

Article

“Sometimes It’s Easier Just Not to Feel Anything”: How Ukrainian Women Fixers Respond to the Embodied Work of War Reporting

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Abstract

The study explores the trauma experiences and gendered labor of Ukrainian women working as local fixers for international major media outlets covering the Russian war. Using semi-structured interviews ($N = 15$) with Ukrainian women fixers and drawing on feminist standpoint epistemology and embodied journalism, this research investigates how they perceive and perform their roles in a male-dominated professional environment. Women fixers’ work is shaped by lived, embodied experiences and an alternative knowledge of conflict. The fixers have an unofficial leadership role in international news teams, describing themselves as producers who shape editorial decisions, ensure safety, and influence coverage. From a feminist standpoint, their experiences show how lived experiences afford them authority in war reporting, even when it is not formally recognized. However, they face gender inequalities, primarily from male foreign correspondents who question their competency, as well as from Ukrainian military personnel who undermine their expertise and authority. Women fixers have also received unwanted sexual propositions from other freelancers in the media teams. Participants acknowledged that they have been traumatized by the war coverage, and they do not receive sufficient institutional support, but they invest in self-funded coping strategies.

Keywords: fixers; women; foreign correspondents; war; trauma; Ukraine; interviews

1. Introduction

Since Russia launched its full-scale invasion of Ukraine on 24 February 2022, the war has become one of the biggest news stories of the 21st century, attracting coverage by more than 12,000 foreign and Ukrainian journalists (Reporters Without Borders, 2023). When covering international stories, foreign correspondents often have limited language skills and cultural experience, and they tend to work in teams that may include local journalists, producers, and media workers called “fixers” (see, e.g., Erickson & Hamilton, 2006; J. Palmer & Fontan, 2007; Murrell, 2014). Also known as local producers, para-journalists, and stringers, fixers are residents hired by newsrooms to help international media teams by providing local knowledge, translation services, and logistical support (Murrell, 2014; L. Palmer, 2019; Kotišová & Deuze, 2022).

Many Ukrainian journalists, media workers, and even local people with no background in journalism have become fixers, working on the front lines as they experience war for the first time (Trifonova & Jenkins, 2024). This research focuses on Ukrainian women fixers. According to the Committee to Protect Journalists (CPJ), of the 21 journalists



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killed covering the war, seven were local women working as fixers ([Committee to Protect Journalists, 2026](#)). War coverage “separates these women from their families” (para. 8) for weeks, and many have experienced traumatic scenes on the ground ([Coalition for Women in Journalism, 2024](#)).

Drawing from feminist standpoint epistemology ([Steiner, 2018](#)) and journalism as an embodied practice ([Wahl-Jorgensen, 2025](#)), this study uses in-depth interviews to examine how Ukrainian women fixers perceive and perform their roles as significant contributors to media coverage of the war. We also explore challenges women media workers face as part of a masculinized working environment in the Ukrainian frontline. The findings show that Ukrainian women fixers fulfill leadership and editorial roles while experiencing unequal pay, disrespect from military officials and personnel, and sexual propositions. Assisting with war reporting has exposed women fixers to violence, even direct Russian military targeting, and the stories of Ukrainian victims, which can lead to emotional numbness, anxiety, burnout, memory gaps, and delayed trauma responses. The fixers acknowledge that they have been traumatized by their experiences with the conflict and cope through self-funded therapy and other strategies.

The study is structured as follows: a literature review addressing how scholars have examined Ukrainian fixers and women journalists in male-dominated newsrooms, particularly in war reporting, as well as an overview of Feminist Standpoint Epistemology and embodied journalism as lenses for examining women fixers’ perspectives and experiences. We then discuss the methodological approach, including study participants, data collection procedures, and analytical strategies, followed by the findings. We conclude with a discussion of the theoretical and practical implications of the research.

2. Literature Review

Scholars have explored gender inequalities, sexism, sexual assaults of women correspondents, and tactics correspondents apply to challenge the masculine culture of war reporting ([Steiner, 2017](#); [Wolfe, 2011](#); [P. Palmer & Melki, 2018](#); [Chambers et al., 2004](#)). Research has also examined the vital role of local fixers as part of international media teams ([Erickson & Hamilton, 2006](#); [J. Palmer & Fontan, 2007](#); [Murrell, 2009](#); [L. Palmer, 2019](#)). Still, almost no academic research addresses women fixers, who could be more vulnerable than women correspondents.

2.1. The Role of Local Fixers

Fixers often work as freelancers, with no permanent contracts, no insurance, and no official affiliation with media organizations ([L. Palmer, 2019](#)). Fixers are often not considered equal partners in their journalistic teams, even when they put themselves in danger ([Plaut & Klein, 2021](#)). Media organizations expect fixers to risk their lives in assignments on the frontline, to find unique stories, and to provide access to exclusive people who are difficult to secure for interviews ([L. Palmer, 2019](#)). However, fixers complain that they do not receive enough recognition from foreign correspondents, and their work is hidden from the wider audience because their names are rarely credited in coverage ([L. Palmer, 2019](#); [Murrell, 2014](#); [J. Palmer & Fontan, 2007](#)).

