

EPISODE 206

[INTRODUCTION]

[00:00:10] ANNOUNCER: Welcome to this week's episode of Coffee with a Journalist, brought to you by the team at OnePitch. Are you looking for a more efficient way to find and pitch the right journalists? Head to our website at onepitch.co to learn more.

Our guest on today's episode of Coffee with a Journalist is Andrea Gonzalez-Ramirez from The Cut. As a senior writer, Andrea reports on systems of power, specifically around gender issues and abortion rights. During the episode, Andrea explains her beat and why it is difficult to pitch. How she approaches stories through one-on-one conversations? She talks about the newest spring fashion issue at The Cut and more. Let's dive in.

[INTERVIEW]

[00:00:53] BB: Welcome, everyone. This is Coffee with a Journalist. And I'm Beck Bamberger. A publicist who is always looking to figure out how better to make friends with the media. Even though, really, we're not friends. We're here to just do our jobs, and do them peacefully and with respect. That is why we have this little show here.

And with us today is Andrea Gonzalez-Ramirez. She is the senior writer at The Cut, which is so fun, Andrea. And I'm very excited to chat with you. Because I'm a fan. Welcome.

[00:01:24] AGR: Thank you so much for having me.

[00:01:25] BB: Yes. Real quick, Andrea. Just in case maybe people aren't as familiar, how would you describe The Cut? Because it's in part of the New Yorker. Yeah. Go ahead.

[00:01:35] AGR: Yeah. We are a vertical of New York Magazine. And we're a digital lifestyle publication. Our mission is basically to meet readers where they're at and foster forward-thinking conversations about a bunch of issues they care about. Whether that's politics, feminism, work,

money, style, relationships. Yeah, we do a ton of oriental reporting, service pieces. And I think I work with a group of really amazing writers. Yeah.

[00:02:04] BB: I love that. It's great to be working with smart people around you. However, I also feel you have to be viciously smart to even survive as a journalist. By default, you'll be working with smart people. That's just my personal opinion. Andrea, how is your inbox though?

[00:02:20] AGR: My inbox is a little crazy. I'm not going to lie.

[00:02:23] BB: That's okay. That's okay. How do you manage it?

[00:02:27] AGR: As best as I can. I tend to check it in the mornings, at noon and before I log off in the evening. I do not check it on the weekends. I'm trying to be more disciplined about that. Mondays tend to be a little bit of an insane – yep, catching up. And I am a big proponent of like keeping it as streamlined as possible. Using filters. Using tags just to mark what type of sources people are. Stuff like that. I'm a little bit OCP about it in order to keep my sanity.

[00:03:04] BB: Wait. In actual emails, you have a flagging system?

[00:03:08] AGR: Yeah. Yeah. I've created filters. For example, I have Google Arts for a bunch of stuff. And in order to not have it clogging my inbox, they go directly to a folder and I check them whenever I have time. I tend to tag emails from people depending on what type of source they are. If I'm working on a piece about abortion and they are working in this space, I tend to tag it. If it's about gender violence, politics, whatever, it's within my beat. And that kind of like helps me stay a little bit on top of who's who and make sure that things do not fall through the cracks as much as I can.

[00:03:49] BB: Are you an inbox zero person?

[00:03:51] AGR: I try to be. I'm not very successful at it.

[00:03:54] BB: It's okay. It sounds like you're trying.

[00:03:55] AGR: Yeah.

[00:03:57] BB: Yeah. Yeah. Okay. You strike me as someone difficult to pitch perhaps. Because, quick scroll of your coverage area, you're talking about abortion. You're talking about loneliness with your family. You're talking about union leadership. I mean, it is a lot. What's a good pitch for you?

[00:04:14] AGR: Yeah. I am difficult to pitch. My role at The Cut, the way that it was defined is like reporting on systems of power, which is like really broad. And what it means usually is that I am seeking out sources rather than really relying on pitches for my reporting.

I will say, however, that in order for a pitch to be successful, it has to be within what I cover. It's just by virtue of being at The Cut, I receive a ton of pictures about beauty, and fashion, and lifestyle, which is amazing. But it's not what I report on. Those obviously I tend to just ignore them or delete them.

