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JOURNALISTS AND THEIR SOURCES: A CRITICAL EXAMINATION OF ETHICS
IN CONVENTIONAL JOURNALISM METHODOLOGY

By

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Every journalist who is not too stupid or too full of himself to notice what is going on knows that what he does is morally indefensible. He is a kind of confidence man, preying on people's vanity, ignorance, or loneliness, gaining their trust and betraying them without remorse.... Journalists justify their treachery in various ways according to their temperaments. The more pompous talk about freedom of speech and "the public's right to know"; the least talented talk about Art; the seemliest murmur about earning a living (Malcolm, 1990, p. 3).

I remember the first time I read these now-infamous lines on the opening page of *The Journalist and the Murderer*, in which Malcolm examines the inherent tension that exists between reporters and their sources. It was the final year of my undergraduate journalism studies, and Malcolm's book was on the reading list for a course I was taking called Great Journalism, which seemed designed to challenge the way we students thought about the craft on a number of different fronts, from Didion's use of the subjective voice (1979) to Mailer's use of style (1968). Malcolm's lines struck me with a force that has diminished only slightly in rereading. Even at that early stage of my career, I recognized a truth in her description of the journalistic transaction in which reporters take information and stories from a source and use them for their own purposes; I knew the feeling of taking something and giving back little in return.

As outlined in the book, Malcolm's argument is less that journalists purposely lie and mislead their sources in order to gather information (although certainly, some do) than it is about the subtler, routine tactics that journalists use to engender trust among their sources that obscure their actual motives, opinions, and feelings. While some may argue that Malcolm's claims are exaggerated and that she paints the character of journalists with an overly large brush, few reporters can deny the frequency with which they discover potential sources who refuse to cooperate for having been burned by another reporter in the past. Thus, Malcolm gets

at the heart of the imbalance of power between journalists and the sources upon whom they rely to carry out their work. For while the journalist, in most cases, requires the cooperation of a source to do his or her job, a source rarely needs the journalist in the same way. And yet, the power dynamic between the two almost always skews in favour of the journalist.

In many workaday situations, this difference in power between journalists and their sources is not an issue, for when journalists are working with highly trained, media savvy sources such as politicians, business leaders, or any sort of spokesperson, both sides are clear about the nature of the journalistic transaction taking place. But when journalists turn to ordinary people for their opinions, anecdotes, and even life stories, the imbalance of power becomes an important issue. Regardless of which type of source the journalist is interviewing, the expectation of him or her is the same. And in my experience, journalistic conventions dictate that successful reporters do whatever is necessary to obtain a good story, which may include misleading sources as to the goal of the research or how the source is likely to be represented in the final product. As a writer, an editor, and a university journalism instructor, I have always found such a position rather untenable, yet it is so commonly accepted in the field that if journalists feel ethically compromised by such conventions, they understand it is probably wise not to discuss their concerns openly in the newsroom. As such, I think this ethical gray zone is ripe for study by journalism scholars who have experience in the field but are now insulated from it by virtue of working within the academy.

Thus, in this paper, I argue in favour of creating another way, a better way, for journalists to engage and work with their sources. I argue that feature writers, in particular, should incorporate some of the principles of feminist research methodology and

autoethnography into their work as a way to respect their sources' voices and experiences and create reportage that is less oppressive than what is found in most mainstream media today. Doing so will encourage journalists to engage in more of a research partnership with their sources, one that features a more balanced power dynamic through the sharing of question lists and transcripts, the creation of multi-vocal texts, and the vetting of manuscripts. It will also result in richer stories as well as assist journalists in meeting one of the principal goals of their profession—to help facilitate the workings of democracy by combating oppression.

I begin with an overview of the theories that inform this paper, as I have employed an integrated approach in developing my argument. I have done this for a number of reasons. First, I believe strongly in the usefulness of an interdisciplinary approach in critiquing a discipline such as journalism, which spans a variety of disciplines by its nature. As an interdisciplinary scholar, I also believe in the value of applying theory from one discipline onto another as a way of analyzing issues from an outsider's perspective. As Nissani (1997) suggests, an integrated approach "holds a greater promise of bringing you closer to a firm grasp of [a] complex subject than any important but one-sided study" (para. 38). This way of thinking and analyzing also feels natural to me given my background as a journalist, because reporters, as well as journalism scholars to some extent, are always engaged in interdisciplinary research, crossing disciplinary boundaries to write meaningful, thought-provoking articles and provide analysis.

