BEHIND HUMAN FACES:

HOW EXEMPLARS EXPERIENCE THE NEWS PROCESS

A Thesis

presented to

the Faculty of the Graduate School

at the University of Missouri-Columbia

In Partial Fulfillment

of the Requirements for the Degree

Master of Arts

---

by

ALEXIS ALLISON

Dr. Amanda Hinnant, Thesis Supervisor

MAY 2020

The undersigned, appointed by the dean of the Graduate School, have examined the thesis entitled

BEHIND HUMAN FACES

HOW EXEMPLARS EXPERIENCE THE NEWS PROCESS

presented by Alexis Allison,

a candidate for the degree of master of arts,

and hereby certify that, in their opinion, it is worthy of acceptance.

Dr. Amanda Hinnant

Professor Katherine Reed

Dr. Ryan Thomas

Dr. Robert Petrone

DEDICATION

For my sister, Abbey.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

So ends a quest. The following people — my Gandalfs and Dumbledores — helped me find my way.

To my committee chair, Dr. Amanda Hinnant: You are grace, wisdom and spunk, role model, mentor and friend. I learned "exemplar" from you, and thus it began. Thank you for your perennial kindness and counsel in this season.

To my committee members: Dr. Robert Petrone, Professor Katherine Reed, Dr. Ryan Thomas. These pages brim with your expertise. Thank you. Rob: For giving me a language and framework for speaking *with* people, not about them. Katherine: For teaching me what it means to be trauma-informed and thoughtfully bold. Ryan: For guiding me through care ethics with an attentive kindness worthy of the theory.

To the family of Tom Duffy: I never met you, but you granted me my dearest wish — to pay the people in this study for their time, energy and insight. Thank you for funding me and, by extension, them. This blessing runs deep.

To the person whose story I botched: Thank you for telling me I got it wrong. And to the people in this study: Thank you for sharing. You make me better.

Finally, to my family: Charles Allison, Jan Swan, Abbey Allison. One privilege I don't mention in Chapter One is the privilege of your love. You anchor me. Thank you. Dad: For helping me keep calm and remember what matters. Mom: For reading draft after draft. For helping me make sense of my thesis and myself. Abs: For your edits and ánimo and for being my friend. We got this life.

TABLE OF CONTENTS

LIST OF TABLES

Table Page

BEHIND HUMAN FACES:
HOW EXEMPLARS EXPERIENCE THE NEWS PROCESS

Alexis Allison

Dr. Amanda Hinnant, Thesis Supervisor

ABSTRACT

Journalists often seek to put a "human face" on a systemic issue. The resulting source is an exemplar, or person whose story serves to illustrate a greater phenomenon. Journalism scholarship has examined why and how journalists choose exemplars, as well as how their inclusion in a story affects readers and viewers. But what's it like to *be* the exemplar? Through six in-depth interviews with people recently featured in the news, this study explores how exemplars experience the news process, from connecting with a journalist to reading about themselves in a published story; and how exemplars talk about journalists and journalism afterward. In the end, I argue that the journalist-exemplar relationship is unique among relationships the journalist forges with other sources. The vulnerability experienced by the exemplar, coupled with the value they place on the relationship both as a means to an end and an end in itself, merits extra care from the journalist.

Chapter One: Introduction

As a journalist, I had done, I thought, all the right things. The article localized a national tragedy, one borne by a demographic I exemplified in a single person's story. It tapped into a vein of deeply human sorrows — loss and injustice, held closely alongside an active, creative hope. I'd sent the relevant text of the story to my central source, asking them to review for accuracy and representation. We'd emailed back and forth, and I'd made their tweaks, and they'd accepted them, and the story published.

After a quiet day, the source emailed me again, asking to be removed from the article. They said they felt misrepresented — made into a victim and stereotype compared to the other sources I'd included. They didn't know theirs would be the primary personal story; they thought there would be many. It didn't matter that I'd shown them what I'd written from our interviews before the story published. When they read the entire piece, they felt betrayed. Other circumstances may have been at work; I asked this person to further explain, but they declined.

Still, the email made me think: This person, whose story I used to illustrate a greater trend, did not know what their role would be going in — did not know, perhaps, that they'd be serving a role. Brosius & Bathelt (1994) write that "journalists do not present exemplars to show an individual experience but to exemplify a societal problem with an individual experience" (p. 49). I had not told them. Should I have?

The experience cracked me open, laid bare the many powers I hold to redeem or destroy. Already I'm steeped in privileges: white, cisgender, heterosexual, educational, able-bodied, thin, upper-middle-class, but this response unveiled one more — that of the

storyteller. Across disciplines and cultures, the person who tells the story holds great power. Momaday (1997/2001) writes that people invest in and preserve themselves through storytelling:

> The state of human *being* is an idea, an idea which man has of himself. Only when he is embodied in an idea, and the idea is realized in language, can man take possession of himself. In our particular frame of reference, that is to say that man achieves the fullest realization of his humanity in such an art and product of the imagination as literature — and here I use the term "literature" in its broadest sense. (p. 88)

But people who tell not only their own stories but other people's stories also possess power. Adichie (2009) affirms storytelling as a method for reinforcing power dynamics. She references *nkali*, an Igbo word she translates to roughly mean "to be greater than another":

> Like our economic and political worlds, stories too are defined by the principle of *nkali*: How they are told, who tells them, when they're told, how many stories are told, are really dependent on power. Power is the ability not just to tell the story of another person, but to make it the definitive story of that person. (Adichie, 2009)

In the creative writing world, authors like Adichie have spoken about the privilege of authorship: who gets to tell which story, and what it means for authors to write outside of their own identities. Journalism, another storytelling medium, wrestles with similar questions. It's quite likely a journalist will write about a person who doesn't look or think as they do. Although the current wave of new, young hires brings more diverse identities into the newsroom, journalists are still more likely to be white and male than other employees in the U.S. workforce (Grieco, 2018, para. 1). These are two identities within what Ellsworth (1989) calls the "current mythical norm, namely: young, White, Christian, middle-class, heterosexual, able-bodied, thin, rational man" (p. 310), a position

of societal power that can render invisible the experiences of those who occupy a lower tier.

The social empathy function of journalism, however, requires journalists to do the opposite: make visible the stories of less familiar others and, in doing so, evoke compassion and understanding (Schudson, 2008, p. 18). It matters that journalists get these stories straight. To do so requires great care, and merely including quotes isn't enough: "Despite the apparent incorporation of quotations from sources, the objectivity-governed model of news reporting is fundamentally monological, as the voices of sources are co-opted, subjugated or subsumed by the journalists' singular narrating voice" (Zou, 2018, p. 383). Instead, Zou (2018) privileges a dialogical model of representation, one that entails "an active and ineluctable responsibility of journalists toward the subjects they portray—the responsibility to achieve a genuine and nuanced understanding of others" (p. 384).

A dialogical model requires listening. But journalism scholarship, which brims with research on how, why and what journalists write, as well as the effects on their readers, offers significantly less on the experience of those who've been written about. This research seeks to narrow that gap. The study of the relationship between the journalist and the ordinary person who becomes the "human face on cold, hard facts" (Grabe et al., 2017, p. 907), and how that person experiences the news process, is germane to the ongoing conversation about media representation, news credibility and the public's confidence in journalism as a whole. Moreover, the exemplar's experience of making the news may affect not only their perceptions of journalism, but their wellbeing and personhood.

Chapter Two: Literature Review

In *The Journalist and the Murderer*, writer Janet Malcolm (1990) likens the journalist-source relationship to a romance gone wrong. The journalistic process, she argues from line one, is "morally indefensible" (Malcolm, 1990, p. 3) — an act of betrayal:

> The catastrophe suffered by the subject is no simple matter of an unflattering likeness or a misrepresentation of his views; what pains him, what rankles and sometimes drives him to extremes of vengefulness, is the deception that has been practiced on him. (Malcolm, 1990, p. 3)

Her sentiment is echoed more recently by Yahr (2019), who dubs this type of hit-and-run journalism "extractive" reporting. Lamenting the lack of professional, public wrestling with the conditions that make journalism "morally justifiable and not purely extractive or voyeuristic" (Introduction section, para. 6), Yahr (2019) made her own guide. In it, she emphasizes a deep consideration of the source, recommending that journalists take care to set the source's expectations, that they never mislead or confuse the source, and that they find opportunities to give the source "some editorial control" (Rule 4 section). She's limited, though, by her interview subjects — eight of nine work or have worked in journalism; only one is a source. It's a common theme in studies about journalism: "One consequence of the 'newsroom centricity' of journalism scholarship is that when scholars do focus on audiences and other aspects of journalism, they tend to see them from the perspective of reporters and editors" (Palmer, 2018, p.11).

To test Malcolm's (1990) sometimes brutal, sweeping claims about journalism, Palmer (2013) performed a phenomenological study on the "ordinary" (p. 4) person's experience of being in the news. She interviewed more than 80 people who'd been

"featured, quoted, or simply mentioned in a news story" (Palmer, 2013, p. 3), the majority of whom were named in one of three large New York-based publications.

Palmer's (2017) findings complicate Malcolm's (1990) narrative. She notes that, more than feeling betrayed or deceived by the journalists, some of her interviewees felt exploited: "Feeling exploited, at its root, seemed closely tied to interviewees' sense of having given up — or lost — control of their own stories" (Palmer, 2017, p. 586). Malcolm, too, addresses the feeling that an interviewee has, in Palmer's words, "been robbed of something precious" (Palmer, 2017, p. 586), even if the narrative puts that person in a positive light: "Yes, a subject may occasionally grudgingly concede that what has been written about him isn't bad, but this doesn't make the writer any less a thief" (Malcolm, 1990, p. 14). Palmer's (2013) interviewees were, on the whole, much less begrudging: "Even though it may seem to an outside observer that the subject is underselling, many of my interviewees found it a deal well worth striking, and few regretted the decision" (p. 311).

My own study seeks to explore the experience of a further narrowed population: not merely a source or subject, but the exemplar — the person whose story functions as an illustration of a much larger issue.

Adjacent Research

The exemplar experience has not, to my knowledge, been studied. Other researchers, however, provide a path. Using a mixed-methods approach, Thomson (2019) examined the experience of more than 40 people who were photographed or video-recorded by journalists — though about half of them didn't interact or barely interacted with that journalist (p. 50). Perhaps unsurprisingly, he discovered a knowledge gap

between journalists and their subjects, specifically when it came to understanding journalist "roles, values, routines, and priorities" (Thomson, 2019, p. 49). The relationship other subjects of visual journalism develop with the storyteller can become much more personal. In her interview study on the experience of documentary film subjects, Walukiewicz (2018) examines the tension between the journalistic ideal of objectivity and "the intimacy and longevity of the storyteller-subject encounter in extensive factual formats" (p. 217). She offers care ethics as a means to mitigate that tension.

Two more studies spotlight how specific people groups responded to being in the news. Maercker & Mehr (2006) examined the effects of media coverage on trauma victims. They found that accuracy did not allay sadness or fear: "Regardless of their accuracy, the emotional reactions of the victims to the reports were predominantly negative" (p. 141). Reports that didn't get the story straight garnered even worse reactions: "Inaccurate reports were associated with significantly higher levels of anger and feelings of exposure" (p. 141). Furthermore, the study found that "respondents who suffered more from PTSD tended to evaluate the media coverage of their case in more negative terms" (p. 141). It's unclear whether the victims had been interviewed by the journalists or their stories merely reported. Along a similar thread, Foster & Minwalla (2018) interviewed Yazidi women, many who had been captured by the Islamic State, about how they perceived the "nature and impact" (p. 53) of media coverage on the girls and women who survived. Nearly half of the women had been interviewed by journalists (Foster & Minwalla, 2018, p. 56). The researchers found the women, in interacting with the news media, navigated a great emotional toll while feeling it necessary to share their

stories and then, eventually, experiencing disappointment that the media attention yielded few returns (Foster & Minwalla, 2018, p. 56).

Other research that includes the voices of those cited in news articles has done so for the purpose of measuring story accuracy. Maier (2005) asked nearly 5,000 people cited as sources in news stories to review those stories for accuracy. The study also asked people how credible they considered the paper, and if they'd be willing to be a source again. The analysis differentiated between two types of errors: objective, like an incorrect age or spelling, and subjective, or "information considered technically correct but misleading" (Maier, 2005, p. 540). People who found errors of either type were less willing to be news sources again. However, in nearly 50 percent of the news stories, sources found subjective errors, like the omission of vital information or a quote taken out of context — and considered them more egregious than objective errors: "As the results suggest, how the story is conveyed is as least as important to sources as getting the facts straight" (Maier, 2005, p. 545). The study, however, didn't explore these sources' overall experience with the news process. Palmer (2018) found that concerns over inaccuracies are merely one piece to consider: "(F)or many subjects, seeing themselves in the news evoked strong feelings, from pride and titillation to embarrassment and even existential angst. Those feelings at times exacerbated subjects' concerns about accuracy and at times eclipsed them altogether" (p. 126).

The Weight of Representation

The stories we tell about other people can have soul-deep and long-lasting consequences. To understand this phenomenon, I borrow from critical race and queer

studies, which address the value of accurate representation and recognition by a public other.

Du Bois (1903) writes about double-consciousness, the holding together of two identities — including one put upon a person by a more powerful other:

> It is a peculiar sensation, this double-consciousness, this sense of always looking at one's self through the eyes of others, of measuring one's soul by the tape of a world that looks on in amused contempt and pity. One ever feels his twoness. (Of Our Spiritual Strivings section, para. 3)

The result is a double-self, one that must reconcile "two warring ideals" (Du Bois, 1903, Of Our Spiritual Strivings section, para. 3). Though Du Bois (1903) centers the experience of Black Americans navigating the white gaze, exemplars in news stories may encounter a similar sense that they've been somehow misrepresented or misrecognized. Palmer (2018) describes a more casual form of this experience as "that's me! … but it's not me" (p. 127). One of her interviewees, upon seeing himself in the news, cringed: "He explained that he felt so … weird. The person in the profile seemed so familiar, and yet so strange and alien and public. And yet *it was him*" (Palmer, 2018, p. 127).

Beyond evincing this peculiar form of disquiet, though, a public representation of self holds great weight for the individual and how society sees them: "People *are* in search of positive recognition because it validates their humanity. When one is misrecognized it subverts the possibility to be made credible, legible, or to be read and/or truly understood" (Miller, 2016, p. 3). The repercussions for the lack of representation — or lack of accurate representation — can be severe. Miller (2016), writing about educational spaces that exclude nuanced representations of non-cisgendered students, dubs this lack a "recognition gap" (p. 3), one which can beget ignorance and, ultimately, gender-based violence.

Connecting journalism and violence may feel extreme. However, Wadekar (2019) argues that the written representation of a person can contribute to violence. She points to two genocides in which journalists helped perpetuate an us-them mentality: "The reporters' artful crafting of 'the other' helped convince people that Jews, in the case of World War II, and Tutsis, in the case of the 1994 genocide in Rwanda, were subhuman groups that should be eliminated" (Wadekar, 2019, para. 5).