[00:04:59] BB: Yeah.

[00:05:00] AGR: But I think that the most successful pitches are the ones that are coming from someone who has a client or is working with an organization that's a really powerful story. Reporting on abortion specifically. Groups that work with people in the front lines of this movement who are really trying to help patients access care. I think the connecting thread of my work is people. Anything that's really people-centered tends to catch my attention, if that makes sense.

[00:05:31] BB: Mm-hmm. People-centered. It needs to be narratives from people individually and how it connects to people more broadly.

[00:05:38] AGR: Yeah. And I think a good example of this one piece I worked at recently, basically, we were just looking at abortion funds and the work that they're doing. And I think that what's most compelling about those stories is how they interact. The human element of it. Obviously, we are not a hard news outlet or a daily –

[00:06:02] BB: Breaking news. Yeah. It's not a breaking news.

[00:06:05] AGR: Breaking news. In many ways, we are trying to push conversations forward. Give clarity to our readers. And a lot of that comes from having conversations who are in the thick of it.

[00:06:18] BB: Mm-hmm. Who are in the thick of it. If you have clients that are in the thick of it, that's a good way to think of it. Then maybe that's a pitch for you. Okay.

Subject lines. How important are those for you to open them?

[00:06:30] AGR: They're very important. As we kind of establish my inbox, it's a little bit nuts. Really straightforward subject lines are best. I want to know upfront what it's about, especially since we have to keep things moving right.

[00:06:46] BB: Yeah. You got to keep it moving. Subject line. And more specifically, in a subject line, what are you looking to see?

[00:06:54] AGR: Why people are reaching out? For example, this week I had a subject line that was story idea/an organization that reached out. And that to me was kind of like, "Okay, what's the story idea?" Making me click.

[00:07:10] BB: Oh, you mean the subject line just was story idea?

[00:07:13] AGR: Yeah.

[00:07:14] BB: That was it? That was the whole thing.

[00:07:15] AGR: Yeah. And it was kind of difficult, right? Because then I have to go back and forth with this person and try to figure it out. But then I also had one that was coffee shot with this person. And that's wonderful. Because I love doing this type of background conversations. The fact that they're just like coming up front and offering it. Telling me who it is. What

organization they belong to? And then in the body of the email, giving them a small bio. That was really great. Yeah, straightforward as possible.

[00:07:43] BB: Okay. Straightforward as possible. We touched on this – well, no. We haven't gotten too much into it. But just sources. It was something I was just talking with someone else. Any ideal sources where you're like, "Yes, I want to have this person in my inbox?" I mean, the person who's in the thick of it. Okay. But academics, researchers, founders. I don't know. Anyone that's like interesting to you? Celebrities? You have a couple celebrity type of things. But what would you say?

[00:08:11] AGR: Yeah. I would love to do more celebrity coverage as way to take little breaks from –

[00:08:20] BB: My break is a celebrity.

[00:08:21] AGR: Yeah. From the doom and gloom days. Yeah. Definitely, love speaking with researchers and academics. I think that they tend to – I tend to use them a lot because there's so much information out there that they help clarify. And I'm really interested in being able to match that human element with data, with things that support the stories and marry those two things. Definitely researchers. Definitely academics. Authors. I love reading a good book on interesting subjects. Advocates in any sort of space. And then real regular people, that's something that we try to do a lot of.

A good example of it is the IVF ruling in Alabama.

[00:09:11] BB: Yes. In Alabama. Oh, my gosh.

[00:09:14] AGR: I had a conversation with a legal expert to cover that. And then one of my colleagues did a piece basically talking with people who were affected by the ruling. More of that as well. And I think organizations that are usually doing advocacy are really amazing at helping make those connections with people who are on the ground. Yeah. If I can get pitched in that type of thing, I am definitely interested.

[00:09:45] BB: Okay. Everyday people. Also, celebrities and authors. For example – by the way, this J.D. Barker racy. I was like, "Spon-con **[inaudible 00:09:55]**." I'm like, "What's spon-con?" Oh, my God. I don't even know what that is. Okay. I got to read the piece. Look at me.