In choosing to frame my argument within a personal narrative, I am trying to put into

practice the notion of reflexivity, defined by Etherington (2004) as the

...need to be aware of our personal responses and to be able to make choices about how to use them. We also need to be aware of the personal, social and cultural contexts in which we live and work and to understand how these impact on the ways we interpret our world (p. 19).

Thus, my argument is steeped in my own experiences as a magazine writer and editor and part-time university journalism instructor. It is also based on my experience of entering graduate school as a mature student in search of meaningful critical and social theory, which I felt was lacking in my undergraduate studies, to help make journalism more socially progressive. Thus, my ideas are based on both my years of experience in the field as well as my more recent experience of interdisciplinary study focused on creating and encouraging socially relevant and meaningful journalism.

It is important for me to locate my work within the wider context of critical theory, which emerged in the 1920s and 1930s among members of the so-called Frankfurt School. Under the direction of Max Horkheimer, the school's members "sought to develop an interdisciplinary social theory which could serve as an instrument of social transformation" (Kellner, 1990, p. 13). Simply put, critical theory

...is committed to emancipation from all forms of oppression.... [i]n contrast to the often hypertheoretical and apolitical discourse of postmodern theory, critical theory seeks a connection with empirical analysis of the contemporary world and social movements which are attempting to transform society in progressive ways (Kellner, p. 12).

Feminist critical theory evolved in North America in the 1970s as an offshoot of the women's liberation movement and as a result of the creation of women's studies programs within the academy (Crow and Gotell, 2005, p. 1). During that time, the mostly white, middle-class women involved in the movement challenged the widely held belief that knowledge was

universal and objective, arguing that "the 'view from nowhere gaze' that has been the centre of post-Enlightenment Western thought has been dethroned and revealed as masking the specific perspective and interests of dominant social groups," namely privileged, white, heterosexual men (Crow and Gotell, p. 3). During the 1980s and 1990s, the movement's focus shifted from being solely concerned with ending sexism to examining the intersections of overlapping oppressions. Today, the current aim of many feminist theorists is concerned with "questioning how systems of power based upon race, class, sexuality and ability interact with gender. In the current context, the category 'women' has emerged as a conceptual window for interrogating interlocking systems of power" (Crow and Gotell, p. 1). In this way, feminist critical theory becomes a powerful tool with which to analyze oppression and the distribution of power in society. For my purposes, it also provides a valuable lens through which to examine the discourses of power at play in the conventional journalistic transaction between journalists and their sources, particularly when those sources are members of marginalized groups.

Examining conventional research methodologies from a critical feminist viewpoint has contributed significantly to my analysis of journalistic research practices. Kirsch (1999) suggests that what makes research feminist is not only its goal of investigating oppression but its focus on "the related problems of interpretation and representation as they concern 'others,' especially persons and groups alienated from cultural, political, and economic power" (p. ix). Moreover, feminist methodological researchers such as Kirsch work toward developing ethical guidelines that address

...the politics of location (how researchers position themselves in relation to participants), the politics of interpretation (how lived experience is transformed into

research data), and the politics of publication (how research is disseminated to various audiences) (p. x).

The key, underlying idea here that journalists need to understand is a poststructuralist one—that the insight of privileged researchers, or reporters, into the experiences and actions of their subjects, or sources, is neither better, nor more objective, nor more accurate than the insights of the sources themselves. All of our understandings of the world around us are constructed through language and filtered through our own personal and cultural experiences, whether we are consciously aware of it or not. As such, "[u]nderstanding language as competing discourses—competing ways of giving meaning and of organizing the world—makes language a site of exploration and struggle" (Richardson & St. Pierre, 2005, p. 961). Thus, even with the best of intentions, researchers and journalists may, in the process of completing their work, oppress, misrepresent, or otherwise patronize their sources with interpretations that are not congruent with their own understandings. That being the case, many feminist thinkers argue in favour of adopting research methodologies that produce work about members of marginalized groups that is relevant to them as a means of empowerment, as opposed to being done solely for the researcher's own gains, without any consideration for the potential impacts on the participants (Kirsch, p. 3).