Journalism ethics do wrestle with keeping sources safe and, if need be, confidential: "The protection of sources is a core concept in the journalists' *habitus*. All the major ethical codes for journalists throughout the world cover source protection" (Lashmar, 2017, p. 669). More difficult, perhaps, is another form of protection: how journalists steward and affirm a source's complex humanity. In other words, how journalists recognize that people who serve as sources have inherent value — not only as wellsprings of information but "human beings deserving of respect" (Society of Professional Journalists, 2014, Minimize Harm section).

Ethics of Care

Some scholars advocate an even more explicitly people-centric ethic from which journalists might navigate. Critical of a rights-based ethics she thought emphasized masculinity, Gilligan (1977) proposed a care ethic, an approach to moral judgment that centers relationship, responsibility and context rather than an abstract, universalized sense of right and wrong.

A care ethic, therefore, emphasizes the particular. Consequently, it "allows for consideration of how specific (deuniversalized) groups have special pull" (Steiner & Okrusch, 2006, p. 107). Considering that special pull might be the only practical form of

care ethics for journalists, according to Vanacker & Breslin (2006, p. 203). They call for a position that regards care as a "limited resource" (p. 2013) given to certain people in certain circumstances. For reporters, this means that "the more vulnerable a person is, the more the value of compassion should trump values such as objectivity and truth telling" (p. 210). However, the study also recommends joint decision-making between the two in relationship — in this case, journalist and source, rather than a ceding of power from one to the other (p. 209). Finally, Vanacker & Breslin (2006) complicate their guidelines by urging journalists to beware "moral stereotyping" (p. 208), or making assumptions about the vulnerability of a specific kind of source. Instead, they advocate seeking a nuanced understanding of the individual: "This would perhaps lead us to conclude that not all whistle-blowers need to be protected at all times, and that public officials' privacy rights may trump the public's need to know" (p. 208).

One pillar in the Society of Professional Journalists' current ethical code is to "minimize harm" (Society of Professional Journalists, 2014, Minimize Harm section) — whether harm looks like misrecognition, ignorance, violence, or something else. A deeper understanding of how people experience being written about in the news may both complicate and clarify what it means to pursue this ethical standard.

Big-Picture Coverage Replaces Event-Centered Reporting

The style and content of news coverage shifted in the 20th century. An analysis of coverage that spanned 100 years in three American newspapers — *The Oregonian*, *Chicago Tribune* and *The New York Times* — discovered the decrease in event-centered reporting in favor of longer, more thematic, interpretive and contextualized pieces that sought to answer "how" and "why" (Barnhurst & Mutz, 1997, p. 34). This newer

journalism named fewer “actors or victims” (p. 38), relying instead on officials, experts and commentators.

Similarly, the advent of precision journalism — reporting that utilizes social science research methods — in the latter third of the century created a movement in journalism toward stories that captured a bigger picture (Barnhurst & Mutz, 1997, pp. 48–49). Meyer (2002) justified the need for such a practice in his oft-cited text on the subject: “The world has become so complicated, the growth of available information so explosive, that the journalist needs to be a filter, as well as a transmitter; an organizer and interpreter, as well as one who gathers and delivers facts” (p.1). Not only did this emphasis on precision journalism imbue journalism with scientific exactness, it “encouraged [reporters] to investigate the broad context of related events rather than passively describing individual ones in superficial detail” (Barnhurst & Mutz, 1997, p. 49).

Privileging this broad context meant that, when journalists included an individual in a story, the individual often served a different role. Specifically, they became an explanatory tool, an illustration of a larger theme or trend: “In other words, individuals no longer matter in stories as individuals per se, but they take on increasing importance as exemplars of particular human categories or types” (Barnhurst & Mutz, 1997, p. 37). By the 1980s, wielding “personal trouble as entree to a public issue” (Schudson, 2008, p. 18) was a journalistic norm.

Decades later, the practice holds. Palmer (2018) says it this way: “Today, a news subject will likely be cast as a representative of a given group and have his or her personal story explained in relation to broader trends” (p. 10). These changes mean that

ordinary people whose story a journalist weaves into a news article may be "playing a role in a larger saga" (Palmer, 2018, p. 10) they know nothing about and to which they may not consent.

Exemplars and Exemplification Theory

This role differs depending on how a person interacts (or doesn't interact) with a journalist and whether they're named in a story (Palmer, 2018, p.10). A source may solely provide the journalist with background information, and therefore go unnamed in the final piece. A subject, such as a profiled athlete or other celebrity, may never speak to the journalist, yet the piece may wholly revolve around them: "That means news subjects always have something personal on the line because their names, images, or descriptions will be put on display in the product, whether they directly interact with journalists or not" (Palmer, 2018, p. 8).

Also known as an example, case report (Zillmann & Brosius, 2000, Preface section, para. 4), or "human face" (Grabe et al., 2017, p. 909), an exemplar is both source and subject, and they serve a particular function in a story. Hopmann et al. (2017) delineate two types of exemplars: man/woman-on-the-street interviews (also known as "vox pop" interviews), or ordinary people personally affected by the news story's topic who illustrate, through a first-person account, that topic "in a vivid and concrete way" (p. 334).

This study spotlights the latter definition. Here, an exemplar describes "causes, importance, and consequences of the problem from the unique perspective of an individual and function[s] as a case illustration or exemplar of the underlying problem" (Brosius & Bathelt, 1994, p. 48). The use of exemplars in news reporting is well-

documented; Zillmann & Brosius (2000) call them "the lifeblood of journalism" (Preface section, para. 4). Journalism scholarship has explored not only why and how journalists use and choose exemplars, but also the effect of their use on the audience. Hinnant et al. (2013) found that health journalists weave exemplars into their stories for three purposes: to connect, educate and attention-grab (p. 544). An editor-in-chief in the study said that exemplars humanize the story for readers, "putting health 'in the context of their lives'" (p. 544). For another journalist in the study, exemplars made the facts palatable: "A 'human face' diminishes the abstraction of medical science" (p. 544). Across interviews, health journalists used exemplars as hooks to compel readers to engage with the story (p. 544).

Communication scholarship brims with research about how those exemplars influence readers and viewers. This scholarship centers exemplification theory (Zillmann, 1999), which explores how exemplars can — more than hard numbers — have a powerful effect on how people think about and remember a phenomenon. A person's subconscious habit to apply the features they observe in a few cases to a like group supports the theory: "Recipients, as a rule, do nonconsciously infer that the properties observed in a few instances apply to the aggregate of like instances ... It is this deep-rooted inclination to generalize observed phenomena that gives individual events the status of exemplars" (Zillmann, 1999, p. 83).

The effects of exemplars in the news media have been studied in relation to issue perception, risk perception, the evocation of empathy, news credibility and political involvement, to name a few (Brosius & Bathelt, 1994; Spence et al., 2017; Andersen et al., 2017). Early research affirms that exemplars, rather than base-rate information like

hard numbers, influence recipients' perception of the public opinion about, as well as their understanding of, a specific issue (Brosius & Bathelt, 1994, pp. 73-74). For example, a report's base-rate information noted that one third of people who took part in a dieting program regained weight within the following year. When the report also centered several examples of people who had indeed regained weight, recipients believed more than two thirds of people who took part in the program had regained weight: "In terms of media effects, such a selection of exemplars obviously distorts perceptions of reality" (Brosius & Bathelt, 1994, p. 73).

Emotional exemplars can increase not only a recipient's perception of risk generally but personally. In other words, after viewing an emotional example, a person may think they and everyone else are in danger of a particular threat (Zillmann & Brosius, 2000, Emotional Displays in Exemplars section, paras. 4-5). And, anger-invoking exemplars can sway future jurists' "moral evaluations" (Yu et al., 2015, p. 527). Yu et al. (2015) found that, after reading exemplars whose stories provoked anger, readers were more likely to blame the exemplar for their problems. Sympathy-invoking exemplars had the opposite effect: Readers were more likely to blame society (p. 540).

To mitigate ill effects, exemplars must be chosen with special care. Zillmann (1999) writes that, ideally, journalists will select representative exemplars — exemplars that align with the article's base-rate information (p. 75). And if an exemplar isn't representative, the journalist should explain so using numbers: "The typicality of particular occurrences within a group of events would be defined in frequencies or proportions" (p.77). Or, the journalist could select multiple exemplars to round out representation (p. 76). At the very least, Spence et al. (2017) recommend the exemplar

should illustrate the important components of a group: “Obviously, no one example can represent all of the relevant characteristics of an entire population of a topic, but a good exemplar will illustrate the key characteristics of an entire phenomenon” (p. 591).

But what it’s like to *be* the exemplar? Here, the research seems silent — but not for long.

Research Questions

The study will investigate the following queries:

RQ1: How do exemplars describe their experience with the news process?

RQ1A: As perceived by the exemplar, how closely did what they remember being told by the journalist about the process align with what happened?

RQ1B: How do exemplars describe the nature of their relationship with the journalist?

RQ1C: How do exemplars describe the experience of reading about themselves in a published story?

RQ1Ci: How closely does the representation of the exemplar align with how the exemplar perceives herself?

RQ1D: How do exemplars experience the story’s publication and aftermath?

RQ2: How does the experience of being an exemplar affect the way exemplars perceive journalists and journalism?

Chapter Three: Methods

If, as communications theorist James Carey claimed, the purpose of journalism is to "amplify" (Rosen, 1997, The Image of a Republic section, para. 3) conversations already taking place, the journalist often gets the last word. In this study, the people who've been written about have an opportunity to respond. I interviewed six people who served as exemplars in recent news stories. Specifically, their stories served to illustrate a larger issue: affordable housing, equity in public schools, disputed diagnoses (in two articles), deployment, and urban homelessness. Each article ran in a top-circulated U.S. newspaper between July and December 2019.

My focus on the exemplar experience lent itself beautifully to phenomenological research, which seeks to understand how people experience something, rather than "how the event actually took place" (Ungvarsky, 2019, para. 1). Thus, my study excluded the journalists who wrote the articles in which the exemplars appear. What mattered to me wasn't "what really happened," which a journalist may or may not contest, but how an exemplar perceives their experience: "The person's perception and interpretation of the event is given priority in understanding how the event unfolded" (Ungvarsky, 2019, para. 1).

For this focus, in-depth interviews made the most sense. A qualitative technique that centers open-ended questions, in-depth interviews allow the interviewer to acquire a rich, "holistic understanding" of a person's perspective on a particular topic (Berry, 1999, In-Depth Interviewing section). Furthermore, because I centered a specific experience — that of being an exemplar in a news feature — the interviews were semi-structured. Semi-

structured interviews can “provide detail, depth, and an insider’s perspective” (Leech, 2002, p. 665), marrying the insight of unstructured interviews with the focus of structured interviews.

Constructivist Grounded Theory

Because the study centers interviews, I suspected it might elicit a sort of deja vu, a similarly uncanny feeling for people who’ve been in the news. After all, they’ve been interviewed and written about, and their stories — told through the lens of someone else — published for the world’s perennial consumption. In a worst case, it could be a kind of second victimization if I, in the role of researcher, merely extracted their stories and published them with little regard to their own sense-making of the experience.

From theory to method, I sought to set myself apart from journalists and, in doing so, create a wholly distinct experience for the people I interviewed. Specifically, I promised them confidentiality, paid them and gave them “pre-publication review” of my findings. Furthermore, I invited them to participate in the research process by asking whether they had questions for the other people in the study. And, in the spirit of internal consistency, I adopted a constructivist grounded theory approach to guide my analysis.

Grounded theory, pioneered by Glaser and Strauss (1967), pursues the inductive, or bottom-up, development of theory as it emerges from data (Chun Tie et al., 2019). Shame researcher Brene Brown (2012) uses the following quote by Spanish poet Antonio Machado to describe the grounded theory approach: “Traveler, there is no path, the path must be forged as you walk” (p. 251). Brown (2012) writes this: “The mandate of grounded theory is to develop theories based on people’s lived experiences rather than proving or disproving existing theories” (p. 252). The constructivist flavor of grounded

theory, developed by Charmaz (2006), re-positions the researcher as sole creator of meaning; instead, it requires the co-creation of meaning — both the researcher and the participants get a say (Chun Tie et al., 2019, p. 2). Charmaz's (2006) "approach explicitly assumes that any theoretical rendering offers an *interpretive* portrayal of the studied world, not an exact picture of it ... Research participants' implicit meanings, experiential views—and researchers' finished grounded theories—are constructions of reality" (p. 10).

Along these lines, my philosophy as a researcher is interpretive, rather than positivist — constructivist, rather than objectivist. In other words, in this study, I sought to understand the exemplar's experience through their language and lens, rather than assuming a single reality that exists independently of context. The Institutional Review Board at the University of Missouri-Columbia approved this study in December 2019.

Sample

Because I sought people who had each experienced something specific, I selected a criterion sampling frame for this study. Criterion sampling is a derivative of purposive sampling, which requires the researcher to pick a sample of "information-rich cases for the most effective use of limited resources" (Palinkas et al., 2015, p. 534). Simply put, my sample needed to comprise people who could best answer my questions. The method is eponymous; each of my participants fit specific criteria (p. 535).

And this, perhaps, is where Palmer's (2013) study and my own most diverge. Her criteria for interviewees included people quoted once or mentioned briefly in an article (p. 21), as well as people who discussed articles that were published years ago (p. 351). My study solely explored the experience of people who served as exemplars in news

articles. As I've written, an exemplar is an "illustrative individual case" (Brosius & Bathelt, 1994, abstract), a person whose story epitomizes a big-picture phenomenon. Furthermore, I sought people whose stories were published within a six-month timeframe to preserve the memory of salient details. Wary of intercepting them in the story's immediate aftermath, however, I contacted no one within the month following the story's publication.

Sorting readership data. To begin, I used a database maintained by the Alliance for Audited Media (AAM), a nonprofit that verifies data about media. Specifically, I downloaded a custom report of newspapers ranked by print and online readership. I then sorted the data by the number of "adults who 'read or looked into' the newspaper at least once between Monday and Friday and/or the Sunday edition. Adults that have visited the newspaper's website within the past week are also included in this group" ("Audience Summary," n.d., p. 3).

The resulting spreadsheet included data for several media conglomerates like Southern California News Group and Miami Herald Media Company, which combine readership numbers for multiple newspapers within the umbrella group. Intending to focus on specific papers rather than groups of papers, I excluded these rows from the data. My final list comprised 86 papers ranked by print and online readership, primarily large metro dailies like *The Dallas Morning News* and the *St. Louis Post Dispatch*, along with a few national outlets like *The Washington Post* at its top. Ultimately, I explored the top 20, from the *Los Angeles Times*, ranked No. 1, to the *Orlando Sentinel*. The list isn't definitive — *The Wall Street Journal*, *USA Today* and *The New York Times*, for example,

measure their audience in other ways, so they're not included. Still, it provided a useful roadmap to guide my gathering (see Appendix A).