Fixers work for short- or long-term assignments and are typically not professional journalists. However, fixers take an active role in how international media produce stories ([L. Palmer, 2019](#)). The relationship between local fixers and foreign media depends on the story, news event, and organizational culture of the media outlets. Some fixers “hunt the story” when media organizations assign it to them; others suggest “new story topics,” or they “try to educate” correspondents on the context of the story ([L. Palmer, 2019](#), p. 38). In

some cases, fixers replace correspondents on the ground, conducting and filming interviews and gathering and verifying information from sources (L. Palmer, 2019).

Ukrainian fixers have described themselves as “producers,” “linkers,” “connectors,” and even “managers” responsible for making decisions about what to report (Trifonova & Jenkins, 2024). They also take responsibility for ensuring the safety of their international media crews (Trifonova & Jenkins, 2024). As locals, they might be motivated by activism, patriotism, or other biases, and their participation can shape the content of news coverage (Kotišová, 2024; J. Palmer & Fontan, 2007; L. Palmer, 2019). In general, Ukrainian fixers do not aspire to the journalistic standard of neutrality but perceive their role as helping international media teams keep the world’s attention on Ukraine, thereby serving their country (Trifonova & Jenkins, 2024).

2.2. Women Journalists in Male-Dominated Newsrooms

Although the number of women journalists has increased in newsrooms around the world, they frequently experience unfair treatment, such as a lack of access to leadership positions and unequal pay to men (Chambers et al., 2004; Elmore, 2009). As Van Zoonen (1994) argues, the most significant barriers to women in media come from the attitudes of male colleagues and decision makers, such as blatant sexist behaviors. Women also face the challenge of balancing social and cultural norms of femininity with criteria of professionalism, including expectations that they work in areas considered extensions of their domestic responsibilities and that reflect socially assigned qualities of care, nurturing, and humanity (Van Zoonen, 1994).

Male-centered norms influence newsrooms through newsroom culture, decision-making, and promotions—what North (2016) referred to as “ongoing and systemic gender bias that disadvantages women” (p. 315). A survey found that male journalists are older than their female counterparts, and women do not stay in the profession as long as men (Chambers et al., 2004). When men work long hours, they are promoted in newsrooms, while women are considered careerists (Buzzanell, 1995). These disparities can lead women to seek equal opportunities “within the existing structures of patriarchy” (Ross, 2004, p. 146).

Steiner (2002) argues that newsroom gendering is evident in two ways: (1) objectivity, which suggests that journalists’ professional and personal experiences are irrelevant and their histories and identities do not matter, and (2) the increasingly hierarchical and bureaucratic nature of the newsroom, which decenters the individual. Journalists, then, are expected to remove themselves from their stories and distance themselves from their subjects.

Newsroom assignments can differ based on gender as well. Scholars have found that women reporters tend to produce more stories than male journalists on problems that affect women, children, and families (Covert, 1981; Mills, 1997). A study of three local television news programs in a “top 30” market in southern New England found that women cover human interest and health stories, or “softer” topics, more often than men, while men reported political stories more often than women (Desmond & Danilewicz, 2010).

2.3. Women and War Reporting

Women reporters are often blocked from covering conflicts, disasters, and wars, with some being told that those are beats for men (P. Palmer & Melki, 2018). Women war correspondents have experienced gender inequalities, sexism, and even sexual assaults while reporting from conflict areas (Steiner, 2017). Most sexual assaults of women war correspondents occur in combat zones; however, correspondents rarely share their experiences with their media organizations or authorities, as women journalists feel ashamed or

fear being pulled off an assignment (Matloff, 2011). Although the number of women war correspondents has increased, they are not treated equally to their male counterparts, as well as editors, photographers, and video photographers (P. Palmer & Melki, 2018), and their reporting skills have been questioned (Chambers et al., 2004).

Researchers also focus on the strategies women foreign correspondents apply to protect themselves in the masculinized spaces of war (P. Palmer & Melki, 2018; Steiner, 2017). Women correspondents may perform “specific” roles on the frontline (P. Palmer & Melki, 2018, p. 140; Aoláin et al., 2011), such as showing femininity or acting fearlessly. One of these roles is an “exaggerated version of feminine weakness,” such as requesting assistance from their male counterparts or colleagues (P. Palmer & Melki, 2018, p. 140). In other situations, women correspondents may be “aggressive and competitive,” as might be expected from male journalists (P. Palmer & Melki, 2018, p. 140).

These findings suggest that women journalists adjust their professional behavior to meet the demands of patriarchal reporting environments, including strategically deploying or withdrawing traditionally feminine qualities to fulfill journalistic roles. In this way, women journalists engage in emotional labor, or workers managing their feelings to align with organizational rules and guidelines (Wharton, 2009; Hochschild, 1983). A fundamental concern of the emotional labor concept is understanding how culture and social structure regulate emotions and how that regulation affects individuals, groups, and organizations (Wharton, 2009).

Papadopoulou and Siapera (2026) argue that rather than remaining detached and objective, journalists can use emotion to enrich their storytelling. Emotion is also core to a feminist ethics-of-care approach to journalism, which is grounded in empathy and attention to vulnerability (Papadopoulou & Siapera, 2026) and can be particularly important when reporting on vulnerable groups, such as women, children, and refugees (Hossain & Aucoin, 2018). The feminist ethic of care requires that journalists demonstrate intentionality in how they interact with their subjects, whether human or topical, such as considering “who gets to speak, who is heard as authoritative, and how knowledge claims become authoritative” (Steiner & Okrusch, 2006, p. 110).