Many scholars working in the burgeoning field of autoethnography have arrived at similar conclusions about the ethical pitfalls of working with research participants in a top-down, journalistic manner. Ellis credits Hayano with originating the term autoethnography in the 1970s as "cultural-level studies by anthropologists of their 'own people,' in which the researcher is a full insider by virtue of being 'native,' acquiring an intimate familiarity with the

group, or achieving full membership in the group being studied" (2004, p. 38). More recently,

Ellis has championed a contemporary definition for the genre as

...research, writing, story, and method that connect the autobiographical and personal to the cultural, social, and political. Autoethnographic forms feature concrete action, emotion, embodiment, self-consciousness, and introspection portrayed in dialogue, scenes, characterization, and plot. Thus, autoethnography claims the conventions of literary writing (p. xix).

Anderson (2006) prefers an autoethnographic model that is less impressionistic than Ellis's and more rooted in realism and analysis, hence his term of choice, analytic autoethnography, which he defines as

...ethnographic work in which the researcher is (1) a full member of the research group or setting, (2) visible as such a member in the researcher's published texts, and (3) committed to an analytic research agenda focused on improving theoretical understandings of broader social phenomena (p. 375).

While Ellis's model appears to be the more popular of the two in contemporary scholarship, I reject the need to use one or the other and draw from both in my argument as they share a common methodology.

Although all autoethnographers may not be explicit about how critical feminist thought has influenced their methodological approaches to their research and writing, its influence is unmistakable. As Kirsch notes,

...many feminist principles of research overlap, to some extent, principles central to new ethnographic, critical and hermeneutic approaches to research. This distinction between explicit and implicit feminism also underscores the rhetorical nature of feminist inquiry: it may be intended as feminist by authors, or it may be construed as feminist by an audience (p. 6).

Ellis, for her part, argues that the genre owes a substantial debt to feminist thinking for

"legitimizing the autobiographical voice associated with reflexive ethnography" within the

academy (p. 47), as do other forms of so-called "alternative ethnography," such as Tillmann-Healy's (2001) exploration of using friendship as a method of scholarly inquiry.

For my purposes, one of the most important methodological elements of autoethnography is the openness with which researchers approach their participants as co-constructors of the final published product, not mere sources from which information is to be extracted. Ellis suggests that autoethnographers work to capture their own reactions to their findings and their participants but should also give some space, if not equal space, to the same types of reflections from their participants. She argues that one of the autoethnographer's goals should be to assist participants in telling their own stories as opposed to telling only the stories the researcher deems interesting and worthy of study (p. 72).

In addition to framing my argument within an interdisciplinary theoretical context, it is equally important for me to locate it within a personal context. This paper is the culmination of my Master of Arts—Integrated Studies, which I undertook after being a working journalist for more than seven years and a part-time university journalism instructor for two years. One of my goals in returning to school was to develop a better understanding of the social and critical theory that is rarely taught in undergraduate journalism programs but I felt could help guide journalists who are interested in being more socially progressive. My paper also reflects my frustration with how little scholarly research exists by journalists about journalism practices. To be sure, there are a great many journals devoted to mass communications, media studies, and communications, but they tend to favour studies of products over methods and quantitative over qualitative research, with little interest in foregrounding the practice of journalism as a

tool of social transformation. As Hardt (1996) notes, mass communication scholars share a

...belief in a world that is knowable through the application of scientific techniques that stressed the plurality and equality of facts, through the belief in objectivity of expert observations and the power of empirical explanations. Since mass communication was treated as a series of specific, isolated social phenomena, it resulted in a narrow understanding of communication and in a conduct of media studies without appreciation for the importance of their historical environment (p. 107).

As this type of thinking seems prevalent in a great deal of journalism scholarship, I feel it is important for progressive researchers to embrace a qualitative approach that questions the norms of the profession. We must embrace postmodern and poststructural cultural and social theory in order to provide useful, contemporary analysis of both the methods of journalists and the media products they produce. To remain mired in a quantitative, instrumental type of study is limiting when there exists such a wealth of research from other disciplines that can help prepare journalists not only for the workforce but for the intellectual work required in performing their democratic duties, particularly at a time when profit-driven constraints are shrinking the industry and conglomerating ownership. What Carter, Branston, and Allan first noted in 1998 seems even truer today, more than ten years on:

...media power is being restricted to an ever smaller number of (white male) hands; the corporate priority of profit maximisation is leading to a commercialisation of news formats whereby content becomes ever more uniform and the spaces available to articulate dissent are being reduced; and, fears over the "bottom line" are reshaping news values in ways which frequently define feminist concerns as "controversial," and thus potentially threatening to "market sensitive" news organisations and their advertisers (p. 3-4).

Thus, it is my contention that in re-evaluating how journalists work with sources, we may also work at changing the public perception of journalists by creating work that is more in line with our democratic goals. While a tension exists between Kirsch's modernist views and my

advocacy of poststructuralist change, I believe such goals are still possible and worth working toward.