Searching for exemplars. Beginning at the top of my list, I combed the websites for the newspapers with the highest print and online readership according to AAM. Specifically, I sought news features that included exemplars. According to Rogers (2019), news features blend hard-news reporting with feature writing:

> These stories focus on hard-news topics but aren't deadline stories. They bring a softer writing style to hard news. These articles often are people stories, focusing on individuals behind the news, and they often seek to humanize a set of statistics. (News Feature section, para. 1)

I thus excluded spot news, briefs and event coverage — their brevity and quick timetables rarely allow for exemplars. I similarly avoided profiles, which may focus on a single person, but not for the purpose of illustrating a larger phenomenon. Investigations I considered on a case-by-case basis; those with more sensational discoveries, I worried, could introduce a new variable — consequence or fallout from the story's findings, which might color or overshadow the exemplar's experience of being in the story.

Furthermore, I avoided officials, celebrities, and other public figures for whom being in the news is no longer novel, as well as anonymous or pseudonymized exemplars, whose lack of name recognition might diminish the consequence of being in the news. Brosius & Bathelt's (1994) definition of an exemplar led my quest: something that describes "causes, importance, and consequences of the problem from the unique perspective of an individual and function[s] as a case illustration or exemplar of the underlying problem" (p. 48). This definition allowed me to also exclude anecdotes or case studies in which a person's perspective was not included and people who served as a case illustration of a greater something that wasn't problematic.

Thus, the story needed to contain four elements to be considered: 1) a private person whose story functions as an example of a larger issue 2) an exploration of that larger issue 3) hard news subject matter, defined in Tuchman (1973) as "'factual presentations' of events deemed newsworthy" (p. 113), and 4) length. Determining a specific word count is difficult; however, in 2014, the Associated Press told its journalists to keep most news stories between 300 and 500 words in length — more important stories could be longer (Farhi, 2014, paras. 2–4). I expected these news features to be at least 500.

My initial searches followed a similar path, until necessity (and website design) required me to diverge. Each news site's homepage mostly offered breaking news, or stories posted within the week — I always began there. To locate stories within my time frame, I then delved into sections like News, Local, or Investigations, many of which provided paths to older stories, whether through a perpetual downward scroll or a "show more stories" button. A few websites, for papers such as the *Daily News* and *Newsday*, required more creative sifting: through archives of recent cover stories or, via an advanced Twitter search, headlines they pushed on social media. I searched for stories published on NJ.com through Google's news filter.

Next, I skimmed headlines, avoiding stories that seemed unlikely to explore a larger problem and therefore less likely to include an exemplar. Headlines that warranted further scrutiny often referenced a specific population (ex. "Students in Dallas and Fort Worth continue to struggle on national assessments") or implied systemic injustice (ex. "In the rush to harvest body parts, death investigations have been upended"). Some stories, like the former, did not include an exemplar, so I moved on. Other stories

included people I couldn't immediately identify as exemplars, and these yielded a series of decision points. For example, were the family members of someone who died at the hands of an unjust system exemplars? Initially, I decided they weren't — after all, they weren't the person to whom the thing happened. However, after contemplating Brosius & Bathelt's (1994) inclusion of the word "consequences" (p. 48) in their definition of an exemplar, I conceded: A bereaved parent does illustrate the consequences of a larger problem. I also wrestled with whether to include vox pop, or people-on-the-street interviews, a form of exemplar. Ultimately, I followed the lead of Hopmann et al. (2017), who focused their research on people whose stories concretely illustrate something abstract: "Contrary to exemplars appearing in man-in-the-street interviews, these exemplars are personally affected by the problem or issue reported in the news story. Also, they are typically covered more extensively" (p. 334).

Still other stories included multiple exemplars. In these cases, I compared prominence, usually through the "find" function — the person mentioned most in the story made it to my contact list. Occasionally, I considered the diversity of my sample. If I'd most recently garnered a slew of female sources and needed to choose between a man or woman, I'd choose the man. Sometimes, my choice was simply guided by whose contact information I could find.

The culling of email addresses and social media pages always began with a simple Google search: the person's name, location and job (if provided in the story). This search typically yielded Facebook or LinkedIn accounts. Occasionally I found emails, perhaps through a company website or people-search engine. Once, for a student, I pieced together a possible email account using hunter.io — and it worked. I found one person's

spouse through GoFundMe. I emailed her to say I'm a graduate student with an inquiry about the article that recently featured her husband, and could I have his personal email? I decided not to send her my recruitment email to protect his confidential participation in the study. She responded, but he did not.

A myriad unexpected challenges stymied this process: paywalls (and subsequent subscriptions and cancellations), scrolling web pages that stopped scrolling before articles published within my timeframe appeared, anonymous exemplars, pseudonymous exemplars, my inability to email on LinkedIn without a premium account, etc. For this study, I planned to create an inaugural "journalist" Facebook account to help me connect with possible interviewees. Alas, Facebook disabled and subsequently deleted three accounts I created due to "suspicious activity." Thus, I could not include exemplars for whom I'd solely found Facebook pages. More importantly, I struggled to find contact information for people in vulnerable groups — people living in shelters and people without papers, for example. Their experiences in the news demand further study.

Recruiting participants. On Jan. 24, 2020, I sent recruitment emails or LinkedIn messages, along with consent documents (see Appendices B and C), to 11 people from the top 15 newspapers on my list. Those who made the list initially but didn't receive an email, I couldn't contact — I only found their Facebook page or nothing at all — or I chose not to contact. After one week, I sent follow-up emails to people who hadn't responded. I wasn't able to send follow-up messages to people whom I'd contacted over LinkedIn, an inconvenience I hadn't predicted; the site disables the reply function until the recipient responds to the initial email. From this pool, four people agreed to

participate in the study. Three of them ended up following through, and I conducted the interviews during the final week of January and the first week of February.

By the second week of February, after what felt like a prolonged silence, I decided to send out a second swath of recruitment emails. This task required a new list of exemplars and a small adjustment to my timeframe. I'd contacted the first group of recipients in January; my timeframe for them had been July-November 2019. It was now February, so I shifted my timeframe up one month: August-December 2019. I did this to prevent the possibility of further memory loss for people whose stories ran in those earlier months.

Following the same process as before, I sought a new group of people whose stories published in the newspapers ranked No. 16-20 on my list. To further pad the second group, I returned to exemplars I'd identified in my initial search but who hadn't made the cut or whose contact information I couldn't find. For example, when deciding between two exemplars, a man and a woman, in the same article, I'd originally selected the woman — the journalist had featured her more prominently. She expressed interest in the study, but then stopped replying to my requests for an interview time. For my second round of recruitment emails, I returned to the man in the story.

I sent this next batch to nine people on Feb. 14, 2020. A week later, I sent follow-up notices to those I'd contacted through email. As with the first set, four people expressed interest and three ultimately agreed to participate. I completed the final three interviews the last week of February. All told, I sent recruitment emails to 20 people, and although eight agreed to be interviewed, only six followed through. The participation rate was 30 percent.

In my final sample, five of six people identified as white or Caucasian; the sixth, LatinX. They ranged from 21-46 years old, with the median age 38. Four identified as female and two as male. All six held a bachelor's degree, a master's degree or were in the process of pursuing their bachelor's or master's degree. Regionally, these six are scattered from coast to coast; two live in the middle of the country. The location of the paper that published their story doesn't necessarily reflect their current city.

To protect each person's anonymity, I opted not to create pseudonyms in my chapter on findings. I worried doing so would threaten something similar to what Tolich (2004) calls "internal confidentiality," which concerns the "ability for research subjects involved in the study to identify each other in the final publication of the research" (p. 101). Specifically, I feared pseudonyms would provide a narrative throughline for each experience that might enable, for example, the journalist who wrote about someone in this study to identify them. However, to provide context and protect the integrity of the data, I did include details to help illuminate a person's thoughts. For example, when writing about one person who said he doesn't often interact with adults, I referenced his occupation: teacher. Securing confidentiality while maintaining the richness of data — as well as not making readers work too hard — was "an ongoing working compromise" (Saunders et al., 2015, p. 627).

The Interview Process

Between the last week in January and the last week in February, I conducted the six interviews via Zoom, Skype or FaceTime. The interviews lasted between approximately 60 to 110 minutes in length. Informed by an interview guide (see Appendix D), the interviews moved chronologically through the news process the person

experienced, from the news event and/or initial contact with the journalist, to interviews, to the publication of the story and its aftermath. An interview guide, rather than an interview schedule, allows the interviewer greater flexibility (with follow-up questions, how and when a question is asked, etc.) within the interview "to find the best fit" for the interviewee (Lindlof & Taylor, 2011, p. 200).

Although I did not ask every person the same question in the same order, all six interviews covered similar terrain. For those whose stories centered a trauma, such as the death of a child, I prefaced by reminding them they did not need to recount the experience, nor did they need to answer every question. No one, however, chose to skip a question.

As much as possible, I also intended participants to be co-creators of meaning in this study. As referenced, I included a participatory practice in the interview process. Mimicking Watson & Marciano (2015), I added a final question in the interview guide that seeks to reposition researcher and researched (p. 39): What else should I ask the next person I interview about their experience? The first three people didn't offer a question, but the final three did. The fourth person asked two questions:

1. Was the journalist true to your voice? Was the journalist able to capture the "metamessage"?
2. Was there anything that you felt that was really important to you that you wanted said that wasn't said?

I included both of these in my next two interviews, unless the answer arose organically. The fifth person recommended I ask, as I had done spontaneously in her interview, whether the next person considered their own article to be "fake news." I chose not to

include this question in the final interview because the final interviewee said she felt, overall, the article had represented her well. Finally, this person also offered a question, one most people in the earlier interviews answered without my asking: Did they or didn't they have a connection with the journalist?

With permission from each person, I recorded the interviews, then immediately jotted a memo of initial takeaways from the conversation. I also paid each person $25 for their time and insights via check, Venmo or CashApp. Then, I transcribed the interviews by hand and voice typing to allow for my own immersion in the data. Charmaz (1996) recommends doing so as a practice in studying the data: "Your respondents will live in your mind as you listen carefully over and over to what they say" (p. 36). The intimacy of self-transcription, too, helped me develop "theoretical sensitivity," or discernment about what's meaningful in the data (Chun Tie et al., 2019, p. 6). I did not transcribe the entire interview, omitting, for example, the early back-and-forth about whether or not we could hear and see each other properly, or, at the end, the gathering of their personal information so I could pay them for their time. At the very least, I transcribed from my initial question to their answer to my final question, excluding occasional interruptions of, for example, a husband calling or a small child wandering into the room. Still, the transcripts together totaled more than 180 single-spaced pages. After making an initial draft of each transcript, I re-listened to the corresponding interview to accuracy check my work. Then, before I began my analysis, I read through each completed transcript once more. The entire transcription process took nearly five weeks, from the week after I began interviews to the week after I finished them.

Grounded Theory Analysis

Adopting a constructivist grounded theory approach, I began line-by-line coding in late February while wrapping up the final three interviews. The brunt of the work, however, I completed in March. Rather than analyzing the data with a top-down approach, qualitative grounded theory coding means "*creating*" (Charmaz, 1996, p. 37) codes from the data. Charmaz (1996) recommends "examining each line of data and defining the actions or events that you see as occurring in it or as represented by it" (p. 37). So, guided by the examples she provides, my initial codes almost solely comprise present participles — nouns ending in -ing. For example, here's a snippet from one of my transcripts (with codes edited for concision):

Table 1

Line-by-Line Coding Sample

Q: Were there any considerations you had to make about whether or not to share something?	
A: No. I mean, there was nothing to hide. I mean you can't get any worse than this. I mean, there was, there was nothing to hide at this point. You're, you're ripped, you're, you're, you're laid bare. I mean, you, you can't get, at least, I can't even imagine being any more emotionally exposed than the moment you lose a child. So after, it's kind of interesting, because after your, after you go through something like that, you just don't give a shit. Sorry, language. You just don't give a shit anymore.	Feeling there was nothing to hide Feeling ripped open Feeling emotionally exposed Reflecting on aftermath Not giving a shit

Bereft of a printer, I inserted the codes as comments on each line in Google Docs.

After completing the line-by-line codes, I uploaded my coded transcripts into ATLAS.ti, a qualitative coding software, for focused coding. Focused coding required me to select analytically relevant codes that emerged in the line-by-line phase and apply them to larger amounts of data (Charmaz, 1996, p. 40). For example, here's what the same snippet of transcript looked like during focused coding:

Table 2

Focused Coding Sample

Q: Were there any considerations you had to make about whether or not to share something? A: No. I mean, there was nothing to hide. I mean you can't get any worse than this. I mean, there was, there was nothing to hide at this point. You're, you're ripped, you're, you're, you're laid bare. I mean, you, you can't get, at least, I can't even imagine being any more emotionally exposed than the moment you lose a child. So after, it's kind of interesting, because after your, after you go through something like that, you just don't give a shit. Sorry, language. You just don't give a shit anymore.	Navigating disclosure

Some of these focused codes, including "Navigating disclosure" above, became categories by which I organized my findings. Because grounded theory emphasizes process, I continued to keep my focused codes active (Charmaz, 1996, p. 41).

I took an initial pass at focused coding, wrote a draft of my findings, and then took a second pass at focused coding, applying to earlier transcripts codes developed in later ones. As I worked, I compared "data, incidents, contexts and concepts" (Charmaz, 1996, p. 42) to help me develop and understand relationships between my findings. For example, regarding "Navigating disclosure," I sought to understand why some people worried about oversharing while one person said, as seen above, she didn't "give a shit." During the interview, transcript and coding phases, some of which were intertwined, I wrote memos examining relationships like these to capture and clarify my thinking. Did I approach data saturation? Guest et al. (2006) define data saturation "as the point in data collection and analysis when new information produces little or no change to the codebook" (p. 65). During focused coding, the number of new codes I created for each subsequent transcript diminished; for the final transcript, I only created one new code that I later applied to the previous five — a sign of early data saturation.

Conducting Member Reflections

The final week of March, I conducted "member reflections" (Tracy, 2010, p. 844), a revision of member checks that doesn't presume the existence of a single Truth, but rather a multitude of truths. Member reflections serve not only to create space for reflexivity and collaboration, but also "additional data and elaboration that will enhance the credibility of the emerging analysis" (p. 844). I emailed each person a separate draft of my entire findings section — at the time, all 46 pages of it. To simplify the task, I highlighted the lines I'd written from a specific person's interview. I solicited feedback about accuracy and representation, including critiques that I'd missed the mark, and if they had anything else to add (see Appendix E).

All six people responded with, if any, minimal edits. Three people said there was nothing to change. The three that offered edits said I'd flubbed a fact — for example, I'd written about a day in which a settlement agreement was signed. In reality, it wasn't signed that day, but agreed upon. I made the fix. Two people also asked for a quote cleanup. They felt like they were repetitive or said "you know" when they shouldn't. If the verbal tics or fillers shifted meaning, I made the changes. Otherwise, I left their quotes as raw as possible, in a nod to grounded theory but also as a further means for differentiating myself from a journalist. One person offered additions and a subtraction. For example, she elaborated on why she shared the news article with her co-workers, as well as why she said the journalist felt like family. I added her thoughts in. Furthermore, I'd suggested the news article turned her into a "niche celebrity." She felt, I think, like the word trivialized a truly somber trauma; she described it as being "famous for something no one wants to be famous for." I removed it. After each person responded to my request for feedback, I paid them a second $25 for their time, insight and energy.