Scholars have identified empathy as a construct of a global ethic of care, particularly in the practice of interviewing, in which journalists care about the welfare of their sources, including those who are inexperienced or in distress (Hossain & Aucoin, 2018). Hossain and Aucoin (2018) argue that building relationships with subjects and allowing them to tell their stories is vital to humane reporting and ensuring gender and racial equity. Ultimately, journalists’ words and actions should suggest that they care about the people they cover (Steiner & Okrusch, 2006).

2.4. Embodied Journalism and Feminist Standpoint Epistemology

Scholars increasingly recognize journalism as an embodied practice defined by subjectivity, in which journalists are “human beings first and foremost, complete with bodies and emotions, rather than the disembodied, distant observers imagined by conventional understandings of professionalism” (Wahl-Jorgensen, 2025, pp. 1–2). In this way, the body does not just function as a storytelling device but also represents a “dynamic site of meaning, expression, and connection” that shapes how journalists understand their work (Middleweek, 2026, p. 795). This corporeal turn creates spaces for understanding how journalists interact with one another and with their subjects, as well as the contexts in which they live and interact. Journalism comes into being “quite literally by bodies bumping into each other, navigating place and space together, and in doing so coming to understand their differences” (Deuze & Glitsos, 2024, p. 1852), which allows journalists to make sense of their work.

In embodied journalism, emotions are seen as an epistemic affordance that is “cognitively fruitful” (Kotišová, 2025, p. 638). Conflict journalists are driven by moral emotions, such as anger, empathy, and grief, to pursue reporting that leads to action (Kotišová, 2025; Zreik & Suliman, 2025). Embodied journalism allows journalists to “more effectively convey the pain and suffering of those whose stories are being told, while also drawing attention to the embodied nature of the violence itself” including the experiences of marginalized voices, such as women (Zreik & Suliman, 2025, p. 5).

Feminist standpoint scholars argue that women journalists can do better reporting because they understand victims (Steiner, 2018). Rather than relying on journalistic objectivity, a standpoint-informed understanding embraces situated, embodied, and partial knowledge, particularly those subjugated based on gender, race, and class (Haraway, 2013). Privileging these perspectives can offer “more adequate, sustained, objective, transforming accounts of the world” (Haraway, 2013, p. 678) and lead to more critical questions about unexamined assumptions that influence knowledge-seeking (Steiner, 2018). Journalists who acknowledge their social position and partial knowledge are more explicit and self-reflexive about how they interact with their subjects, both human and topical, leading to reporting that is potentially more reliable, transparent, accountable, consistent, and comprehensive (Kotišová, 2025; Steiner, 2018).

Integrating feminist standpoint epistemology (FSE) into journalism studies includes considerations of journalists’ “individual experiences of privilege and discrimination but also how they negotiate the norms and values—or rules of the game—that structure their journalistic identity and work, and the societal power that comes with that” (Banjac, 2025, p. 5). FSE can be evident in the authorship, sourcing, framing, and social-justice orientation of news outlets, including centering the voices of women and presenting marginalized sources as authoritative, as well as using feminist epistemologies to analyze social issues (Cabas-Mijares, 2023). Velloso (2026) advocates for connection-based reporting, in which journalists draw from their identities and experiences to “see stories where others might not” (p. 2) and produce more authentic, fair, credible, nuanced journalism with a greater diversity of voices. Women fixers working in conflict journalism could bring similar perspectives to their work with international reporting teams.

Journalists leveraging an FSE-guided approach might struggle to disconnect their sense of journalistic professionalism from their embodied, lived experiences, resulting in feelings of “‘shame’ over their inability to control their bodies during news work” (Middleweek, 2026, p. 795). This condition can lead journalists into multiple directions, such as taking risks with little to no support, individually navigating the harm or damage resulting from those risks, and taking the risk because it is an expectation of the profession (Deuze & Glitsos, 2024). In war and conflict reporting especially, “Risking one’s life to tell the truth is romanticized, worn as a badge of honor, and rewarded by different forms of capital, particularly in conflict zones” (Kotišová, 2025, p. 635). International newsgathering can take a particular toll, in that correspondents are “putting their bodies on the front line” in their attempts to “step into their subjects’ lives and live what they are living” (Francoeur, 2021, p. 213). Therefore, correspondents’ bodies are not only a depository for their own emotions but also for those they engage with, including sources, other correspondents, fixers, bureau chiefs, and local people suffering from the effects of war (Francoeur, 2021; Kearney & Waller, 2026).

Scholars have studied the effects of trauma on foreign correspondents working for leading international media outlets (Browne et al., 2012; Dworznik, 2018; Feinstein et al., 2002). War correspondents can experience long-term psychological problems, including post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD), depression, and substance abuse (Feinstein, 2020; Hunt, 2010). Symptoms of PTSD can impact journalists’ performance (Ananthan, 2017).