In order to appreciate why journalists would benefit from adopting some of the principles of feminist and autoethnographic research methods, it is first necessary to understand the role journalists are expected to perform with respect to society. While this may seem like a simple enough task, there is much debate concerning the nature of the journalist's job from inside and outside of the profession. Generally speaking, many seem to agree that the role of the journalist is to provide information relating to "the public good" in an easy-to-understand manner. But what is "the public good"? Is it served by exposing government corruption, or comparing the prices of flat-screen televisions, or covering celebrity scandals, all of which are often reported on in major news media? I argue that "the public good" is directly related to the facilitation of democracy; for that reason, I favour Adam and Clark's (2006) description of the role of journalism:

Regardless of the manifold subjects it treats, journalism springs from a fundamental democratic freedom. It is a democratic practice bound up with the continuous creation, renewal, and maintenance of democratic institutions, culture, and civil society... journalism is not value-neutral or value-free. Conceived as artifice, it is value-laden. The values are those that promote the vitality of democratic life (p. xviii).

This being the case, I consider the work journalists do as deeply, and inherently, political. Once we accept that ideal democracy does not exist in the western world, where huge imbalances of power and privilege mean that marginalized groups (e.g., women, people of colour, the poor) do not have equal access to their democratic rights and freedoms, it becomes self-evident that the role of journalists is to use their privilege to fight oppression in an effort to help realize a true democracy. In this way, the goal of journalism is congruent with the goal of

many critical and feminist theorists—to produce progressive, socially relevant analysis that questions the status quo in an effort to conquer oppression and facilitate greater social equality.

Once we accept the importance of journalists engaging in anti-oppression work, we must consider that goal both in terms of methods and products. While the aim of my paper is to examine journalistic methodology, it is worth noting briefly the great number of studies that have shown how members of marginalized groups are routinely oppressed in media products, be they magazine or newspaper articles or TV and radio newscasts. It seems strikingly obvious to anyone who consumes news media on a regular basis that women, people of colour, and other marginalized groups are routinely underreported on and misrepresented. By way of a brief example from the many that exist in the literature, Zeldes and Fico (2005) reveal that in the U.S. national networks' coverage of the 2000 presidential election, men and Caucasians were over-represented in news stories as both reporters and sources, and that both men and women reporters tended to use more male than female sources and gave more on-air time to men than women (p. 383). In Canada, the United States, and the Netherlands, research suggests that women journalists are promoted less often and paid less than their male counterparts for the same work (Robinson 2005; Rush, Oukrop, and Creedon 2004; Van Zoonen 1988, 1998). Kern-Foxworthy (2004) also reveals that women of colour who are journalists face additional discrimination on the basis of their ethnicity. And as Ross points out, women's real lives and experiences are not reflected in most mainstream media unless "they are framed in routine and sexualized ways that accentuate gender and occlude almost every other personal attribute" (2002, p. 125). Thus, while journalistic conventions would normally lead a reporter to seek out a

woman for her opinion on daycare subsidies or home decorating, they seldom lead reporters to seek women as sources in stories about pensions or politics.

On the methodology side, it is less clear how journalists treat their sources and how oppressive they may be, as there are few studies that question sources or reporters about their experiences with interviews. For this, then, I rely mostly on my own experience as a journalist and a journalism instructor. Journalism textbooks have more to say about interviewing practices than the scholarly literature, most of which is predicated on the notion that some degree of equality is achievable when engaging sources in the conventional journalistic manner; Cumming and McKercher (1994) even suggest that among the rewards journalists reap from good a interview is a sense of mutual respect with the source and "a sense that the interview has an importance transcending the personal satisfaction of the participants" (p. 69). Similarly, Russell suggests that "[a]ny news worker...should be able to hold his head up when he meets his sources after the story is published. And any news worker should be able to respect the person he meets in the mirror each morning" (2006, p. 34). But is such an equitable relationship even possible when the discourses of power are so strongly skewed in favour of the journalist? This appears to be a subject most journalism textbooks gloss over instead of interrogating.