[00:10:03] AGR: Yeah. That was what I was saying. A break from the rest of the **[inaudible 00:10:07]**. And definitely interested. I think at The Cut, we do really enjoy extremely niche drama and trends, right?

[00:10:18] BB: Extremely niche drama. I love it.

[00:10:19] AGR: Anything in that space definitely piques our interest as well. As an organization. Not just me.

[00:10:26] BB: Yes. Yes. Oh, it must be fun chatter on your slacks and stuff. Oh, my gosh.

[00:10:30] AGR: Oh, yeah. Definitely yes.

[00:10:32] BB: Oh, my Gosh.

[BREAK]

[00:10:35] ANNOUNCER: Today's interview will continue after this brief message brought to you by OnePitch. Are you curious to learn about the unique ways OnePitch helps brands engage with the right journalists? Head to onepitch.co and create your own custom media list in 5 minutes or less. Now back to today's episode.

[INTERVIEW CONTINUED]

[00:10:58] BB: Okay. Speaking of authors, and like lawyers and people who might be the sources you're looking for, how can anyone make a relationship with you, if at all?

[00:11:09] AGR: No. I love a good relationship with people who work in PR. I think that we can be really beneficial to each other. I think my closest relationships with people who – are

spokespeople or doing work in this space, they just happen gradually. Having background conversations about their clients and also what I'm sort of looking for in a story. And a lot of trial and error, right?

I sometimes get pitch stuff that it's interesting personally to me but it's a little bit hard to visualize as a story, right? An idea is not necessarily a story, a topic is not necessarily a story. Just developing the relationship. Just having calls. I work remotely. But if I'm in New York visiting our offices, I like to go and meet with people in person as well. Yeah, I love a good relationship with a PR person. I think we make each other's lives a little bit easier, you know?

[00:12:10] BB: We can. How often are you in New York City?

[00:12:13] AGR: I mean, a couple of times a year, I think. Yeah. It's not too frequent. But sometimes I fly in a couple of times.

[00:12:21] BB: That's good. Okay. What else have we not covered that you want to get out there, Andrea?

[00:12:27] AGR: Oh, I'm not sure. You're the one asking the questions.

[00:12:30] BB: I am. I just thought I'd give you the floor for a second. I just wanted to give you some space. Well, here's one. Story approval process. Anyone who's a writer, a reporter who's not the top-top editor. How is the story process approval – let's say the story approval done? For example, this J.D. Barker piece on the racy ron-con thing. What does that look like?

[00:12:54] AGR: Yeah. That was an assignment I think that came from our news editor. They just needed someone to cover that. But with my main editor, Catherine Thompson, who is our power features editor, it's a constant conversation. Whenever something catches my attention or there's something happening within the beats I cover, whether that's politics, abortion, gender in general, I just tend to DM her and be like, "Hey, what do you think about this?"

For bigger stories, usually features, then there's like a little bit of more pre-reporting that I need to do. Got to think of a headline. Got to think of an angle. And for that, I think that we usually just

like sit down and have conversations about what we visualized. Is this like a 3,000-word piece? Or is this something that's like closer to 1k that we can turn around in like two days, you know?

[00:13:54] BB: Got it. Good conversation back and forth, dialogue happening. Okay. Andrea, I have a quick rapid-fire question series. Are you ready?

[00:14:04] AGR: Yes.

[00:14:06] BB: Okay. Video or phone interview?

[00:14:09] AGR: Phone interview with experts, or advocates, or anything that's like quick turnaround. But video for longer, more sensitive subjects.

[00:14:22] BB: For more sensitive subject. I've never heard that response before. Why?

[00:14:24] AGR: Because you want to be able to see a person. I think that reading emotional cues, it's really important. And I tend to cover really heavy stuff. Whether that's domestic violence, sexual assault, some topics that require anonymity. Being able to read the room as much as I can if I'm not in person. And I prefer video over phone for those.

[00:14:51] BB: By the way, this is not on the rapid-fire, but I just wanted to throw it out there. What do you do for your own sanity/self-care?