Conflict journalists are exposed to trauma in three interconnected forms: primary trauma as direct targets of violence, secondary trauma as eyewitnesses to death and destruction, and tertiary trauma through repeated engagement with victims' narratives and graphic material (Obermaier et al., 2023). These forms of trauma can produce short-term stress reactions and long-term consequences, especially when organizational support is limited or there is none (Obermaier et al., 2023).

This research seeks to understand how women fixers who are involved in the journalistic work of war reporting perceive and perform their roles and the challenges they experience in a male-dominated field. Their perspectives can help scholars better understand the collaborative nature of war reporting, as well as the distinctive experiences of women working in this area. Therefore, we propose the following research questions:

RQ1: What challenges do Ukrainian women fixers experience working in the male-dominated area of war reporting?

RQ2: How do Ukrainian women fixers engage in meaning-making around the embodied and gendered aspects of war reporting?

3. Method

The study used semi-structured interviews with Ukrainian women fixers working for international media organizations since the start of the Russian invasion in 2022 to elucidate their roles and practices working with news teams and their experiences covering traumatic events. Interviews provide a rich, contextualized understanding of the object of study (Tracy, 2019). The following strategies and procedures were applied to guarantee the validity and reliability of the study (Lindlof & Taylor, 2017).

The fixers worked with media companies such as The New York Times, Washington Post, Wall Street Journal, Politico, NPR, CNN, Al Jazeera, Canadian Broadcast Corporation (CBC), France 24, Le Monde, Arte, ZDF, ARD/WDR, NRK, NTR, and Czech Television (CT). The fixers supported news organizations that are public and private (TV, radio, print, and web) and based primarily in the United States and Europe (Norway, France, Germany, the Netherlands, the Czech Republic) but also Australia, Canada, and the State of Qatar.

Eight fixers had previous experience as journalists (between 8 and 20 years) (Look at Appendix A). Their beats included politics (1), international affairs (2), and fashion and lifestyle (2). Half of the participants with a journalistic background said that they had covered different beats through the years and categorized their work as reporters (4). The other seven had non-journalistic backgrounds, such as acting (2), marketing (1), documentary filmmaking (1), teaching (2), and nonprofit work (1). The respondents were identified from closed social media groups of Ukrainian fixers who communicate on WhatsApp, Facebook, and Telegram. We used a snowball sampling method (Biernacki & Waldorf, 1981).

The interview guide was informed by the study's theoretical and conceptual lenses, feminist standpoint epistemology and embodied journalism, as well as the research questions. We asked participants to describe the general working environment for fixers in war reporting; the challenges they faced as women working in war reporting; the feelings or reactions they noticed over time in relation to their work and how they understood these experiences; how they managed the stress or emotional strain connected to their work; what their work as a fixer meant to them; and whether their understanding of themselves or their role had changed.

The interviews were conducted between December 2024 and January 2026 in English via Zoom. The final interviews, conducted in January 2026, took place during a period of limited electricity and frequent power outages in Kyiv. Therefore, some interviews were conducted twice in two separate sessions. The interviews were audio- and video-recorded

and lasted between one and one and a half hours. The audio was transcribed verbatim and analyzed in NVivo using an inductive coding approach to identify common themes and patterns in the transcripts.

Inductive coding allows themes to emerge from participants' narratives. We first engaged in primary-cycle coding (Tracy, 2019), in which we read the interview transcripts multiple times to identify themes and patterns in meanings and experiences. In the first stage of the analysis, we assigned initial labels to segments of text related to participants' professional roles, emotional and gendered experiences, and relationships with the international news outlets' crew members while allowing for the emergence of new themes. In the next round of coding, related codes were grouped into broader thematic categories (Saldaña, 2021). In the final round of coding, we identified four themes, which are outlined below.

4. Findings

The first research question considered the challenges Ukrainian women fixers experienced working with war reporters, a historically male-dominated area of journalism. Respondents described their roles as a "producer" or "manager," rather than "fixer." Some referred to themselves as the "mother" of the news team for organizing the reporting process. Their duties include translating from Ukrainian and Russian to English and from English to Ukrainian and Russian. The fixers also propose original stories about the war to journalists and arrange interviews with experts, authorities, officials, and others. In addition, they manage logistics, including ground transportation and setting interview locations and times.

Despite their leadership roles, the fixers experience gender inequalities. They said they earned lower pay than their male counterparts, experienced foreign correspondents underestimating their contributions, and often did not receive a byline for stories. To navigate these challenges, as well as to prevent violent behaviors, such as assault, the fixers applied different strategies, from performing feminine behavior to access information and stories to performing with confidence to earn respect within the team and among the Ukrainian military.

Fixers explained that they call themselves "producers" or "local producers" because they do journalistic work on the ground, such as finding stories, pitching them to international teams, and even producing stories as reporters. A fixer (D) working for multiple international outlets, including French France 24 and German ARD/WDR, explained that although she has no journalism experience, she organizes and manages the reporting process for the international media crews. She said:

Sometimes even like a teacher. I am telling them when it is time to eat, not to forget their helmets and vests when we are in dangerous places. I am the lady dealing with kids. Not like mummy, I'm a manager. The manager!