Instead of addressing the ethical issues involved in working with sources, it appears that most authors focus on providing advice on how to conduct productive interviews in terms of uncovering information that is desired by the journalist (see Bender et. al., 2009; Cumming and McKercher, 1994; Randall 2007; Russell, 2006; Shapiro, 2009). In terms of ethical instruction, textbooks have much to say on the subject of treating sources unethically in a conscious manner, such as fabricating quotations, creating composite characters, or misattributing

information. But they contain little or no discussion of the subtler ways journalists may mistreat their sources when working within the boundaries of journalistic conventions. This is a significant oversight, as there is an important difference between fabricating a source's quotations and giving her a poor understanding of how the information she provides will be used in the finished product. When such ethical issues are mentioned, such as in Shapiro (2009), they are mentioned in an offhand manner and given markedly less space than the more straightforward matters of fabrication, plagiarism, etc. Per Shapiro:

There's no doubt that sources often feel betrayed by reporters—and especially by feature writers, who, seeking to deliver a "good story" ...find themselves placing on the story a "spin" that (however justified it may be by objectively observed facts) comes as an unpleasant surprise to the story's sources or subjects. But that's just a reality of the journalist's world: the truth can hurt (p. 306).

Shapiro does go on to say that

...[s]ources have a right to be treated decently and with respect—for instance, by being told why we are asking questions and what kind of story we have in mind (especially if they are people who, unlike lawyers and politicians, for instance, may not understand how the media work). They also have a right to be quoted accurately, without distortions of meaning or context (p. 307).

But what does treating a source respectfully mean in practical terms when the underlying methodology of journalists is so inherently one-sided? How is it possible to inject even an idea of equity into the standard relationship parameters between journalists and sources, which hold that the journalist decides which information is most important and which is not worthy of coverage, cherry-picking details from the source's experiences? I contend that it is not possible when working within such restrictive parameters—the process is inherently disempowering for sources, and it contributes to the overall public perception that journalists are untrustworthy,

since they grant sources no say in the final product before it is published for fear of appearing unduly influenced or coerced.

One of the reasons for this conventional way of working with sources is the notion of objectivity. Many journalists and journalism texts, particularly those associated with news reporting, still hew to the notion of objectivity as being crucial to the craft:

Today, most news journalists strive to be as impartial or "objective" as possible. Reporters are neutral observers, not advocates or participants. They provide the facts and details of the stories they report.... Journalists express their opinions only in editorials and commentaries, which usually appear in a section of the newspaper or a part of the news broadcast reserved for opinion. (Bender et. al., 2009, p. 72).

Although the notion of objectivity remains central in journalism, it is a concept that has been skewered by poststructuralists for some time. As Ellsworth explains, citing Aronowitz, poststructuralist thought is not bound to reason, but to "narratives about the world that are admittedly partial. Indeed, one of the crucial features of discourse is the intimate tie between knowledge and interest, the latter being understood as a 'standpoint' from which to grasp 'reality' (p. 96). That being the case, I contend that journalists need to recognize that we bring our ideological baggage to everything we write about and that, whether it is implicit or explicit, our stories always have a point of view. Particularly with respect to feature writing, narrative writing, and creative nonfiction, stories almost always have an explicit point of view, and I argue that it is this angle that makes them interesting to read; even if readers do not agree with the writer's point of view, they can still find the story engaging and provocative. As such, I think it is better for journalists to be open about the fact that their stories have a point of view than to pretend they are objective. This does not mean that journalists should fail to be complete in

their research, investigating all sides of a story and speaking to people with differing views; that kind of substantial, diversified reporting is key to any good piece of journalism.

One of the reasons journalists are not more accepting of the notion of subjectivity in their work comes from a longstanding dichotomy in how they conceptualize the public—i.e., as either their audience or their sources. On the one hand, journalists go to great lengths to explain that they want their methods to be transparent for their audience, as a sort of checks-and-balance system to allow readers to gauge how well reporters are meeting their democratic goals. To wit, Kovach and Rosenstiel (2001) suggest as one of their foundations of journalism the idea of transparency, which they consider of primary importance in their call to foster a discipline of verification:

...this responsibility requires that journalists be as open and honest with audiences as they can about what they know and what they don't. How can you claim to be seeking to convey the truth if you're not truthful with the audience in the first place?

The only way in practice to level with people about what you know is to reveal as much as possible about your sources and your methods (p. 80).

They explain that being transparent about one's methods is a sign of respect for one's audience, allowing readers to judge the veracity and quality of the journalist's research, reinforcing the idea that the journalist should be motivated by serving the public interest in having her readers be able to critique her research (p. 81). Thus, journalists purport to have great respect for their audiences and, at the very least, pay lip service to the idea that they want to be as transparent as possible with them.