Research Questions

I came into this study with a few broad questions about the exemplar experience. While writing and revising my findings and discussion, however, I realized my original research questions didn't reflect the breadth or depth of what I'd learned; my interviews had garnered answers to questions I hadn't thought to ask. In response, I adjusted my original questions — tweaking some, adding others — to more accurately represent my findings. Below, the final list:

RQ1: How do exemplars describe their experience with the news process?

RQ1A: Why do exemplars say they talked to the journalist?

RQ1B: How do exemplars describe what it was like to be interviewed?

RQ1C: As perceived by the exemplar, how closely did what they remember about their expectations for the process align with what happened?

RQ1D: How do exemplars describe the experience of reading about themselves in a published story?

RQ1E: How do exemplars assess how they were represented in the article?

RQ1F: What do exemplars say happened after the story published?

RQ2: How do exemplars talk about journalists and journalism after being in the news?

RQ2A: How do exemplars describe the nature of their relationship with the journalist?

RQ2B: How do exemplars describe their willingness to be in the news again?

Chapter Four: Findings

Before and after their articles published, the people in this study moved with agency amid vulnerability. They waded through hard decisions, sundry worries, and feedback from friends, family and strangers. All but one forged a relationship — some brief, some enduring — with the journalist.

For this study, the six re-lived their journeys through the news process. Most shared about the experiences that put them in the news. All six outlined how they first connected with the journalist, how they felt about the published story, and what happened in between. Here, I follow a similar path, relaying my central findings in the order in which the six experienced them (RQ1). Finally, I share how they described their relationship with the journalist, and whether they'd be in the news again (RQ2).

How They Met the Journalist

Four of the six people in this study were initially approached by the journalist; the other two took more active roles — one person responding to a Facebook post that asked for interviews and the other seeking out a journalist at a hearing they both attended. For everyone, the contact came at a busy time. One person was parenting three kids on his own. Another was maneuvering a second litigation. A third was in college. A fourth was changing his name. Alongside daily banalities — grading essays, marriage troubles, paperwork — they'd each experienced, or were experiencing, their own trauma: yearslong battles for basic rights, CPS investigations, living on the streets of an American metropolis, working three jobs to make ends meet, a child's death.

Then, a letter arrived at one person's house. For someone else, it was the Facebook post. For another person, an email. She glimpsed a reporter at a hearing and went up to her. They connected through the military press. She answered a phone call. Someone, a journalist, wanted to know something, or was willing to listen. I remarked to one person how journalists enter the story in medias res. The action has been happening long before the journalist arrives, maybe for years and years, and will continue long after. I told her, feeling the smallness of my profession, "It's like dipping your toe in a stream or river that's already going." She looked at me and said, "And yet, it can shift the tide, right? You can change the river."

Why they agreed to be interviewed. The hope for making change catalyzed people in this study to receive or seek a journalist (RQ1A). Always, they said they sought change on behalf of other people — raising public awareness, promoting a program, holding power to account, exposing an injustice before it hurt someone else. Sometimes, they sought or welcomed change for themselves. For everyone, the motives were mixed.

The awareness and leveraging of privilege. Multiple people were animated by a worry: If something like this could happen to me, what happens when it happens to someone with fewer resources? One person was blunt: "If you don't have the money for the representation for these attorneys, then you're, you're completely, I don't want to say this, but you're screwed."

For more than one person, the awareness of a perceived injustice occurring *despite* privilege highlighted the severity of the issue and magnified the need to address it. These people seemed to feel not only like they had done the right things, but

acknowledged they'd come from asset-rich backgrounds or communities — and therein lay the shock.

"This is my language, it's my culture," one person said. "I have an education, I have a master's degree, I was on the debate team, I'm an assertive person. I know the system as well as I can." Another person described her and her husband as "law-abiding citizens" who "were treated like criminals." Given the opportunity to speak about the issue, they did. One person said it felt like a "duty" to step up:

> This is happening to us, this is happening to everybody. And we knew that, if we went to the media and we spoke up, that we could help everybody else. That we could help the people who didn't have the money, the people who aren't educated and don't know what their rights are … and that, that's why we wanted to do it. We wanted to help all of them.

Another person summed up the sentiment in a lesson to her son, whose story their article centered. "This is not just about you," she said. "It's really important that we share your story so that other kids can get help, too. Because not all kids are as lucky as you." This desire, to harness a platform on behalf of someone else with fewer resources, propelled these people to press forward amid worries about what might go wrong.

Hoping "it could help." Whether or not a sense of duty undergirded their willingness to be in the news, every person was pulling for, or hoping for, change. For everyone, that looked, at least in part, like raising awareness. One person was hoping to complicate the narrative surrounding traditional gender roles. Another said she wanted to catalyze a conversation about a disputed diagnosis to mitigate the stigma of that diagnosis: "That's the pot I wanted to stir." More than one person emphasized the scope of the problem, and the resulting urgency for it to be highlighted: "There's tons of us. I'm

on these Facebook groups across the U.S., and it's like hundreds and hundreds and hundreds of us that this has happened to."

Multiple people hoped highlighting the issue would maintain accountability. One person, whose lawsuit involved a school district, wanted the public to know how their tax dollars were being spent: on attorney fees. Another hoped to provoke legislation that would strip immunity from certain medical providers. Still another hoped to spur a local official to reconsider his stance on a controversial diagnosis.

Some people also sought, even in some small way, to provide solidarity, hope and mentorship for people who might be going through the same struggles. "If I can help one set of parents deal with this and, and deal with … that stigma," one person said, "then, I'm open. I'm ready for it." Another person said sharing his journey to recovery from addiction allowed not only people in his previous life to see in print that he's doing well, but, hopefully, would model "for the people who also are still struggling" that they, too, can make a change. Whether their hope was to complicate an issue or spotlight it for a few or for many, each person said they sought a bettering beyond themselves.

Seeking personal benefit. Their hopes were manifold. More than one person approached the news process with open hands, welcoming the possibility of receiving something personally.

One person said he wasn't expecting any form of compensation, but acknowledged it's happened when he's been in the news before. Once, after a story ran, a social service program sent him some money. "It was never a huge motivation," he said. He primarily wanted to help and to share his story. "And also," he said, "it doesn't hurt if somebody contacts me and wants to cut me a check."

Another person felt some "peer pressure" by his parents — they thought the good press might increase his job security. He's not privy to the protection of a union. "In theory, it might be harder for them to get rid of me if, you know, my name's in the paper like that, promoting [my work]."

Still another, navigating a lawsuit, was encouraged by a friend in public relations to share her story far and wide: "She just felt like, you got to get some PR behind this because this story is just, it's insane." She hoped the lead photo for the piece would convey her resolve — she'd already told her attorneys she'd take the case to the Supreme Court. "I'm like, 'Yeah, but don't fuck with my kid.' Sorry! That's, that's what this picture needs to show. It's like, 'Don't mess with my kid. You've messed with the wrong mom.'" Ultimately, they hoped for positive press — and feared for worse.

What they worried about. Despite their will, there was worry. The people I interviewed offered a cavalcade of concerns, most of which never came to pass. Together, they worried about the interview process and the final product: whether it would be accurate and what would come of it. The fears ran through their minds like movie credits. One person called them, at various intervals, "dumb thoughts," "random thoughts," and "stupid thoughts."

He, particularly, voiced concerns about the interview process, which took place in his home. Common insecurities felt by hosts arose: "What are they going to see in my house? Is it going to be — you have the classic, is it messy?" And, later, "Oh, is my floor clean enough? Is this, what are they going to ask me?"

The five people who didn't see their articles before they published didn't know quite what to expect of the story. One person worried about accuracy: "What if he says

something that's not true? What if I don't agree with it?" Another worried about representation:

> I guess the fear is that they don't get the story straight, right? That they make me look out, look like, I guess the fear is that I'm made to look out like this crazy mom … That my intention wouldn't be portrayed as authentic.

Reading the article for the first time, another person worried about the journalist's intentions: "Okay, where is this going? What is her motivation? Why? What's her 'why'? … You know, what is she, what is she planning on doing with this information we give her?"

Worries about the article's possible aftermath often centered how other people in real life and online would respond, and whether the story would negatively affect the people in this study or their children down the road.

Worrying about public perception. Each person knew, by agreeing to be in the news, they were stepping into Roosevelt's arena, and that critics were likely waiting in the wings. "You're like, 'Oh gosh, are people going to look at us differently?'" one person said.

The fears extended to their communities. One person wondered, "Like, walking outside, are people going to think we're child abusers?" She acknowledged the personal and professional blowback such a reputation could incur: "You don't want your name tied to being accused of child abuse. That is like the absolute, as a parent, that is like the absolute worst thing, especially in Corporate America."

Another person said her spouse worried about how people might judge them out and about — though that worry predated the article. "What if people, if we go out and enjoy ourselves? If we laugh? If we go out and have fun? What are people going to say

about us?" she asked, outlining his fears. "You know, 'They're supposed to be grieving parents.'"

Yet another was concerned about the article's online reception. "What are people going to put for comments?" he said. "What's going to come out of this that could become negative? How are people going to view it?"

He wasn't alone. People in more than one conversation remarked about today's sociodigital landscape. They knew the article would be, as though dipped in amber, preserved for the coming years, searchable and vulnerable to critical spirits. This latter concern — what one person called "the backlash of any positivity" — carried special weight. "With modern media," he said, "you always hear about, you hear about something positive and then things going negative." He worried what someone might "try to dig" up to bring him down.

One person said she knew, in taking a stand, she was also taking "an emotional risk":

> And when you stand up and say, "No, that's not what happened," especially in today's world, when trolls are out there by the millions and are willing to say the worst things in the world and this is an emotionally charged subject that, that was the, what I was steeling myself for.

Wrapped within concerns about searchability, trolls, and comments, was the understanding that these articles will, ostensibly, live online forever — and what that might mean for the kids.

Worrying about their families. Four of the six articles included or centered children younger than 13. The participants who parent did what they could to seek informed consent from their children, or, at least, explain to them what was happening and why. Still, there were worries about both digital and physical worlds.

One person worried about bullies:

> Our children, they go to school and kids are mean, and putting our reputation and their reputation out there was a big thing. And then we had a fear of it being national, and somebody finding them or somebody coming to coerce them to say something, because their faces are out there, right?

She and her husband prayerfully considered the decision, she said. They spoke with their older children about the process and asked if they had any issues: "And both of our children, when we talked to them, were like, 'You know, we want to do the right thing.'"

Another parent approached her son with a similar openness, a posture with which she and her husband discuss their second child's death. "We've never sugarcoated anything," she said. "He doesn't understand. He was three and a half at the time … He can't, the little minds don't work that way." She said she and her husband live for their son and for the memory of his sibling: "At times, in our deepest, darkest times, that's what motivates us to keep moving forward. So, not having him in the story would have been just, it wouldn't have been the complete story."

One person was cognizant of detailing the anxiety her son felt at school. But the season for bullying, she knew, would be short-lived. As he grows, she said she imagines the people who learn of his story will approach him with empathy and curiosity: "Nobody's going to care, right? And as you get older and older, it's like, 'Wow, that really sucks, that must have been really traumatic for you, right?'" Furthermore, she's not a "helicopter parent" — while she advocates for his rights in a system that's bigger than him, she expects him to fight his own daily battles. She knows navigating future feedback will be one of them:

> Depending on how this story is written, and gets out, is it going to negatively impact him, like some day? Like, "Oh, your mom is the crazy one that sued the district?" Or, is it going to be perceived more like, "That's cool that you fought to

> get what you needed"? I don't know. It's his story, I mean, he's going to have to figure that out.

She told her son, "We're going to do this article, and it's important to get your story out," framing it as an opportunity to help people like him.

Another parent approached the article with similar trust in her child, who's still too little to understand. "But I feel like, when he gets old enough to understand, he will, he will be okay," she said. "Especially if we can make the proper changes to the system that need to be made." Her sentiment echoes a greater finding: That the hope for a positive outcome outweighed, but did not dissolve, fears over a negative one.

The Interview Process

The shape of their interviews with journalists, and the timeframe in which they occurred, looked different for everyone. For one person, it was an under-30-minute phone call. For another, 10 months of regular contact. Two people interviewed over the phone, then followed-up via email. For another, it was a couple phone calls, a coffee, and a few hours spent with the journalist and photojournalist at home and church. Another, a three-hour chat at his house. In five out of six stories, in fact, the journalist and/or photojournalist came into the person's home. Through the process, while the journalist and, sometimes, photojournalist, gathered, sifted, clarified and verified, their interviewees approached with skepticism, trust and lots on their mind — including a desire to shape the story (RQ1B).

Navigating disclosure. The interviews didn't happen in a vacuum. The participants brought life's stressors, related and unrelated to the subject matter, into the interview space. "There's a whole other side to everything that people go through," one person said. He was worrying about childcare and the state of his floors. Another didn't

want to share much about her family — she "didn't know if they wanted to be in the article or not." Furthermore, she had to clock in at work.

Some of these stressors they shared with the journalist. Others, they wrestled with quietly. For more than one person, determining how much to divulge — and holding the other things back — during the interview required some mental calculus.

When the journalist and photojournalist entered one person's house, for example, he feared he'd spill the beans — or that someone, whether journalist or reader, would unearth them. There was a long list of things he didn't want them to know: His spouse had been investigated by CPS a couple years back. In high school, he'd given a speech advocating nuclear weapons against Iran. What if he'd been "drunk at 21 and said something ridiculous"? He worried it might return to haunt him:

> You're afraid that that's going to come out, that somebody's going to bring up something from your distant past or something like that. That's not really a reflection necessarily of who you are today. It might be part of your story, but we all grow.

The day of the interview, his mom came in to watch the kids. With everyone present, he felt the crowd — and an acute sense of being watched. He'd wished they interviewed him at work, a space where he could slip into what he calls the "ideal self":

> I'm always trying to be that ideal [at work], which you can never possibly 100% be, but that's what you're trying to be ... It's unrealistic, but. And then, when you come home, it's like, this is who I really am and that's the space that the reporter was coming into, and I probably didn't feel as comfortable with it.

He was feeling the tension of public becoming private — a journalist and photojournalist entering his home — and private becoming public: His story being packaged for other eyes. Which parts, he didn't know. "You're like, 'Well, what's the story going to be?' So,

you know, you're promoting this ideal," he said. "Yet at the same time, you have these things in your background where you're like, 'What if this comes out?'"

Of the people I interviewed, he wasn't alone in trying to gatekeep which information ran in print. Another person was limited in what she could say publicly by an ongoing lawsuit featured in the news story. Strategically, and with legal oversight, she didn't disclose certain facts or, when she did, had them "redacted" before publication. Some of the omissions were a "huge part of the story."

"A lot of the stuff that I think really could have given the story a lot more power, emotional pull, couldn't be stated," she said.