The fixer said she is not familiar with journalistic standards; therefore, she said she does not follow them. The fixer's reference to "the lady dealing with kids" reflects the gendered labor expected of women fixers, which includes not only engaging in journalistic work but also ensuring the safety and care of the media team. The fixers said they oversee the daily reporting schedule of the crews, as well as scheduling breaks for rest and eating. Some said they book hotels and restaurants and even find catering companies to deliver food for the media teams.

Fixers described how their roles have changed over time. Their work expanded from translation and logistics at the beginning of the war to include research, interviewing, and even writing news content and stories for international media outlets. This shift reflects a move toward greater editorial involvement and stronger trust with news organizations. In addition, some fixers explained that the stories they worked on shifted from breaking news

and “urgent coverage” at the beginning of the war to more in-depth, analytical reporting. They explained that over time, they became more selective about the international media organizations and foreign correspondents they worked with, as well as the types of assignments they accepted. At the beginning of the war, they were more flexible and accepted any assignment, including dangerous ones like working on the front line. Over time, they established themselves as fixers and became more selective, preferring structured, long-term collaboration.

Some fixers highlighted tensions between their local knowledge of the war in their home country and the foreign correspondents’ assumptions about conflict reporting. The women fixers said the correspondents, especially men, wanted to report from the front lines. A fixer (C) working for The New York Times who has a background as an actress said a correspondent who had covered several wars and conflicts, including in Afghanistan, wanted to produce stories from the frontline “right away.”

Journalists come from other worlds. And usually they can say, oh, you know what? I (the correspondent) know everything. I was in Afghanistan. And you just listen. I will tell you what we (the team) will do here. And then I (the fixer) hear that, oh, God, we are in trouble because he doesn’t understand that the Ukrainian frontline is different.

The woman fixer added that the Russian military specifically targets media teams on the frontline. She said male journalists seeking professional recognition or promotions can be “reckless” and put their team into dangerous situations while trying to get the best story. In noting that journalists “come from other worlds,” this journalist acknowledged the lack of cultural awareness that can accompany foreign correspondents, which is compounded by assumptions that their journalistic experiences override local knowledge.

Women fixers with journalistic background and experience shared that while they are not neutral, they try to stay objective while working with international media teams. However, they also reflected characteristics of a feminist understanding of objectivity that embraces embodied knowledge and experiences (Steiner, 2018; Haraway, 2013). A fixer (L) working for Al Jazeera with 12 years of journalism experience explained, “Neutrality does not exist while your friends are dying . . . bombs under your hand.” However, the fixers from non-journalism backgrounds explained that they do not align themselves with journalistic standards, and they are neither neutral nor objective. A fixer (C) explained that she hugged a grieving father and cried with him while the media team filmed his story. The fixer said, “I decided to hug him because I am Ukrainian,” highlighting how her response was shaped not only by shared national identity but also by care and emotional expressiveness in the field.

4.1. Invisible Labor and Gendered Treatment

Ukrainian women fixers are a vulnerable group, as most are freelancers working without permanent contracts, affiliation, or insurance (L. Palmer, 2019). All the fixers said they sought greater recognition from international media teams, particularly through inclusion in the bylines of published stories. Some fixers said male correspondents and other male team members doubted their skills. A woman fixer (D), who had a background in marketing, for example, said:

There was a feeling that I was at a lower level than the other members of the team. But I guess it’s not about the media. [. . .] I guess, he (the correspondent) just has this feeling that French guys are more intellectual or something than Ukrainians.

The fixer said the correspondent looked down on her as less competent because she did not have journalistic training. Another fixer (B) working with German and French media noted that when she traveled with media crews, they booked larger rooms for themselves at the hotels. She said this disparity made her feel like she was not an equal part of the team. Some fixers said they received less pay than their male Ukrainian counterparts working for the same media organizations. The participants for the study shared that they were paid per day, varying between \$200 and up to \$500, which was well-paid labor for Ukraine.

Although the fixers said they take a leading role on the international media teams, some experienced unfair treatment from male correspondents. However, all described maintaining a strong support network through a WhatsApp group, where they shared contacts for interviewees, story ideas, logistical information, and feedback about foreign correspondents and international media teams. As a result, if a correspondent treated a fixer poorly, underestimated their work, or offered inadequate payment, others could recommend avoiding future collaboration with that journalist and media organization.

All the fixers said they experienced negative attitudes from the Ukrainian military public relations representatives, as well as military personnel from the Ukrainian army. They said the representatives were respectful to the international media team but disrespectful to the women fixers. A fixer (N) who had worked with Czech Public TV and had over six years of journalism experience said that while arranging an interview for an international media team with a high-ranking Ukrainian military personnel, "I called him on the phone, he said to me like, I don't want to speak with a woman." She explained that a military general treated her as unqualified to report on military affairs. Other interviewees shared similar experiences, noting that they had to adopt specific strategies when communicating with Ukrainian military representatives.

First, they sought to assert their competence by demonstrating toughness and expertise in military matters. They emphasized that they were knowledgeable, capable, and no different from their male counterparts or the soldiers they worked alongside. This approach was used to challenge military personnel's assumption that women are less suited to cover war or military issues. Second, when seeking access, interviews, or sensitive information, some said they strategically performed femininity in interactions with male military personnel. In these situations, they adjusted their communication style in ways they believed would be more effective with their male counterparts, forms of emotional labor to align with organizational expectations (Wharton, 2009; Hochschild, 1983). A few also noted that foreign correspondents sometimes relied on women fixers to negotiate access specifically because they were women and in some cases even suggested they wear makeup to appear more feminine.