In my experience, journalists treat their sources quite differently than they treat their audience. When working with sources, there is little thought given to the notion of transparency apart from not lying outright about the angle of one's story; as Kovach and

Rosenstiel advise, "[o]bviously journalists should not lie or mislead their sources in the process of trying to tell the truth to their audiences" (p. 82). They go on to argue that journalists should

...be skeptical of what they see and hear from others, but just as important, they should be skeptical about their ability to know what it really means.... A key way to avoid misrepresenting events is a disciplined honesty about the limits of one's knowledge and the power of one's perception (p. 85).

While such advice may seem sensible enough, it underscores a crucial difference between how journalists view their audience and how they view their sources—while the expectation is for journalists to be transparent for their audience, the expectation of sources is to be transparent about their stories for journalists. This makes it clear that journalists conceptualize the public in two very different ways, and the two groups are not afforded the same privileges. So, while the public-at-large should be granted transparent access to a journalist's methods (which I would argue rarely happens in practice but is a worthwhile goal nonetheless), sources are not. At best, a source learns what the story she is interviewed for is about and perhaps what the angle will be, but nothing more in most cases. This is evidence of a dichotomy at work in the mind of journalists: we will treat you one way when you are simply a reader, but as soon as you participate in the story or become part of it, willingly or unwillingly, we will treat you differently—arguably, less respectfully and more paternalistically. But outside of the journalistic mindset, the two groups are in fact the same, so when one is treated poorly, so is the other by extension. If we, as progressive journalists, are serious about doing a better job of performing our democratic duties, then we must work to reconcile these two conceptions of the public and resolve to treat sources more like our audience, for they are one and the same. To be clear, I am not suggesting that journalists set out to treat their sources oppressively, but the

constraints they work under as part the standard operating procedure for journalists prevents them from treating sources better, despite how much they may want to. In accepting that their writing and research methods are not objective, I think journalists should be more open to the idea of working with sources more equitably, as feminist researchers and autoethnographers do with their research participants.

To illustrate the differences between the two methods, I will briefly describe how journalists usually engage with their sources. Upon arranging an interview with a source, the journalist explains the subject of the article she is working on, its angle is (if there is one), how she hopes the source can be of assistance, and what type of information she is looking for, be it expert commentary, lived anecdotal experience, opinion, etc. After the interview, the journalist may follow up with the source to clarify details or ask more questions. At most media outlets, this is the last interaction sources have with journalists before the story is published or aired. At many magazines, however, there is an additional step built into the publication process called fact-checking, which I argue makes magazines the best place to start in exploring new ways for journalists to engage with their sources, as I will outline shortly.

First, it is necessary to provide an overview of the job of a fact-checker. As per Brouse (2007),

...a fact-checker revisits the territory that a writer has covered, consulting and speaking to her sources and in some cases finding other, better sources. In effect, the fact-checker is forcing the writer to prove, before publication, what would have to be proved in a libel case in Canada—that every assertion in the article is true, that there is an authoritative source behind each one, and that each source is known and has been consulted and documented independently of the writer. Fact-checking is the magazine industry's adaptation of the peer-review system employed by academic journals... (p. 11).

At most major consumer magazines, sources are often contacted by a fact-checker, whose job is to verify all of the details gathered from or regarding a source without actually reading quotations or sharing any piece of the manuscript. If there are changes to be made, the fact-checker discusses them with the writer and the editor overseeing the piece, who then decide how the final text will appear. The source sees only the story, and whatever information she has shared, once it has been printed. As Brouse explains, magazines employ fact-checkers for a number of reasons: it helps to stave off potential claims, as Canadian libel law puts the burden of proof on publishers in lawsuits, and it builds their credibility with their readers as trustworthy and accurate media (p. 14).

The convention that journalists have little post-interview interaction with their sources is already somewhat mitigated in the magazine editing process by virtue of employing fact-checkers. I think this should make magazine writers and editors more open to the idea of working collaboratively with their sources than, for example, news reporters and editors, who work under much shorter deadlines and, as such, probably have no time to implement a more interactive approach to working with their sources.

Let me be clear from the outset that what I am proposing is a methodology for long-form, narrative, feature, or creative non-fiction writers (who I will refer to as feature writers for the sake of brevity), particularly when they working with so-called ordinary sources. This methodology would not be suitable for sources who are politicians, lawyers, business leaders, or anyone else with a high level of media training and savvy, or people suspected of wrongdoing; rather, it is a methodology for working with sources who are less media savvy and, as such, more apt to be misrepresented or taken advantage of, intentionally or not, because of

their lack of power and privilege. Because feature writers often work with their source's life stories and anecdotal experiences, there is more at stake for these sources than for someone who is simply sharing political opinions, year-end profit margins, poll results, and the like.

