use a password manager", "don't respond to harassers", or "log off from social media for a while".

    (b) Did you follow this advice? Why or why not?

    (c) How did you hear about this advice? If no response: could prompt for "on the Internet", "from colleagues", etc.

    (d) In your opinion, how effective is this advice in relation to achieving your security goals?

    (e) How difficult is this advice to follow?

    (f) How time-consuming is it to implement this advice?

    (g) How confident are you that you could implement this advice?

    (h) How disruptive would it be to implement this advice?

2. Do you have any trusted people in your network you can turn to for advice, either on security specifically or in general with regards to responding to harassment?

3. Have you ever given advice to someone in a similar situation as yours? What advice did you give?

    (a) Did they follow this advice, to your knowledge? Why or why not?

    (b) Is [advice] not applicable to their particular situation? Why?

    (c) Does [advice] have costs or downsides that make it difficult/unrealistic/undesirable to implement? What are those costs or downsides?

Closing.

1. For this study, we are choosing not to systematically collect common demographic data, like race, gender, age and ethnicity, in order to help protect participant privacy. However, we acknowledge these factors can have an impact on one's experience of harassment, so I'd like to give you the opportunity now to share any identifiers you are okay with us reporting as part of our analysis. We will, of course, not use your name, but we can also mask or share other factors.

2. Please share any comments, suggestions, or feedback you have about our study.