In addition to the foreign correspondent, videographer/photographer, a producer, and a fixer, international media teams can also include private security contractors. The women fixers described them as former soldiers hired by private companies to provide armed protection for journalists covering a conflict or war. Four of the 15 interviewed fixers said they have received sexual comments and proposals from security contractors. A fixer (E) with 11 years of reporting experience said she was asked by a security contractor to engage in sexual activity, but she refused:

He offered to have sex. [...] Maybe he thought I wanted it. I just let it stop and went out of the room, and he immediately messaged me, "I'm sorry, I just drank too much beer." It's always like there is a line that could be crossed in a bad situation.

The fixer added that she decided to continue her work and act as if nothing happened and, in communication with the security contractor, tried to avoid the topic. Other fixers who received similar propositions said that they did not acknowledge it as an important part of their work or something that left them with trauma, and they did not say they were sexually assaulted.

4.2. *Effects of Covering the War*

The fixers said constant engagement with war reporting created both physical and psychological pressure. Physical pressure consisted primarily of tiredness and lack of physical strength, while psychological pressure included symptoms of depression; difficulty concentrating on everyday tasks; and a reduced capacity for empathy toward the Ukrainians whose stories they covered, particularly after extended periods of fieldwork. The lack of empathy was most often expressed by fixers with prior journalistic experience. They shared that because of their professional background in media, they were not new to traumatizing events. However, fixers without a professional media background said they were empathetic and even felt related to the stories they covered as part of the international media teams, suggesting a feminist ethic of care focused on concern about the welfare of sources, particularly those experiencing distress (Hossain & Aucoin, 2018). Fixer (L), who had been freelancing for Al Jazeera and had 12 years as a TV producer, described the effect of the war as the ability to measure the impact of her work on herself as she became emotionally detached.

Sometimes it's easier just not to feel anything and put the wall in between these people (the protagonists of the journalistic stories) and you . . . then you become emotionally closed, like for anything in your life, which had happened to me.

She added that since she began working as a fixer, she had become more insensitive to people's tragedies or suffering. Fixer (N), who had reporting experience, worked with a Czech media team covering a massive grave of Ukrainians killed by the Russian army in Bucha at the early stages of the full-scale invasion in 2022. She said:

I keep forgetting a lot of things, probably my brain is trying to defend myself, so there is a huge gap [. . .] maybe also because I see so many events and tragedies each day.

The fixer explained that she had memory gaps and had forgotten traumatizing stories and events.

4.3. *Fixers' Trauma Experiences*

The second research question explored how Ukrainian women fixers engaged in meaning-making around the embodied and gendered aspects of war reporting, including experiencing trauma from war coverage. The fixers experienced bomb shelling and artillery attacks, but they said they were most affected by the stories of Ukrainian people who suffered during the war and were covered by the international media teams. Women fixers said they witnessed daily suffering and loss, which had lasting emotional effects. A fixer (I) with 17 years of journalism experience said working as a fixer changed her life.

I am a totally different person right now after this experience. [. . .] I realize how fragile our lives are. We have to stay with people we love.

This response speaks to the ways that emotion can be seen as an epistemic affordance in conflict reporting that allows journalists—and fixers—to draw upon their sadness, anger, empathy, and grief to pursue meaningful reporting (Kotišová, 2025; Zreik & Suliman, 2025), although it can take an emotional toll. Fixer (I) explained that the coverage of the war traumatized her, and she was emotionally overwhelmed in the second year of working as a

fixer and decided to leave Ukraine. She moved to another European country, where she was pursuing a graduate degree in an area outside of journalism.

For some participants, the emotional impact of the war extended beyond their work to personal relationships with those involved. For example, fixer (K), who had worked with Norwegian media, explained that her biggest stress during the war was concern for her partner, who was serving in the Ukrainian military and was on the front line. She said that she was “more worried about him than about things I have seen as a fixer.” Ukrainian fixers experienced the war as both media workers and citizens, with their personal lives directly affected by the conflict.

All the fixers recognized the trauma they experienced, and when asked to describe the symptoms, their responses included feeling mentally and physically drained as well as “exhausted” and “burned out.” To manage these effects of trauma, they applied coping and emotional strategies including “emotional numbness” and “selective silence.” These strategies reflect the ways journalists might struggle to reconcile their need to remain professional and take risks with the trauma that can accompany embodied reporting experiences (Kotišová, 2025; Middleweek, 2026).

The fixers described the consequences of war trauma in terms of both short-term and long-term stress effects. As documented in the previous literature (Obermaier et al., 2023), short-term consequences occur immediately after the story is complete, while long-term consequences appear months or in some cases a year or two later. Short-term reactions include crying, insomnia, and debriefing about the traumatizing experiences. Translating numerous interviews with Ukrainian women affected by the war made fixer (J), who worked for NPR, “cry repeatedly during the interviews.” Long-term effects of trauma included emotional exhaustion, anxiety, and the need for extended recovery periods. The fixers experienced deep, emotional impacts that persisted for months or even years.