Why would feature writers want to work any closer with sources than they already do? First and foremost, to show them a greater degree of respect. What often happens when employing conventional practices is that journalists use sources and the information they provide in whatever way they, or their editors, deem fit. It is a hugely imbalanced relationship in terms of power, and as facilitators of democracy, journalists should appreciate the benefits in being more open with their sources and working with them to express their stories and experiences in a way that pays them greater respect. More than that, though, there appears to be considerable evidence that supports the idea that working more openly with sources results in a better, more accurate, and more detailed stories, which is something all journalists would want to achieve if possible (see Ellis, 2004; Tillmann-Healy).

The interviewing methods employed by feature writers line up well with feminist research practices by favouring open-ended discussions with a focus on discovering interesting, anecdotal, lived experiences, a method that Kirsch says makes it easier for researchers to establish rapport with their participants and validate their experiences, as well as allow them to form bonds based on shared sociocultural experiences and undo the conventional hierarchy of power implicit in closed interviews in which an expert examines a specimen (p. 26-27). As Etherington explains, this type of reflexive interviewing

...can follow the usual format of the researcher asking questions and the participant answers: where it is different is that the interviewer also notices and/or shares personal

experiences of the topic and comments on the unfolding communication between both parties....

My meeting with each participant is like a snapshot in time: each of us is uniquely embedded in whatever is happening in our lives at that time (p. 77).

Thus, adopting new, more ethical methodological practices can, and should, be seen as an extension of existing practices as opposed to embarking on something entirely new and untested.

I propose three ways for feature writers to embrace more ethical methodological practices as suggested by feminist researchers and autoethnographers. First, feature writers should be completely upfront with their potential sources about what their story is about, what they hope the finished product will look like, and how the source's anecdotal experiences will contribute to that product. Additionally, they should explain what they will do if, in during the research process, the tone or angle of the finished product changes. Working with sources may include co-creating question lists before any interviewing takes place, a practice many journalists consider anathema to objective, independent reporting, because it might give a source an "upper hand" in devising answers ahead of time. I suggest that helping sources understand our goals and helping them prepare for an interview, in which they will likely be asked to mine their memories for specific anecdotes in as much detail as possible, actually results in sources feeling better about the interviewing process and gives them a chance to start preparing their answers, which is likely to result in better, more detailed anecdotes than one might expect on the fly. Asking sources to participate in the project pre-interview, as is often done in radio and television, also pays respect to the contribution of information and time they will be making to the journalistic product that, in all likelihood, they have little stake

in compared to the writer. At the same time, we must be mindful, as Kirsch cautions, that sources will not have the same level of interest in the story that we do and, as such, may not wish to cooperate as fully as we might like, which is, of course, perfectly within their rights (p. 36). All the same, I think it behoves feature writers to try to engage their sources in the project as early and as thoroughly as possible. The corollary to this is, of course, that if sources change their minds about participating in the process at some stage, it is their right to do so, and this should be explained from the outset; as Kirsch suggests, a participant's consent is something that should be discussed throughout the process and renegotiated along the way, particularly if the writer's focus or direction changes from what she originally stated (p. 40).

Second, feature writers should be open to sharing interview transcripts with their sources. While this is an accepted practice among many feminist researchers and autoethnographers (see Kirsch, Ellis, Etherington, and Tillmann-Healy), it is unheard of among feature writers. Again, the conventional thinking appears to be that the more input sources have in a story, the more it may appear that they have directed its outcome instead of trusting that job to supposedly objective writers. But sharing transcripts actually empowers sources in a number of positive ways. First, it offers them the chance to retract information they contributed but have since regretted. As Kirsch notes of qualitative interviews in which the interview/writer behaves as a friend, sharing her own experiences and opinions with the source, they

...can sometimes lead participants to divulge information against their better judgment, perhaps even against their will. Feeling the warmth, undivided attention, and sincere interest shown by skillful interviewers (something we rarely experience in daily life), participants can easily reveal intimate details about their lives which they may later regret having shared (p. 29).