For others, the facts they held tight to their chests weren't necessarily skeletons, nor were they governed by external forces. They were just personal. One person, intent on curating his privacy, was in the process of legally changing his name when the journalist approached him. There was a certain safety in the anonymity that change offered. When the article ran, it ran with his old name. Today, his name is more common, less searchable — and allows him more control over his story. He said he wouldn't have done the interview with his new name:

> I feel like that had been my story for so long … I've had struggles in my past and stuff, but I don't want that to be the defining characteristic of my story and who I am, so I was kind of glad to leave that behind … When people Google me, I don't want that to be the first thing they see.

One person was decidedly unconcerned about saying too much. "I mean, there was nothing to hide," she said. "I mean, you can't get any worse than this … You're ripped, you're laid bare." Her article traced the worst day in her life: her child's death. "I can't even imagine being any more emotionally exposed than the moment you lose a

child," she said. "So after, it's kind of interesting, because after you go through something like that, you just don't give a shit."

Then again, her husband disagreed. "[He] didn't want our dirty laundry strewn all over things," she said. He's "very sensitive, and he's very attuned" to how people perceive them as bereaved parents. She wanted to be represented well, yes. But as for disclosing too much? "If we really wanted to get this story out there, we couldn't hold anything back."

Hesitations and restrictions, however, didn't stop those who had them from approaching the journalist with imagination and clout.

Maneuvering power dynamics. Though Malcolm (1990) depicts sources as doe-eyed victims, "astonished when they see the flash of the knife" (p. 145), the people in this study navigated the interview process with clarity, vision and agency. They did not always get what they wished in the end, but it mostly turned out alright. What power they had, they leveraged, and, in varying degrees, their stories reflected it.

Offering a vision. The day the photojournalist arrived, the interviewee was ready. She'd studied nonverbal communication in school, and she'd checked all the boxes for likeability: pink top, hair down, glasses. She had a plan for a photo illustration, and a tub of paperwork to make it happen. She also had a tip for the journalist to investigate a specific type of public record. The photo illustration, with adjustments made by the photojournalist, became the lead photo for the story. And, findings gleaned from the records request provided the story's nutgraf. When the story ran, her fingerprints were all over it.

Something similar happened for another participant. She told the journalist what she wanted the story to include: the scrutiny and stigma people like her experience, for example, as well as her family's Catholic faith. The journalist, she said, acquiesced: "She checked all my boxes, if you will. So I was happy. I was happy."

A third person had a different experience. He'd suggested to the journalist the story spotlight his classroom. He outlined thematic parallels the journalist could make between his work as a teacher, the lives of his students and the article's subject matter. He'd basically written a story in his head. The reporter didn't bite. However, he did end up including one student's story in the piece. It wasn't perfect, but it was something. Regardless of whether their visions came to fruition, these people were active, seeking to become co-creators of meaning in a relationship not often considered collaborative.

Offering stipulations. In one case, someone's vision served as an ultimatum. When she and the journalist connected over the phone, she was still on the fence about the article. She knew the journalist was credible, and a strong writer — but would she do the story justice? The journalist had already pitched a storyline to an editor, one that didn't align with what this person believed really happened. So, she offered a stipulation: "If you are not open to discussing [that storyline], our conversation is ended and we will not participate." When they met for an initial coffee, the journalist asked if she could take notes. In response, she offered another stipulation: "I said, 'Yes, but you can't use them until we say yes.'"

The journalist respected her requests, her "curve balls" and more:

> She was willing to … kind of allow her story to be led by our experience. And in fact, she told us on many occasions our story changed the whole direction of hers. That the story that she finally wrote was not the story that she initially set out to write.

This person's resolve illustrates that the people interviewed for a news story do hold a vital bargaining chip: their willingness to participate.

Receiving pre-publication review, or being kept in the loop. More often than not, the people I interviewed entered the news process with questions. For some of them, those unknowns were packaged as worries about the final product — what the story would look like, how their piece would fit in, whether the journalist would get it straight, how other people would respond. All six knew, more or less, what the article would be about — beyond that, their expectations and foreknowledge diverged (RQ1C). For four people, the journalist answered some of those questions, and created space for pushback, through pre-publication review.

There is no journalistic standard for how much, if any, of a story a source should see before it prints. The practice takes many forms, and the people I interviewed experienced a panoply. One person saw nothing; after her initial phone interview, she never heard from the journalist again — she discovered the article had published after a friend sent it to her. On the contrary, another person received what she called "redlining privileges." The journalist dropped off a paper copy of the whole story at her house the day before it went to press: "She's like, 'mark it up if you need to.' And then she left." Reading the story was, admittedly, hard. "It was surreal and it was horrible at the same time, because I was reading myself going through everything," she said. Still, the opportunity "empowered" her to offer edits. She took a Sharpie to it, made some changes — mostly additions — and those made it into print: "Up to the eleventh hour, [the journalist] was adding things, which was awesome."

The rest experienced something in the middle. One person verified a few details via text message, but that was it. For another, the journalist conducted fact checks over the phone — then subjected the story to a vigorous round of vetting, a behind-the-scenes process that involved multiple attorneys. Another received an email with a list of facts the journalist planned to include in the article. Again and again, almost unequivocally, the more the journalist shared with the source beforehand — even mere updates — the better their experience.

One person, who received the emailed list of facts, spent about two weeks verifying them with her attorney and the journalist, who she said was "really thorough." If she or her attorney said something wasn't right, the journalist respected it. Hers was the story that involved a lawsuit. She said she told the journalist,

> I'm assuming you're going to lead this story with integrity, and because I'm in the middle of litigation, I'm willing to talk with you, and share with you things, but we have to have mutual trust. I have to be able to trust that if I say, you're, when I run it by my attorney, and I say you have to take this out, I need you to do that.

The stakes were high, not only for the litigation, but for her child's life. The journalist was "sensitive" to that. In the end, the person in this study said she "did such a great job."

The person who received fact checks over the phone also received a heads' up about how the journalist would need to include statements from people with whom the participant disagreed:

> [The journalist] would say, "Hey, are you comfortable with this?" And we would say yes or no. And I don't know if that's something that you guys are supposed to do or not? But I feel like he was very mindful in that way.

The kindness was not that he was giving her power over the story — "it's not like I have a choice in the matter," she said — but the consideration afforded her the opportunity for

informed consent. “He would walk us through things that were happening to ensure we understood where we were in the process,” she wrote during member reflections.

For another person, the journalist’s “accessibility” impressed him:

> If I had questions, because sometimes there was a lot of back and forth needed through email to coordinate either with her or to coordinate with the photographer, or maybe I emailed her and I was supposed to email somebody else ... I didn’t feel like I was bugging her, and there was an availability factor that really said a lot.

She also “took it upon herself” to email him the link when the story published, he said, and even mailed him a print copy. Still, he advocates pre-publication review. Once, while living abroad, another journalist profiled him. Before the story published, she sent it to him — the whole draft, and let him review it. “That was perfect, because her article contained some very critical corrections that I feel like she should make, and I sent them back, and she published it exactly with my corrections,” he said. “And that was great.” He said it’s his understanding that that sort of review is not the norm for American journalists, but he thinks it should be.

Encountering the Article

Reading their stories for the first time kindled delights, sorrows and disappointment (RQ1D). For some, it was a gut-punch. “Like being shot out of a cannon,” one person said. She hadn’t slept, waiting for the article to publish in the wee hours of the day. She approached the digital version, “shaking and crying” on her couch before work. “We were on edge,” she said. “Because it’s your name, it’s your family, it’s your reputation, your job, your friends, your community.”

Another person echoed a similar anxious grief: “It’s tough, it’s hard to get through. And so, you have that emotional outpouring of seeing your name in print, and this ridiculousness that goes along with it.”

Both their stories involved their children, and both had gone through trauma. In those initial moments of that first read, they had questions. “It was kind of chaotic,” one of them said:

> In my head, not around me, but like, the “what ifs.” What if he says something that’s not true? What if I don’t agree with it? What if, because I, we had poured our hearts out, we had poured our hearts and I feel like our souls into this, and what if he didn’t convey it properly?

These worries became reality for someone else in the study. When she read the final piece, she said she felt disappointed and embarrassed. The journalist had misrepresented not only her, but also the issue. But for others, the first read was merely a pleasant surprise, even a delight. One person didn’t expect to be the lead photo. Another read the digital version — he was initially blocked by the website’s paywall — while sipping his rum and coke. The next day, he took his kids to the corner store for the print edition. When they saw they were on the front page, a customer asked for his sons’ autographs.

For more than one person, the act of reading took on an obsessive quality — they read the story and reread it and reread it and reread it. For one person, whose child died, that sort of rumination didn’t make sense. She read the full story before it published, and not once after. Months later, she hasn’t looked at what she calls the “edition proper”:

> I put it in the same category as looking at [my child’s] death certificate: It doesn’t change anything. I mean, my story’s out there. I know what it says. But, reading it, I’m, it allows you to kind of go into that dark hole that you really don’t want to go into. So, I know it’s there, when I want to look at it I can, but I, I don’t. I have better things to do.

As each person read, they also assessed.

Assessing representation. Five of the six people in this study felt the journalist represented them, overall, well (RQ1E). “Perfectly, pretty much,” one person said. “Very fairly,” said another. Still, they had complicated feelings about reading themselves in print.

I asked one person (who said the article portrayed her “very well”) if her representation aligned with how she sees herself. She didn’t hesitate. “No,” she said. “It never aligns with how we see ourselves.” She recalled an old saying: “You don’t know how you look till you get your picture took.” The camera may not lie, she said, “but people have biases.” And those biases can lead to inaccuracies and omissions. Whether they matter depends partly on how the journalist captured, or failed to capture, what one person called “the metamessage.”

Delivering the “metamessage.” At the end of each interview, I asked whether the person with whom I was chatting had any questions for the other people in the study. One person said she’d ask whether the story was “captured accurately” and, along the same lines, whether the others felt the journalist “was true to [their] voice.” She offered the word “metamessage,” or “the message behind the message,” as a metric. In her story, for example, the journalist included one quote that she felt reflected the “integrity” behind her decisions:

> I was so thankful she captured that one quotation. Because that’s really at the essence, she grabbed the essence of what I was going for, right? Like there’s all this minutiae in the story ... but the essence of really why I’m fighting is because I want people to know: This is the length that we have to go to get basic educational rights.

Other people alluded to this ultimate message. One described it as “the underlying current.” Another, “the idea.” Another, simply, “the story.” The metamessage could be a feeling, a motive, a nuance. One person, for example, hoped the journalist portrayed the day her child died as “just another ordinary day.” “I think that’s important,” she said, “because it supports the shock and the tragedy of it all. You know, you’re going from one instance where everything’s fine then another instance, it’s not.”

Another person said he thinks “articles mean different things for different people.” For him, the core idea was to complicate commonly held stereotypes about the military, and he said he thinks the article did that. Another person delineated the representation of self from representation of the issue — and gave greater gravity to the latter. In her story, she felt both were off, but her heartier dislike stemmed “not just because of the way that I was presented, but more so because of the way that [the journalist] conducted her research.”

The journalist’s accurate rendering of the metamessage, however, absolved minor missteps along the way.

Dismissing (certain) inaccuracies. Every person noticed inaccuracies when they first read their stories. For all but one, this initial read took place after publication.

In one article, the journalist flubbed the timeline — what happened when: “I was doing laundry that day, but, you know, it didn’t happen right before.” Another person said he doesn’t like pricey dinners, but the article said he did. One person knew there was an error but couldn’t remember what it was.

For most people, these errors incurred only a flicker of concern — if that. Their dismissal of the inaccuracies arose from differing conceptions of error, as well as how they perceived those errors to affect the story.

For example, not everyone considered the errors "errors of fact." In the article with the laundry, the person said, "I mean, there were little things like that, but nothing that I would say were factually, things that were factually incorrect." In the article with the fancy dinners, the person said the inaccuracy was "not a fact."

In the former case, the person who received prior review from the journalist noticed a few errors. She mentioned them to the journalist but signed off anyway: "I said, 'Don't change them, don't worry, it doesn't change the story.' To me, it didn't matter whether I was in the garage, in the kitchen, in our bedroom ... It doesn't change the story, doesn't change the outcome," she said. She attributed the errors to "poetic license."

A common refrain from others who didn't share was that the errors were "irrelevant" or "immaterial." For those who wrestled with sharing, other considerations were also involved. More than one person felt the acknowledgment would be futile: "The story's already out."

For example, one person noticed two problems in the story. The former was an error of omission. He'd specified that a 12-step program was pivotal to his recovery from addiction, but the journalist didn't include the detail. He chose not to tell her afterward:

> The paper had already run. So I think the most that could be done, which I wouldn't want to be done, is, I've seen where articles online that stay archived like this have been corrected, but they'll have a note on there — they'll say, "A previous issue said this, but actually this," and I ... feel like personally that would be a little silly. Just say, "Oh, a previous article left off that he joined a 12-step program."

He, along with another person, who said it seemed "petty," felt like pointing out an error could strain the relationship he'd developed with the reporter. "We had a really friendly relationship," he said, "but I didn't want to be too combative."

He did email her about his other problem, which he deemed "careless wording on her part, or a misunderstanding." The journalist, he said, had mischaracterized his bachelor's degree. In the article, she described him graduating from a program for non-traditional students, not mentioning the degree. He said it made it sound like he'd earned a certificate, instead of "the same degree as everybody else." His concern was that her wording appeared to diminish what he'd achieved: "It just sounded so much less than what it actually was." Even so, after he sent the first email, he sent a second to soften the criticism: "I sent a follow-up to say, 'I hope my critique didn't sound too negative,' and I mentioned that every article I've ever been a part of has at least one or two things off."

These smaller inaccuracies for the people in this study didn't, overall, hold much weight. More frequently, they spoke about another type of error, sometimes called subjective rather than objective: that of omission.

Noticing and lamenting omission of detail. If there was an underlying disappointment in every piece, it was that the journalist left out something important. For one person, it was the 12-step program — a key component of his recovery from addiction. For another person, it was his students' stories. For a third, it was context, both for her circumstances and the issue itself.

Hers was the affordable housing story. Before the interview, she expected the journalist would ask her to discuss the issue — not her personal story. She'd been connected to the journalist through a friend, someone with whom she's given

presentations on financial aid, and therefore projected the journalist needed her for her expertise. It turns out, the journalist wanted something else: the "quote unquote emotional side of the story."

The mismatched expectations for her role in the story might have turned out okay — the participant said she knows the personal anecdote is an important part of the issue. But she wishes it weren't her only part in the article. In the end, the journalist pulled one quote (that the participant said she'd offered, partially, in jest) and a couple paragraphs of her personal background for the story.

The insert wasn't, overall, true to her voice — too much was missing. "I wasn't disappointed that she pulled that quote, but in the context of it all, it's disappointing that she pulled *only* that one quote," she said. "And that was the quote that she chose." As for the rest of the article, she said it felt "cherry-picked and exaggerated" — not quite fake news, though she did consider labeling it as such, but simply without the necessary context.

The other three articles included an "us against them" narrative arc. One story centered a lawsuit. The other two, disagreement over a diagnosis. All three people noticed how much the journalist included of "the other side." Mostly, the balance wasn't a problem — in fact, more than one person praised it, or came to praise it.