Years after the Russian invasion began, a fixer (N) working for the Czech media said sudden loud noises still triggered a strong reaction, including sounds from trains and buses. She attributed her reaction to exposure to bombings and artillery shelling, as she and her team were targeted by the Russian army in the early stages of the war. A fixer (L) working for Al Jazeera said she did not initially feel traumatized when working with international media teams. However, two years later, she experienced an emotional response while watching the movie *Finding Nemo*.

I didn't cry for two and a half years. [...] I started to cry from the moment when Marlin (clownfish) lost his family, and I could not stop crying until the end of the movie.

The fixer, who has a journalistic background, said the movie made her recognize the trauma she had experienced, a reaction signaling a deeply embodied and empathetic understanding of journalistic practice.

4.4. Coping Mechanisms

The fixers discussed coping strategies they applied after covering traumatizing stories, including taking breaks (between a week and up to six months) and engaging in physical exercises (going to the gym, running). They also received support from the other members of the Ukrainian fixer community, Ukrainian journalists, and international media teams, as well as their relatives and friends. Fixer (H), who had been freelancing for the French media *Le Monde* and has been a journalist for many years, said she saw the importance of taking deliberate breaks and looking for environments where she could rest and restore her physical and mental strength.

Sometimes it needs to go somewhere, you know, to switch off. [...] I spent one week in Romania with my oldest son just to switch off.

The fixer explained that “switching off” meant not following any news from Ukraine and about the war. Other fixers said they took longer breaks and days off for a vacation outside of Ukraine. They said, however, that they struggled to fully detach from the news cycle, as the war developments felt personal. Fixer (N) said that when she spent a longer period outside of Ukraine, such as in the Czech Republic for six months, she felt a need to go back to Ukraine and resume the work as a fixer.

All the fixers said they sought professional support from a physiotherapist at least once. The fixers recognized the importance of consulting with a specialist. However, they said they paid for the sessions themselves. For example, even when fixer (N) was under artillery shelling at the frontline while working with a foreign correspondent, the TV station did not offer psychotherapy sessions. Most of the fixers explained that they did not ask for psychological help, as they acknowledged that they are freelancers, do not have permanent contracts, and do not expect such support to be provided to them by the foreign news media. The fixers’ responses reflect those of journalists, who, when engaging in risk-laden reporting work, might receive little to no support, leading them to navigate the resulting harm on their own (Deuze & Glitsos, 2024).

5. Discussion

This study explored the roles and experiences of Ukrainian women fixers, including their experiences with gender-based inequalities and trauma. We found that the fixers fulfill complex roles, including logistics, translation, arranging interviews, and providing historical, cultural, and social context to the foreign correspondents (Murrell, 2009; L. Palmer, 2019; Kotišová & Deuze, 2022). The fixers described themselves as producers, connectors, teachers, and even “mothers” as they oversaw safety and organization for the international media teams. Additionally, their work is journalistic, pitching stories, verifying information, and in some cases even authoring stories. This suggests that they influence the editorial work of international media teams and the information they provide to their audiences. The findings also reveal a shift in women fixers’ work, from flexible roles at the beginning of the war, such as taking on risky frontline assignments, to more in-depth, analytical reporting. Over time, they became more selective in choosing media outlets, indicating greater control over their work and a strengthening of their position within international news production.

The fixers also experienced gender discrimination, including lower pay, feeling underestimated by foreign correspondents and the Ukrainian military, and sexual harassment from external members of the international teams. The fixers acknowledged that they experienced trauma from their on-the-ground work in war reporting, in some cases witnessing artillery shelling as targets of the Russian forces. The embodied consequences (Wahl-Jorgensen, 2025) of the fixers’ work led to participants reporting emotional detachment, memory gaps, anxiety, and burnout. The fixers applied coping strategies to deal with trauma, such as emotional numbing, selective silence, and peer support, and they recognized the need for therapy.

This research extends scholarship beyond Western women correspondents to include local women fixers as an important influence on the editorial work of international news teams, which are largely male (Steiner, 2017; P. Palmer & Melki, 2018). The findings demonstrate how embodied, situated knowledge shapes reporting decision-making in war zones (Steiner, 2018; Banjac, 2025; Wahl-Jorgensen, 2025). Finally, the study shows the emotional and physical impact of fixer work, especially trauma experiences and gendered expectations that shape news production (Osofsky et al., 2005; Feinstein, 2020; Siddiqua & Iqbal, 2024; Obermaier et al., 2023).

Existing scholarship positions fixers as logistical facilitators whose work is essential but often invisible (Murrell, 2009; L. Palmer, 2019). Ukrainian women fixers do not see themselves as assistants to foreign reporters but as producers of journalism. This role could also be interpreted as a co-authorship of the journalistic stories, which challenges the literature defining fixers as responsible for logistics and translation (L. Palmer, 2019; Murrell, 2014). The women fixers described themselves as equal contributors to news production, shaping editorial decisions and influencing coverage. Therefore, they did not want to be called “fixers” but “producers.” Overall, the extensive role of Ukrainian women fixers points to a shift in foreign coverage, wherein local contributors have substantial responsibilities and influence over editorial processes of leading international media outlets.