Thus, allowing sources the chance to read transcripts of their interviews throughout the process will give them the chance to change their mind about how much of their lives they are comfortable sharing with the public. Although this is the worst-case scenario for a writer, it is worth considering at the outset; in many cases, feminist researchers and autoethnographers report that sources feel empowered by being able to read their interview transcripts, and in many cases, it jogs their memories and results in their adding more detail to their previous recollections. It may also result in their clarifying their earlier comments, which is something many journalists seem opposed to. But giving sources this opportunity helps to make the process less oppressive, for while the journalist is always able to change her mind throughout the research process, up until the point at which her article becomes published, the source has no such luxury. Whatever he said on the day he spoke to the journalist is what often ends up in print, with no chance to change his mind, re-evaluate his position based on other evidence, or simply compensate for having been interviewed on a bad day. Journalists may change their minds and alter their opinions; sources may not. It is an inherent imbalance of power that works only in the journalist's favour. By giving sources access to their transcripts and the opportunity to change them, whether by adding to them or removing from them, the power imbalance becomes less oppressive. Likewise, writers should share drafts of their stories with their sources to ensure they are comfortable with how they, and their experiences, are being represented.

Third, feature writers should consider how to work with their sources as co-constructors of the story, possibly in creating some form of multi-vocal text. Kirsch describes such texts as

combining "multiple voices in a single article, essay, or review. They thereby allow readers to see the complementary and conflicting perspectives grounded in the range of identities typically involved..." (p. 68). The idea behind a multi-vocal text is, as Newkirk notes, to give sources a "right to co-interpretation," or space in the final product to refute a writer's interpretation if they disagree with it (qtd. in Kirsch, p. 39). Kirsch notes there are two main types of multi-vocal texts: one written by a single author, who includes various points of view, using quotations and dialogue excerpts from transcripts, and texts that are written by more than one author, including the researcher and the sources, who attempt to share "authorial and editorial control" (p. 68). While the latter seems unlikely to work in a journalistic context, as professional writers are unlikely to cede such control to their work and publishers are unlikely to pay for work that does not meet their professional standards, the first option is entirely workable. However, in creating such a multi-vocal text, Etherington offers a key caution:

...although the content and process of the research might become seamlessly interwoven stories, affecting each other, it is important that the voices of researchers and researched are not merged and reported as one story—which is actually the researcher's interpretation. By reporting each part and showing how the different roles and voices are separate, differences and problems in encounters are discussed rather than ignore (p. 83).

Ellis, Etherington, and Tillmann-Healy each provide an example of what a multi-vocal text can look like in book format, with long passages, and sometimes chapters, given over to transcript excerpts, quoted dialogue between the writer-researcher and her sources, letters and emails sent between the writer-researcher and her sources, etc. While this type of format might work well for magazines, an unedited, or jointly edited, question and answer piece might work better for newspapers. I think there are many possibilities for creating multi-vocal texts online, where

the writer could insert hyperlinks from the article to a range of other materials, including emails, interview transcript excerpts, audio and/or video clips, and even reflections from the sources. Arguably, this might look like giving the sources less of a prominent space than the writer receives with the story, which is an issue that deserves exploration by the writer, but it presents a relatively cost-effective way to include a host of material from the sources' perspective in an easy-to-navigate way for readers.

These suggestions are merely a first step toward making the journalist-source relationship less oppressive. They are not meant to be definitive, but rather a means of starting a conversation between journalists, editors, and their sources as to how to work more collaboratively and more respectfully. There remains much research to be done by journalists and scholars who believe in the value of applying feminist research ethics to journalistic practice and how journalists work with sources, in particular. While there exists very little in the scholarly literature on this topic, I believe that is beginning to change, as evidenced by Meredith Levine's research (2009) into whether journalists should use informed consent when working with sources, particularly those who are children or deemed legally incompetent and who may not understand the risks associated with giving an interview. I believe we will see more research of this type grow in the years to come as journalists work to regain the public's trust at a time when readers can easily find a wealth of information from unconventional media sources, from citizen journalism news sites to independently operated blogs. Moving forward, I believe it would be worthwhile to interview editors and writers at socially progressive magazines, such as *This Magazine*, *Ms.*, *Mother Jones*, *Bitch*, *The Tyee*, *Rabble.ca*, and *Herizons Magazine*, as well as independent feminist journalists such as Barbara Ehrenreich, about their

current research and interviewing practices and how open they would be to working with sources in a more inclusive manner. I think there would also be much to learn from studying journalists employing some, or all, of the methodological suggestions I have made to examine how well they work in practice and what kinds of final results they produce, particularly in terms of how they might be different from conventional feature articles.

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