[00:14:59] AGR: Great question. Therapy is very important. I love my therapist. I love reading fiction and a non-heavy stuff. A book that's coming out soon that I'm actually doing a small profile of the author is Xochitl Gonzalez's *Anita de Monte Laughs Last*. It comes out on March 5th. And that was like a really fun book. That's what I'm kind of looking for in order to break myself away from my phone and all the heavy stuff that's going out in the world.

[00:15:34] BB: Okay. Good. Books and therapy.

[00:15:36] AGR: Yeah. Very important.

[00:15:38] **BB:** Plus. Plus. Okay, back to our rapid-fire questions. Bullet points or paragraphs in pitches?

[00:15:44] **AGR:** Bullet points. I want to be able to skim as I go.

[00:15:47] **BB:** Skim as you go. Okay. Great. Short or long pitches then? How short or long? Okay. How short?

[00:15:52] **AGR:** Short. A few sentences. If I'm not able to communicate a story to my editor in a few sentences, she is going to say no.

[00:16:00] **BB:** Images attached or a Dropbox zip file?

[00:16:05] **AGR:** Attached. Because the zip file, as soon as I download it, it's going to get lost in my computer. And I don't like clutter, as we established earlier.

[00:16:12] **BB:** Email or XDM?

[00:16:15] **AGR:** Email. DMs are kind of even a hotter mess than my email.

[00:16:21] **BB:** One follow-up or multiple?

[00:16:24] **AGR:** I would say two follow-ups. And then if I don't respond after two, I'm probably not interested.

[00:16:30] **BB:** Okay. Direct or creative subject lines?

[00:16:33] **AGR:** Direct as much as possible. Yeah.

[00:16:35] **BB:** Yes. That's why we talked about that. Okay. Press release or media kit?

[00:16:39] **AGR:** I think a press release.

[00:16:41] BB: Okay. Time that you normally read pitches? Now you told us a little bit. But just to emphasize.

[00:16:46] AGR: Yeah, usually first thing in the morning before I write, I usually do a quick checkup at noon just to make sure that nothing got lost. And then in the evening before I log off, it's the last thing I do.

[00:16:59] BB: You mentioned you don't look during the weekends. Is that a newer habit you're practicing? Or what happened with that? Just to keep your sanity?

[00:17:07] AGR: Yeah. Yeah. I think that because I'm not breaking news reporter, I think I am able to take a little bit of space, I think, away. I still obviously keep an eye on the headlines and stuff and like file stuff away. But I feel like if I go down the rabbit hole of my inbox on the weekends, it's not super healthy.

[00:17:29] BB: It's just not good.

[00:17:28] AGR: Yup.

[00:17:30] BB: Mm-hmm. I'm with you on that. Okay. Okay. We talked about the timing of the pitches. We talked about the sources. Last words, Andrea. Are there any things we can promote? Highlight? Celebrate for you? Send you books for?

[00:17:45] AGR: Please send me all the books.

[00:17:48] BB: As long as they're fun fiction, I would say. Right?

[00:17:49] AGR: As long as they're fun fiction.

[00:17:51] BB: We don't want heavy stuff on memoirs of abortion perhaps, you know?

[00:17:55] AGR: Yeah. Non-fiction is fine if they're good to do interviews. We just published an interview with a sociologist about adoption. And I loved her books. I learned so much. Anything

that feels like that. But, yeah. No. We just published our spring fashion issue. And I'm really proud of the work that **[inaudible 00:18:15]** and my teammates did. You should check it out if you haven't. I'm sure you've seen some of those stories already on the internet. Yeah.

[00:18:27] BB: Yes. Andrea, thanks for being here today with us, especially in this, let's say, busy period time of the coverage you're doing. I really appreciate it. And I know we all do. Really appreciate. And thank you.

[00:18:40] AGR: Thank you so much, Beck.

[00:18:41] BB: Thank you.

[OUTRO]

[00:18:42] BB: Thanks for tuning in to this week's Coffee With a Journalist episode, featuring Andrea Gonzalez-Ramirez from The Cut. For more exclusive insights about the journalists on this podcast, subscribe to our weekly podcast newsletter at onepitch.co/podcast. We'll see you next week. But until then, start great stories.

[END]