One person told the journalist she'd written a "super fair" article. "I felt like she did her job in terms of getting, getting everybody, getting everyone's voices, not just getting mine, or our family's." Another, on her first read, was disappointed. She wanted more weight placed on the wrong done to her family. After a week or two of processing, she changed her mind. "When I first read it I was like, 'wow,' you know, this does have a

lot of them in it, but it had to, right?" she said. "It had to. And I respect [the journalist] for that." She began to regard the balance as the article's strength: "The neutrality of it is the beauty of it."

"You could read the article," she said, "and you could see without him telling you where the mistakes were, and you could make up your own mind about it."

Still, two of the three felt a lingering desire for more — more weight given to their perspective, more weight given to the consequences of the problem. One person, who said she felt limited by her lawsuit, said there was "more that I wanted to say."

"I would have wanted just how much this impacts a child's life to be communicated," she said. "So, I mean [the journalist] stayed pretty high-level ... I don't think the public really understands." She's hoping for a follow-up piece that centers the consequences of the problem for the child.

The third person said she wished the article tipped more toward her perspective, her community, but knew she "wasn't writing the article." She concluded with a kind of extension of grace, an acceptance: "I think the article did it justice. Of course, I would have liked her to have written more. But, she needed to do what she needed to do." For everyone, the omission involved something important about their own journeys or something they considered integral to understanding the issue.

Assessing "fit" of other exemplars. In five of the six articles, the journalist included more than one personal story, or exemplar, to illustrate the larger issue. That wasn't necessarily a surprise — more than one person knew the journalist was seeking other stories. Still, they didn't know how many of these anecdotes there would be, what they would look like, or how their inclusion would reflect on their own narrative.

In one story, which involved litigation, the journalist began with one exemplar (whom I interviewed for this study) and ended with another. The two stories illustrated disparate paths toward the same goal: securing basic educational rights for kids. The latter story didn't involve litigation, and the person I interviewed speculated it was chosen for the journalist by the school district:

> I think [a district official] selected [the other exemplar] and said, "Hey, because you went through this alternative dispute process, will you be a face and a voice in this article saying it was a positive experience?" I'm sure that's how it went down.

The inclusion of the second story didn't nettle her. "I was just happy to hear … that they'd gotten a positive resolution," she said.

Another person, whose story the journalist placed alongside three others, felt the neighboring narratives bolstered her own. She'd expected, coming into the interview process, that her story wouldn't be the only one: The article had been pitched as a series.

Even then, she only knew "high-level." It was several months into the interview process before she learned her story would make it into print; two or three more months before she learned her story would be in the first article. Along the way, she learned another family, whose case she'd followed before meeting the journalist, was also being considered for the series. When the series ran, she felt the stories made a cohesive whole. "I felt like [each subsequent story] fit in with my story," she said. "I feel like each story compiled on my story. It was the same thing, over and over again, in different ways, with more horrific outcomes than my story." She thinks of the other people warmly, keeps up with their cases, and hopes to connect with them on future projects — maybe a panel discussion, or a documentary. "I would be very open to that, too, you know, all of us

collaborating and working together," she said. "I feel like that would be a really cool thing to do."

For two other people in this study, the stories the journalist placed — or didn't place — alongside theirs were harder to swallow. For one person, whose article described the death of her child, reading about the deaths of two other children was, immediately, "horrifying. It was absolutely horrifying."

"You never want to hear about that," she said. "Even as, just as a human being, much less being a parent." In other circumstances, if she comes across a story that includes the death of a child, she clicks to something else. But this was her story, too, and she kept reading. Another feeling, a tension, arose.

> To be in the same article with them, it was, it was difficult. Because, A, I didn't believe I belonged there — because of different circumstances. But the outcome's the same: You're the parent of a dead child. So, you're rowing in the same boat.

She felt sympathy for them but knew her child died in a different way. She said she wished other families with circumstances closer to her own were represented, "so we're not the only ones."

She didn't know why the journalist didn't make that choice: "I don't know if she had time, I don't know if she just felt that we were, we were it, and we, our story was strong enough to stand on its own." But she didn't share those concerns, that feeling of not-belonging, with the journalist.

> Because I think that's, that's a me thing. I, I think that they are comparable to ours. I mean from her perspective, they are. And so, yeah, I definitely, and, and I kind of knew that reading it, I mean you don't, you don't want to be placed in that category. And so I mean, nothing makes it okay, that category is not okay, much less being placed in that category. So, you know, that was just, it's a me thing ... and it's just one of those things you have to accept.

Another person found the journalist's selection of anecdotes harder to accept — not because of what those anecdotes implied about each other, but about how they failed to illustrate the issue. The article, which discussed the affordable housing crisis, included a captioned photo of an unnamed woman, and one quote from an anonymous source. The person I interviewed was, for all intents and purposes, the story's only exemplar.

Still, she derided the journalist's choice to compare her story to the photographed woman's. First, she felt the circumstances were too different to relate. The woman in the photograph lived in transitional housing; the person I interviewed was a renter. Second, she felt her own story did not reflect the "median" story (she referenced statistics regularly throughout our conversation). In other words, her story represented an extreme case, and could therefore color readers' perception of the issue. She'd hoped the journalist would interview quite a few other people to help illustrate the problem's depth and breadth:

> You can't base a huge issue on two stories. Like, my story is very unique, very different from everyone else's, and I feel like to nitpick two stories and be like, "Look it, this is a huge issue," is a huge no-no.

She further criticized the journalistic norm to spotlight extreme cases. Partly, the problem stems from self-selection: The people willing to be interviewed may be more prone "to answer with more of an emotional bias," either for or against the topic, compared to someone whose story represents "the median of the standard deviation curve."

"And I feel like it's a reporter's job to read [those biases] and understand that and reframe that," she said. "I think they're doing a disservice to everyone reading the article when they fail to do that. Which this journalist did." She worries the emphasis on extreme cases, as well as the exclusion of context, contributes to polarization among

readers. Displeased not only with how she was represented, but also by how the journalist rendered the issue, she told no one about the article.

Ultimately, the inclusion of adjacent personal narratives in the article wasn't a shock. It did, however, lead people to compare stories.

The Aftermath

As I write, it's been at least three months since each of the six stories published. I wanted to know what, if anything, each person's experience with the news wrought: How did they interact with the article after it came out? What feedback did they receive? Did their hopes come to fruition? Did their fears come to pass? Would they be willing to speak with a journalist again?

It turns out, most people did garner something good (RQ1F). More often than not, they shared the story via email and social media, and the feedback they received was mostly positive. Were the many "what-ifs" made manifest? "No," one person said, laughing. "They were all made up in my head." Her answer spoke for (almost) everyone. Furthermore, most people spoke positively of the journalists with whom they worked. Only one person's experience, overall, was resoundingly negative. As for their willingness to be in the news again, everyone said yes. However, some people said they would agree only under certain circumstances.

Responding to the article. Although the article could ostensibly be laid to rest for the journalist on the day of publication, the people in the story — and the story's readers — continued to interact with it.

Sharing the story. Four out of six people passed their published pieces forward, either via email to specific people, or toward social media's anonymous crowd.

One person, who'd been in the process of changing his name, chose not to repost the story. Instead, he emailed it to some friends, especially people who lived in the city where the article ran. They'd known him during harder times, and the article served as evidence that his life was on track. "It's just a feel-good story," he said. "A lot of people watched me do pretty poorly over the years, so for them to be able to see in black and white that I'm doing better is pretty cool I think."

Another person shared his article with friends and family, wanting to "surprise some people" who didn't already know. And, he posted the link on Facebook. "You want a reaction," he said. "I mean, the 'feel-good' whatever."

One person, who'd read the story on her couch in the early morning, went into work afterward. She approached the topic gingerly. "I was expecting a lot of people to know it came out, but a lot of people didn't," she said. "And it was a good thing, you know, because I could slowly tell my co-workers, 'Hey, I'm in the news.'" She shared, she wrote during member reflections, so they knew what had happened to her family — and that it could happen to them, too.

Then, there was the person whose article spotlit her litigation. "I shared it anywhere and everywhere I could," she said. "In fact, Facebook stopped me after like my 30th repost. Like I hit their algorithm, and they're like, 'You are banned from posting anymore!' I'm like, 'Oh okay, well.'"

The person whose story was included in the affordable housing crisis article didn't share — she didn't like the story enough to do so:

> I didn't like the way that I was framed in the story and I didn't like the way that she researched the story. Like, it's one thing to not like how you are portrayed in the story, and then it's another thing for the story to also not portray the issue accurately, and honestly, it was kind of embarrassing.

As a professional, she helps people pursue financial aid, and many of her friends and colleagues know the issue deeply — more deeply than the journalist. She worried what they would think: “To have my friends who are in this sphere see this article, it would have just been like … how could this person even publish something like this?” If the article had been better, if it had presented the information accurately, she “definitely” would’ve shared it.

One more person decided not to share. She felt good about her experience; in fact, she said she didn’t think it could’ve gone any better. Still, she said she didn’t think the story needed “a preamble or promotion.”

“No reason to tell people,” she said. “I wanted the story to stand on its own. And, you know, I wanted it to do its work. So, if it had legs, it would go, if not, that’s fine, too.” It was, she said, like bringing a boat to sea: “You kind of push it out, and let’s see where this goes.”

For those who did share, sharing served not only as a way to create space for “feel-good” emotions, but also to spread the word.

Receiving feedback. Overwhelmingly, the feedback was positive. Among people who shared and one who didn’t, some received responses that were small and kind (a friend saying he’d wished the article focused more on the participant), or small and not so kind (people “griping about politics” in the comment section).

For one person, the feedback he received shaped his perception of the final product. Initially, he felt like the article skipped around a little. “But overall, it got the idea across,” he said. “And then it was more from other people that said, ‘Hey, this was good, this was positive.’” Ultimately, he said he felt “pretty good” about the final piece.

For another person, who chose not to promote the story, the feedback was quiet and close to home. One of her friends volunteered to read and filter any comments that came up: “She said, ‘I’ll pull the positive ones and, so, just don’t bother.’” There weren’t many, and they were all positive, her friend told her. But the story upset her parents. Her dad, a former city government employee who’d been hounded by the local paper during his tenure, assumed the journalist hadn’t asked for consent to write the story. “So he was like, ‘this is a bunch of bullshit and blah blah blah blah,’” she said. As for her mom, “she’s been through hell and back, and so it just kind of reopened wounds for her.”

For others, it was a digital onslaught of support: gratitude and questions from people experiencing similar stories. “You get hit afterwards with everybody writing you,” one person said:

> That part was chaotic. It’s just trying to answer everybody’s questions, and then you have people across the U.S.A. that find you on LinkedIn or they find you on Facebook. I still probably have 30 messages that I just can’t get to.

Mostly, people tell her thank you: “I’ve been too scared to speak. Thank you for standing up for this. Thank you for giving this a voice.” Or, they’re asking for advice. “I mean, I’ve gotten a ton of really grateful emails from people,” she said, “and then I’ve gotten emails, you know, ‘Please help me. What can I do? What do I need to do?’” Her story, which involved a disputed medical diagnosis, garnered a few negative comments from health care providers. But, no one has come up to her in person to say something unkind — nor did she “go out searching” for critical feedback:

> I told myself that I wasn’t going to read the comments, that, you know, I didn’t want emotionally to get brought down by it. Because we wanted this to be a good thing, and we wanted to keep a positive attitude for our children and ourselves.

The feedback served not only as an emotional buoy — "I feel like there's been a lot of support that's come out of it" — but a mechanism for propelling her message forward. The same thing happened for another person in this study, the one Facebook eventually banned from reposting:

> As [the story] spread across the Facebook pages across the United States ... they would tag their friends and say, "See? This is happening to this mom … like, it's not just us." So, really building unity across the United States.

Each article that surfaces on the topic, she said, motivates people to think, "We've got to get our story in the news, too." Ultimately, the feedback served as validation, whether of self or of the story's value. For some, too, it allowed a conversation they hoped would take hold to spread.

Receiving tangible benefits. Although journalists don't (typically) pay their sources, nearly every person I interviewed received something material. For one person, it was a slew of documents:

> [The journalist] consistently offered us information that she had compiled: Our police report, the autopsy report, you know, things we just weren't, you don't think about … All the information surrounding our case, whether we wanted it or not, she could get it for us.

For another, it was a set of professional photographs the photojournalist took of him for the story. He's been through seasons in his life from which he has no photos, so the shots filled a need. He and another person spoke of the published piece as a historical artifact with enduring value, at least to them. "It is unique to have stories published in, I keep saying, 'in black and white.' You know, it's cultural artifacts being created in which my story is being documented over the years," he said.

The other person called the piece "a primary source." "I think of the historical significance of it," he said. "I mean, I don't think people, in 50 years, they're going to be

digging for it, but it's going to be there." (He also got the leave of absence from work he'd been hoping for.)

Another person received, and continues to receive, invitations to testify in front of state legislators. "We've been able to just get out there and advocate for change," she said.

For the person whose story centered litigation, the lawsuit settled. She knows she "can't draw a dotted line." Still, she said she's "certain that [the article] pissed a lot of people off," and she's okay with that:

> I think that was needed … There's a piece of me that wants to believe that by being bold and meeting with the journalist and putting myself out there that it was, it was just another indicator to them, "She's not going to back down."

She has evidence to prove her belief. The day the parties agreed to settle, a person from the opposing team referenced the lead photo from the article — a snapshot of her and her family. "I couldn't get out of my mind that photo," he told her. "The amount of time that you've spent, that we've spent, and no one wins out of this except the attorneys."

She was floored. "I thought that was so cool that that picture was part of it," she said. "I mean, it did make an impact .... And I loved that. I loved that he referenced that photo."

Correlation, of course, does not equal causation. However, for most people, whether directly or indirectly, the articles seemed to bring good more than bad.

Receiving intangible benefits. Multiple people referenced rewards that were more difficult to quantify. One person said the article "brought things full circle," laying to rest what, for him, had been a difficult season. For another, the gift was partly academic — he got to glimpse how a reporter works, how difficult it is to "try and get

that story across." The interaction dismantled a stereotype that journalists "come in and ask you like five questions or something like that, write some things down and then go."

In reality, the exchange requires a certain slowness, a certain kindness. "But, it's really, to have a real, authentic interview, you have to be very personable," he said. "You have to put the person at ease and make them feel comfortable sharing that story."

More than anything, people talked about feeling heard, feeling important, and feeling like they were no longer alone. The same person, a teacher, said he doesn't often interact with adults. For him, the interview felt like "having a conversation with someone," and the experience "therapeutic."

"It was really just nice to have another person to talk to and just hear my stories and, you know, my thoughts," he said. The journalist validated the importance of what he had to say:

> He made me feel at ease and said, "Hey, you're doing something unique and it's interesting, people want to hear the story." But he wanted, he just seemed like he was wanting to hear about who I am, and he made me feel good about that.