Despite performing leadership roles and high-risk tasks, the women fixers were often paid less than their male counterparts. Similar to women correspondents (P. Palmer & Melki, 2018), the women fixers adopted strategic gender performances, sometimes emphasizing femininity to secure access to a story and other times downplaying it to gain respect. However, unlike correspondents, the fixers worked as freelancers without institutional protection. These precarious working conditions increase the gendered risks women fixers face, making them more vulnerable within war reporting environments. Like women war reporters, fixers operate as depositories for their own emotions as well as those with whom they engage (Francoeur, 2021; Kearney & Waller, 2026), creating a complex interplay of the need to remain professional while mirroring the gendered norms of the society around them. This need to unite the body and mind can lead fixers to abandon emotional, vulnerable storytelling in favor of a detached, objective approach (Papadopoulou & Siapera, 2026).

The fixers’ national identity, gender, and lived experience of war shaped their work as part of the international media teams, suggesting that they possess a distinctive standpoint (Haraway, 2013). The fixers’ emotional responses, such as hugging Ukrainian people who had been interviewed, suggest an embodied, relational approach to reporting, challenging traditional objectivity (Steiner, 2018). Women fixers, particularly those with non-journalistic backgrounds acknowledged their sense of commonality with the subjects they cover (Steiner & Okrusch, 2006), and they desired to amplify subjects’ stories and embrace empathy as a core element of professional practice (Hossain & Aucoin, 2018). The fixers are, therefore, engaged in connection-based reporting (Velloso, 2026) through which they draw from their identities and experiences to identify stories others might not see. The fixers also showed care for the media teams they supported, suggesting that they embrace a feminist ethic of care in their work (Steiner & Okrusch, 2006). This study, then, reinforces how a feminist standpoint operates not only in reporting choices that privilege subjectivity and care but also in logistical decisions, risk assessment, ethical negotiations, and relationships among the international media teams (Steiner, 2018).

Participants described trauma not only as exposure to shelling but also as emotional strain. Emotional numbness, memory gaps, and delayed reactions mirror research on primary, secondary, and tertiary trauma (Obermaier et al., 2023). However, unlike foreign correspondents studied in the context of trauma, the Ukrainian women fixers experienced trauma while experiencing the war as citizens. The coping mechanisms of taking breaks, exercising, peer support, selected silence, and self-funded therapy highlight both resilience and institutional neglect by the international media teams, reinforcing that because of a lack of organizational support, news workers must often seek support individually (Deuze & Glitsos, 2024). The fixers, however, recognized the need for professional psychological care, distinguishing them from foreign correspondents (Trifonova & Jenkins, 2024; Siddiqua & Iqbal, 2024).

5.1. Limitations

This study included limitations. All interviews were conducted via Zoom, and we were not able to meet participants in person, which could limit deeper conversations. Future research could compare the experiences of women and men fixers to better understand how gender shapes their work. Also, through comparative analysis, scholars can explore the experiences, identity, and roles of women fixers working in different conflict regions.

5.2. Conclusions

Ukrainian women fixers embrace a complex role shaped by gender, war, and professional journalistic norms. They hold leadership roles in the international news teams and are cultural mediators, producers, protectors, and emotional translators whose work is vital for international coverage of leading global news organizations. By exploring their important work, this study expands feminist-theory-informed journalism scholarship and highlights the emotional and physical toll of war reporting, an embodied understanding of journalism. In addition, this study highlights that understanding conflict reporting requires exploring the roles of the invisible people involved in the process: fixers.

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Appendix A

N	Fixer	Gender	Media Organization (Country)	Type of Media Organization	Background & Experience
1.	A	Female	Canadian Broadcasting Corporation (Canada)	Public	Fashion TV reporter; 10 years
2.	B	Female	ZDF (Germany) Arte (France)	Public Public	Political TV Reporter, Anchor; 8 years
3.	C	Female	New York Times (U.S.)	Private	Actress; 10 years
4.	D	Female	France 24 (France) ZDF (Germany) ARD/WDR (Germany)	Public Public Public	Marketing Expert; 10 years
5.	E	Female	New York Times (U.S.) Washington Post (U.S.)	Private Private	Reporter; 11 years
6.	F	Female	NPR (U.S.) Wall Street Journal (U.S.)	Public Private	Documentary filmmaker

N	Fixer	Gender	Media Organization (Country)	Type of Media Organization	Background & Experience
7.	G	Female	NPR (U.S.)	Public	Reporter
8.	H	Female	Le Monde (France) AP News Agency (U.S.)	Private Private	Reporter, 20 years
9.	I	Female	CNN (U.S.)	Private	Reporter in international news; 17 years
10.	J	Female	NPR (U.S.)	Private	Ukrainian human rights non-profit organization
11.	K	Female	NRK (Norway)	Public	Teacher in theater and English
12.	L	Female	Al Jazeera (State of Qatar)	Public	TV Producer lifestyle shows, 12 years
13.	M	Female	NTR (Dutch Public Service Broadcaster for Information, Education and Culture) (The Netherlands)	Public	TV Reporter and international news, 15 years
			Politico (U.S.)	Private	
14.	N	Female	Czech Television (CT)	Public	Reporter, 6 years
15.	O	Female	France 24 (French)	Public	Actress, French teacher

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