Other journalists provided similar kindnesses. The week before the story ran, the journalist asked another participant if she'd be okay with him publishing a snippet of audio with the piece: the moment she realized she might lose her child. These days, she doesn't listen to it — it was "the worst moment of my life" — but she's glad it ran with the story: "I feel like the emotion was there, and that people could hear and empathize with me. They would understand as a parent what it would be like … And the pure fear."

The inclusion of the audio recording tapped into her longing for people to know and deeply feel her story, and to empathize. She mentioned empathy, or the lack of it, six

times during our interview. How, in the beginning, she and her family "just kind of felt alone" in their experience. Taking part in the story allowed her to, "in a way, heal."

"It's been very cathartic being able to tell the story, being able to let others feel what happened to us and empathize with us and you know, just be there for us," she said. She not only felt empathy from readers, she felt deeply heard by the journalist who ultimately told her story. Again and again, she emphasized that he "lived" her story:

> I just, I can't even, he lived it. He lived it. He researched it and the respect he had with the questions, and he was intuitive and curious and he was just, it was a great experience. It really was.

In the months since, she's taken the empathy and strength she received and channeled it toward helping other families and advocating for change. She still goes back to read the article. "Thank God for the media," she told me. "Because y'all are able to expose this. Y'all are able to stop this. Y'all are able to do something about this … I mean, thank you, media."

Another person, whose story centered the death of her child, wrestled with a similar awareness of the media's power. She said she didn't think the experience "could've gone any better." Still, she acknowledged that no platform could've truly done the story justice:

> Yes, I think it was [the platform I hoped it would be]. I think it, it was, yes. As advertised, absolutely. Do I want it to be, did I want it to be more, for it to have more power, I mean, more reaction? Absolutely. Because I don't think, there's, there's not enough out there. There, I don't think there could have been a platform large enough, frankly. Because it's just such an emotional topic for me.

Being in the news, didn't, of course, change what had happened to put them there. It did, however, create space for empathy, catharsis, and the feeling of being heard — along with a deeper understanding of what journalism looks like behind the curtain.

Reflecting on the journalist-source relationship. Before agreeing to be part of this study, one person asked if we could talk on the phone. She was worried, she said, about being part of anything that could reflect negatively on the journalist who worked with her. The journalist had not only navigated with great empathy and wisdom, he'd pored through thousands of documents and hours of voice recordings to get the story straight. "[He] went through all of it. I mean, [he] lived our story," she said later, during our interview. In the end, he felt like family. "He relived the most horrific moments of our lives in great detail," she wrote me during member reflections. "Between the amount of time he spent with us and the intimate nature of the subject he knew more about what happened to us than our closest friends." Five of six people I interviewed spoke warmly of the journalist with whom they worked — either about their professionalism, their empathy or both; two continue to keep in touch (RQ2A).

Assessing credibility, assessing care. The journalist who reported on the same person's story exemplified the same qualities other people I interviewed praised. For one, knew his stuff. He was known in their community as a journalist that held hospitals to account. He asked the questions and did the work.

Multiple people were impressed by the journalist's deep commitment to understanding the issue. One person said the journalist who worked with him had been digging into the story she'd eventually write for a long time, and it showed: "As you read back through the article, you can see that there's actually a lot of stats and numbers involved, which I was really impressed with."

The journalist's care for the work and care for the person were often intertwined. One person noticed both in the journalist who worked with him:

> I didn't get the feeling that she was just doing the interview as part of her job because it had to be done. You know, I felt like she was really engaged with what she was doing and she was really interested in me as she was interviewing me. I felt like she was working on something that was really important to her, so I was glad to be part of it.

A theme that occurred again and again was the feeling of being heard. Here's how the same person put it:

> I know that sometimes, if the interview goes off track it's like okay, let's move things back, let's get the interview done, but with her, if I felt like it was important in the interview, she just let me talk about it. Which is important, especially because I was talking about something so important to me, that it's like, to give me that space, to talk through what I had to talk through, rather than just mechanically getting the information out of me that she needed.

Another person said the journalist "gave me the time of day, thank goodness. And she listened. She sat there, we sat outside the courthouse and she listened to me and she let me pour my heart out." Still another said the journalist put him at ease, connecting with him over parenting and sports and their current life stage and making space for a "real, authentic interview."

"He broke down that barrier where I was able to talk about all these different topics," he said. "And then he sat there and listened."

Another person attributed that feeling of connection to the journalist's style, a way of moving through the world:

> There's some people that don't want to become involved. You know? There's some people that want to, want to remain distant, they want to, they want to just kinda look at it as a spectator, which is fine. And then there are people like [the journalist] that want to insert themselves, want to get to know the people, want to have that emotional connection and, you know, there are different styles of writing, so there are different ways to approach it.

The journalists who were both professional and personable not only helped assuage fears and invite trust, they created space to connect as people — beyond storyteller-subject. For more than one person, that connection lives on.

"Maybe it isn't a friendship, but it feels like one." How much each person recollected (or didn't recollect) about the journalist with whom they worked didn't matter — but they remembered how that person made them feel. One person couldn't remember the journalist's name; instead, he spoke, again and again, about how "personable" he was. Another person, who didn't enjoy her experience, referred to the journalist who wrote about her as "the reporter." But three people used the journalist's first name when they spoke; each spoke warmly about their journalist. Two of them stay in touch.

One of these two said she's "lucky enough to call [the journalist] friend." They've had drinks since the article published. The other person spoke of her journalist with reverence. They'd spent the most time together of anyone: 10 months for this investigation alone, not including the check-ins and follow-ups since the story published. Throughout the interview, she referred to their friendship. At one point, she said, "I mean at the end of it, I felt like he was family. I really did feel like he was family."

She knows, once the story ran, he could've disappeared: "He totally could have been like, 'Okay, story's done, you're gone.' But he still pulls us in, you know. He still talks to us. I still talk to him. He still responds to me when I write him." Still, she grapples with a sense of loss:

> He was very connected to us. And it's kind of hard now, I guess in a way, because he's gone. I mean he's not gone, but he's gone. Like our story's done … he's on to the next story now and, you know, I do, I miss him and I know [my husband] misses him in a way. But he just, he was just a really great person.

For her, more than once, there was a moment of hesitation in our interview — of not quite knowing where they stand. She searched for words: “You know, so I feel like he, he prioritizes, not prioritizes, that’s not the right word, he cares about us.” And then, later, “I mean I just, I felt like we built a friendship in a way. I don’t know, well I say that. He’s a reporter — maybe it isn’t a friendship, but it feels like one.” She paused, and then, “I hope it is one.”

This tension, the acknowledgment of a double role, cropped up briefly in one other interview. This person felt immediate camaraderie with the journalist who interviewed him: “It was just so bizarre to me, like, I don’t know how to explain it, it was just like, you know sometimes you just talk to people and you feel like you’re instant friends? Just have a connection?” That’s how he felt with the reporter. It was one of only a handful of “authentic stranger conversations” he’d experienced in his life, the ones where “you can talk to anybody about anything.”

Throughout the interview, he said, he felt heard. But then, he acknowledged something:

> Or at least it appeared [the journalist] was listening. I don’t know … maybe he was completely off somewhere else, but from my perspective, from what I could tell, he was very engaged. And he seemed like a very genuine person, wanting to know about the story.

This person had, earlier, talked about the “ideal self” and the “real self.” He was aware of a need to navigate different roles at different times, and, perhaps, applied a similar lens to the journalist. “I don’t know if he wanted to be there,” he said, “but it sure seemed like it.”

As for the person who hopes her relationship with the journalist is a friendship, she's aware of the boundaries and requirements of his work. She knows he has other stories to tend. Still, she hopes they stay in touch for a long time:

> Because he did live our story, he did. You know, I just, I feel like there, there was a relationship built there, and it would be very sad and maybe disheartening if, you know, he did just leave. Somebody that's so intricate in your life and then they just leave. That, that would suck. And, and maybe I just have a different opinion on it, I don't know. But coming from an ordinary person having something horrific happen to you and then having somebody live it and then just leave, that, that would just be really hard.

Although they weren't perfectly certain whether the feelings were mutual, for more than one person, their connection with the journalist mattered — and mattered a great deal.

Interacting with other news professionals. For multiple people, the journalist was not the only media member they met along the way. These professionals deepened and, in one case, overshadowed, the experience the journalist provided. Others served as reference points with which participants compared the media encounters selected for this study.

Meeting the photojournalists. For five people, a photojournalist and journalist tag-teamed the story. Three people spoke warmly of their encounters with the photojournalist.

"Even the photographer was super positive, and that was neat," one person said. "And I need positivity, I mean, that was huge, just having somebody come in being positive, wanting to know our story, made me feel good about things."

Another photojournalist, for the story that recounted the death of a child, was "absolutely wonderful." The participant and her husband knew, going in, that they'd not

only need to “unload all our personal everything” onto the journalist, but “subsequently her photographer, who was amazing.”

For another article, the photojournalist allowed the participant to become a co-creator of meaning. They schemed on a photo illustration together, her suggesting a vision and him tweaking and then directing it. The resulting photo illustration became the lead photo, and it ran on the paper’s front page. He was “really good,” she said.

A fourth person’s experience with his photojournalist turned sour, but not because of the photojournalist. He’d contacted a higher-ranking member of the news outlet’s team — he didn’t remember his title — to ask for access to the photos the photojournalist took. He hadn’t had professional photos taken in a while, and he hoped he could use these. They disagreed: “They shot back and said, ‘Sorry, it’s company policy we can’t share those.’” The response, he said, was absurd. “To tell me that it’s just a rule, so you can’t, is really condescending,” he said. “Because obviously I know that if you really want to make an exception, you can make it happen.”

After some back and forth, he ultimately received a few photos. The interaction didn’t diminish his appreciation for the journalist — “I felt validated by her” — but it darkened his experience with the outlet. He said he wouldn’t work with them again:

> Yeah, I feel like, in the end, the paper didn’t really value me. They didn’t really care about me as a person. Not that I would expect them to, but it’s not, I feel like, in the modern world, it’s not asking too much to put a human touch on something.

As it was with the journalist, if the photojournalist (or other media professional) were professional and personable, their presence helped shape the experience into a positive one. If they weren’t, the interaction could cloud the entire journey.

Being on TV. The person who spent 10 months working with the print journalist also agreed to a TV news interview on the same subject. “It was two very different styles of interviews,” she said. She confessed she felt apprehensive at first. “I was really worried that, you know, I would say something wrong, or something bad would come out, or we would be depicted in a bad light,” she said. “And no. I mean, it was great.” But the process was a bit strange:

> It’s like two hours, right? They show up, they set up, they quickly, not quickly, but, you know, they go through it, you talk to them for maybe 30 minutes afterwards and then they’re gone, right? You never talk to them again. It’s like, “Oh wow, okay,” and then the next day you’re on TV. And it’s like, “Oh wow, I’m on TV,” and it’s like a minute. Like a minute section. I mean that was really like, wham-bam thank-ya ma’am.

In the end, though, everything turned out okay. Even her kids liked the experience — they got to hold the mic.

Previous encounters with the press. Some, too, came into the process with prior experience being in the news. For two who shared those encounters, the old experiences differed distinctly from the new one.

One person said she’d been interviewed for more “niche” outlets — school newspapers and the Boys & Girls Club, usually about student achievement. At the school newspaper, she said she felt the students were “very much proud of their work,” and did a better job keeping her in the loop: “They’re, I think, a little bit better about getting back to people after they’ve interviewed them or debriefing them.” The experiences were small and personal and positive. This time around, not so much. This process felt rushed, impersonal, and she did not like the final story.

The contrast further highlighted the disappointment she felt with the larger paper. She had higher expectations for this journalist, partly due to the scope and severity of the

topic. For stories about student achievement, she said, “you’re taking the personal anecdote of the person and you don’t have to contextualize the issue as much.” But, writing about problems like student debt, or the affordable housing crisis, requires greater care:

> With that issue comes a lot more responsibility of making sure that the stories that you’re getting are not just anecdotes. You have a lot more responsibility in my eyes to make sure that this issue has some hard data backed up by it.

Her disappointment, she discovered, wasn’t unique. She’d garnered other disheartening stories from friends and colleagues about being in the news. Often, it seemed, the articles that came from those encounters also lacked context. One person, the head of a nonprofit, told her he’s interviewed regularly:

> He’ll get these, these researchers or these journalists that have no idea what’s been going on, or maybe don’t understand the context of the issue, and then they’re just looking for a quote, a couple quotes. It’s usually very rushed, and he has to break down the issue for them and even then he’s disappointed when he sees the article. It’s never really what he, what he wanted to be.

She hoped her own experience would turn out better, but it didn’t.

Another participant, the one who changed his name, referenced past appearances in the news. Once, he’d also been interviewed for a school paper — and it had not been personal or positive. The student journalists “just were so careless in my quotes, and they quoted me as saying things that I would never say.” Ultimately, the representation was so bad, he said, “I just wish the article hadn’t run at all.”

In contrast, the journalist who wrote this more recent piece was “super professional.”

“I can tell she knows her stuff, and she’s got experience and she’s just good at what she does,” he said.

Still, it's these experiences with the news that contributed to him "being the person who has overcome homelessness." Any time someone's written about him, that narrative becomes the "throughline." Thus, his name change:

> Yeah, I don't know, I just feel like different things are right for people at different times … It felt fine for that to be a big part of my story, but now it's like, I just, I'm ready to go out and actually create value in the world as a professional.

These prior experiences didn't deter either person from agreeing to another interview; they did, however, serve as points of comparison for this more recent experience.

Assessing willingness to be in the news again. Every person said they'd be willing, some with caveats, to be in the news again (RQ2B). Among multiple people who offered no stipulations there was also an understanding: Every journalism encounter is different. So, too, every journalist.

The two people who felt the most skeptical about moving forward offered circumstances in which they'd next say yes. Both considered their amount of care. The person who legally changed his name was concerned about accuracy:

> I would have to be okay with really not caring how right they got things to do the interview. If somebody asked me to do the interview for something and I'm just like, "I really don't care how it turns out," then yes, I would do it.

He's been in the news multiple times, and each time the journalist got at least a few things wrong. Now, he's streetwise and skeptical, knowing it might happen again. His responses could be "completely butchered."

"I mean at this point, I'm aware enough to know not to say anything under any circumstance that I wouldn't want included in something," he said. Admittedly, if the journalist guaranteed he'd get to check the story for accuracy before it published, he "would probably be interviewed for pretty much anything."

The person who felt the journalist mischaracterized her story and the issue said the experience gave her a "distaste" toward future news invitations. She said she'd say yes again for another topic that she cares about — but, she'd take at least a week to research the journalist beforehand. She said she might even contact someone who's been in one of the journalist's previous stories to ask how it went.

The other four participants said yes, they'd do it again, and they hope to do it again. One person, working with the same journalist, has already appeared in follow-up stories. Another person forwarded a press release to "tens of thousands of media conglomerates." Another might pitch a story to his local paper. Amid their willingness, I noticed the admission that the next news experience might not go as well or, at the very least, it will look different.

The person who received "redlining privileges" from her journalist said she wouldn't assume the same consideration from another one. She also knows that give and take is part of the process:

> Would I expect it if I were to do another article or another interview? No. Would I like to have it? Yes. But you don't get editorial rights to everything. I mean, that's the nature of an interview. If I wanted that, I should write my own. But I'm not.

The person who spent 10 months with her journalist for the story said she's aware not everyone has a positive experience being in the news. "I know not everyone is like [the journalist who wrote my story]," she said. Later, she added, "I feel like we got very lucky with the reporter." Still, she said, she's "more than happy" to speak with other journalists: "I feel like everybody's going to have their different take and their different opinion and their different way to showcase [the story], so I would definitely be open to speaking with other journalists going forward."

The person who received redlining privileges echoed that hope. Her posture toward further spotlighting the issue in her story is open, ready. She said she considers this study to be “chapter two”:

> And honestly, I hope there are many more chapters. I understood that allowing to that interview and granting that interview and going through that process was opening ourselves up to things like this, opening ourselves up to comments, criticism, opening, you know, and I was willing to ascend that platform.

Chapter Five: Discussion

In her book *The Journalist and the Murderer*, writer Janet Malcolm (1990) asked Michael Malley, a plaintiff's witness in the trial between said journalist and murderer, why people let journalists write about them. He acknowledged that, in the case of Joe and Jeff, Jeff wanted a book that would help clear his good name: "'But at some point the world's opinion became secondary, and the real audience for Jeff's ego became Joe. Jeff really liked Joe, and he really trusted Joe. And that's why it was such an incredible betrayal'" (p. 140). The connection between journalist and source matters. It may matter, as Malley goes on to suggest, more than what the journalist ends up writing. It may be forged primarily by the source's trust in the journalist's professionalism and credibility. Or, it may also rest on what seems to be, what very well may be, a friendship. But when the source doesn't sense credibility or care from the journalist, the story suffers, the exemplar suffers, and so do other journalists.

In this chapter, I first review my findings by research question. Then, I argue from those findings that the journalist-exemplar relationship is unique among those that journalists forge with other sources. The distinction stems from the exemplar's vulnerability and the value they place on their relationship with the journalist, both as a means to an end and its own end. Next, I apply the dependency principle within care ethics to this relationship, suggesting the exemplar merits special attention from journalists. I outline six ways for journalists to respond. Then, I offer, using one interview as a case study, the grim consequences for journalists and journalism when those measures aren't taken. Finally, after acknowledging the study's limitations and paths for

adjacent research, I reflect on how my findings clarify and complicate my own experience reporting.

Review of Study Findings

In the following pages, I condense and review my discoveries from the interview data. The summaries are ordered by research question.

How do exemplars describe their experience with the news process? For the most part, people had a positive experience being in the news. The journalist played no small role here; their professionalism and empathy enriched the process. Positive outcomes, like validating feedback or increased awareness of the issue, also helped. Despite the good, the process wasn't easy. The circumstances that led these people to the journalist were, for almost everyone, painful (one person said during member reflections it was becoming "famous for something no one wants to be famous for"). There were unwelcome intrusions — an unpleasant experience with another employee in the news organization, inaccuracies in the text, commenters grumbling about politics, worries about what could go wrong or what people might think. Only one person's encounter was overwhelmingly negative — she said she felt the journalist not only seemed ill-informed during the interview, she never heard from her afterward. Furthermore, the final piece misrepresented her and the issue. In the end, her experience was unique. Most people garnered something good, and everyone said they'd be willing to be in the news again under certain circumstances.

Why do exemplars say they talked to the journalist? The people in this study said they sought positive change beyond themselves. That positive change took multiple forms: raising awareness, complicating a commonly held narrative, catalyzing a

conversation, exposing (and, hopefully, stopping) injustices and/or holding power to account. For multiple people, speaking out was a duty — to help those in similar circumstances but with fewer resources. More than one person acknowledged they would welcome personal benefits from the story, whether that looked like a financial gift from a reader or enhanced job security from positive press. Amid their resolve, most people also experienced worries: among them, worry about what people might think, worry the journalist wouldn't get the story straight, worry over their families and the longevity of articles archived online.

How do exemplars describe what it was like to be interviewed? The interview process looked different for everyone. The journalists with whom they worked harnessed a variety of methods: phone calls, texts, emails, coffee shop chats and home visits. These encounters ranged from, for one person, an under-30-minute phone call to, for another person, 10 months of regular communication with the journalist. The people I interviewed weren't passive recipients during the process. Instead, they were active, some navigating how much to disclose, some offering visions and stipulations for the story. Those who self-censored did so out of obligation — one person was in the middle of a lawsuit and couldn't publicize certain statements — and the others did so out of privacy concerns. Another person said there was nothing to hide; the article centered the death of her child, and that death had already rendered her "emotionally exposed." She and a few others also shared with the journalist their vision for the story, offering possible throughlines, brainstorming a photo illustration, suggesting documents to investigate and facts to include. Finally, one person leveraged her participation in the story to request

something from the journalist: that the journalist consider an alternate storyline. If the journalist weren't willing to explore it, she wouldn't participate.

As perceived by the exemplar, how closely did what they remember about their expectations for the process align with what happened? People said they knew broadly what the articles would be about. Beyond that, their expectations and foreknowledge diverged — from one person, who never heard from the journalist after their initial interview, to another, who read and provided feedback about the article the day before it published. More often than not, though, they didn't know what to expect, especially when it came to the final product, when it would publish, how their story would fit in, and what would happen afterward. What expectations they did carry were shaped by the journalist, other people or perceptions they'd brought into the interview process.

How do exemplars describe the experience of reading about themselves in a published story? The first read begat delights, sorrows or disappointment. For two people, whose stories involved their children and trauma, reading was emotion-laden and hard. One reread the story again and again — she still rereads it. The other chooses not to do so; she said rereading the piece invites her into a "dark hole" she prefers to avoid. For two others, the experience was a pleasant surprise; one didn't know the story would be on the front page, and the other didn't know his would be the lead photo. Still another person said she felt disappointed and embarrassed during that first read — she thought the journalist had done the story's central issue a disservice.

How do exemplars assess how they were represented in the article? Each person assessed not only how the journalist represented them, but also the story's central issue — and generally spoke positively about both. One person, whose experience with the

journalist was overall unsavory, felt both herself and the issue were portrayed inaccurately, and without vital context; she called the article “cherry-picked and exaggerated.” All six noticed at least one error, and that the journalist omitted something they thought important to include. These mistakes carried less weight if the person felt the journalist captured what one person called “the metamessage.” Furthermore, most people didn’t let the journalists know about the errors — either because they were irrelevant, or they thought it was too late to change anything, or they didn’t want to damage their relationship with the journalist. Finally, five stories included multiple exemplars; responses to those neighboring stories were mixed. If someone spoke hesitantly, or disappointedly about these other stories, it was because they felt their story didn’t fit in with those stories, or that the stories didn’t accurately illustrate the bigger issue.

What do exemplars say happened after the story published? When the stories went to press, most people in the study shared them — to raise awareness about the topic or create space for “feel-good” emotions. One person didn’t share because she didn’t like the story. The other said she didn’t think the article needed a promotion: “If it had legs, it would go.” Almost everyone said they received (mostly positive) feedback, and that feedback served not only as validation of self or story, but also a discussion space. Sometimes, it was a digital onslaught — people saying thank-you for sharing, or asking for advice for similar situations. Other times, it was gentle, like a kind word from a friend. And, almost everyone garnered something positive (tangible or not) by the end, from case documents to catharsis.

How do exemplars talk about journalists and journalism after being in the news? Most discussion about journalists and journalism centered each person's own encounter with the journalist and photojournalist with whom they worked. Mostly, the mentions were warm, grateful, positive. Occasionally, people referenced the media's role in creating change (one person said, "thank you, media"). Another said his interactions with the journalist helped dissolve the stereotype of the hit-and-run journalist who asks a few questions and leaves. Only the person whose experience was overwhelmingly negative shared her worries about the media landscape more broadly. She wrestled with whether to classify her article as fake news, musing whether articles without context contribute to the country's polarization. She also said she'd heard stories from colleagues and friends about uninformed journalists who required much hand-holding — only to write a disappointing article.

How do exemplars describe the nature of their relationship with the journalist? People spoke warmly about the journalist with whom they worked — either the journalist's professionalism, empathy or both; two continue to keep in touch. They both consider the journalist a friend; one of them also said the journalist felt like family: "Between the amount of time he spent with us and the intimate nature of the subject he knew more about what happened to us than our closest friends." Journalists who were willing to invest deeply in the story, be sensitive to the person's needs and listen with openness and empathy received special praise. One journalist, perceived to do none of those things, yielded in her source a frustrated disappointment — they never reconnected after their initial call. Two people, including the person who said the journalist felt like family, also grappled with whether or not their connection with the journalist was real

and reciprocated: “I don’t know, well I say that. He’s a reporter — maybe it isn’t a friendship, but it feels like one.” Finally, people referenced encounters with other news professionals, like photojournalists, and/or previous experiences being in the news. Photojournalists only received praise — for their good work and/or their good-naturedness. The previous experiences being in the news were mixed; one person said, one time, he’d been misrepresented so acutely he wished the article never ran.

How do exemplars describe their willingness to be in the news again? At the end of the day, everyone in the study was willing to be in the news again — but for some people, only under certain circumstances. The people who said yes, they’d do it again, hoped for follow-up, opportunities to spread the same story, or catalyze another. They said they understood their next experience would be different. The others were more cautious; they know firsthand that reporters can get things wrong, and they’ll approach future interviews with skepticism. One person said he’d agree to almost anything — if he received pre-publication review. The other said she’d research the next journalist who contacts her, maybe even interview some of their previous sources to make sure the journalist is credible before she agrees. Still, the data indicate that even those who’ve felt burned — amid hesitation, skepticism, and a plan to vet future journalists who come calling — may agree once more to be in the news.

The Dependency Principle

Malcolm’s (1990) claims that the relationship between journalist and subject is one of crooks and dupes have garnered much criticism since her book’s publication. Palmer (2013) examines those allegations from the perspective of the source. Ultimately,

Palmer writes, she found the subjects to be "more self-aware and more resilient than Malcolm portrays them" (p. 318).

However, the power the journalist-source relationship holds, at least for the source, may be the thing Malcolm (1990) gets most right. I return to the latter part of Malley's quote: "Jeff really liked Joe, and he really trusted Joe. And that's why it was such an incredible betrayal" (p. 140). Here, Malcolm (or rather, Malley through Malcolm) taps into two postures taken by a source in regard to the journalist with whom they worked. These postures — liking and trusting — emerged again and again in all six interviews for this study. Three people were unequivocal: They'd connected with the journalist, and deeply so. The journalist became a friend, or felt like family, or created space for one of a mere handful of "authentic stranger conversations" one person said he'd had in his life. Still another person attributed his reticence in pointing out an omission in the story to the "friendly relationship" he'd developed with the journalist. Another said she led the interaction with trust and integrity, expecting the journalist would do the same, and she did. Finally, another person experienced the inverse — she said she was hopeful the journalist would conduct more research after their interview. She looked forward to the article, but when she read it, her trust went unfulfilled. These expressions of care for and trust in the journalist indicate the relationship, at least for the exemplar, holds value. Furthermore, for some people, the value arose not merely because the relationship served as a means to an end, but because the relationship itself came to matter.

The exemplar's experience is uniquely positioned to develop a relationship between journalist and source — one forged over a mutual investment in the story and

the sharing of deeply personal details. Because the resulting article centers the exemplar's personal story, one that might very well involve trauma or hardship, the process, too, can feel very personal. One person said, when considering whether or not to participate in the article, she knew she and her husband would have to "unload all our personal everything" on the journalist and, subsequently, the photojournalist. The decision to share, like the intimate details of her trauma, held great weight. In reporting the story, the journalist enters not only a deeply personal mental and emotional space, but also a physical one. In five out of six stories, the journalist and/or photojournalist came into the person's home.

A similar intrusion (and subsequent intimacy) could occur between a journalist and source for a profile, as was the case with Jeff and Joe in Malcolm's (1990) text. However, for the exemplar, the story usually reaches far beyond an insular experience. Every person I interviewed acknowledged the scope of the issue featured in the article. One person put it this way: "This is happening to us, this is happening to everybody." Their stake in the game is not purely personal, but systemic. And this, too, can increase the source's expectations for the journalist. One person said systemic stories require greater responsibilities from the journalist than more individualized stories; the bigger issues require data, she said, not merely anecdotes.

Of course, sources who don't serve as exemplars still desire the journalist's accuracy. In other words, they also hold interests that journalists have the capacity to fulfill. Public figures, including government officials and others who share their expertise with the journalist, or people whom the journalist investigates, hope for proper representation. Even so, the journalist-exemplar relationship remains unique. Sources who double as public figures experience a separate kind of vulnerability from the

exemplar, often a private person. Libel laws acknowledge this distinction. In Gertz vs. Robert Welch, Inc., the court affirmed a difference in vulnerability between public and private figures, noting public figures have greater access to tools that fight defamation, as well as the expectation that they'll be publicly criticized (Schultz, n.d., para. 9). Private people, however, do not choose such exposure:

> *Gertz* designated plaintiffs who have "voluntarily exposed themselves to increased risk of injury from defamatory falsehood" as public figures; these plaintiffs are required to prove "actual malice." On the other hand, where plaintiff is a private figure, recovery is based upon a less demanding burden, usually negligence. (Moll, 1978, p. 340)

The exemplar's vulnerability, coupled with the value they place on their relationship with the journalist, creates unique obligations for the journalist to fulfill.

Walukiewicz (2018) comes to a similar conclusion. In her interview study exploring how documentary film subjects experience being in documentaries, she outlines how subjects come to depend on the filmmaker. First, the subject wants something from the encounter, namely the "transmission of a particular message" through the documentary (p. 227). The depth of access the subject offers the filmmaker as their relationship develops further deepens the dependence:

> The closer to an intimate relationship, the greater the risk related to issues of trust and vulnerability, as demonstrated in the aforementioned quote by subject S: "The more we got to know each other it was like … film what the heck you want, you have access to all of it." (Walukiewicz, 2018, pp. 225–226)

Along the way, the relationship may become its own end. Walukiewicz (2018) suggests that one of the subject's "interests is connected to the filmmaker as a person, not as a filmmaker" (p. 227). After considering these dependencies, she concludes the dependency principle (Collins, 2015) within care ethics governs the relationship between filmmaker and subject. I posit it does the same for journalist and exemplar.

The dependency principle holds that "dependency relationships generate responsibilities" (Collins, 2015, Introduction section, para. 4). In other words, person A has a duty to take measures to fulfill the interests of person B if person A is in a position to do so, if doing so wouldn't overly cost person A, and if both person A and B would receive a benefit from the action. Collins (2015) is careful to clarify that a person who depends on someone else does not necessarily lack power or hold less power in the relationship: "To depend on someone is not necessarily to be subjugated, subservient, or subordinated to them" (The Basic Thought section, para. 5). Furthermore, the relationship does not need to be long term — it can exist for a moment and then be gone (The Basic Thought section, para. 5). As I discuss in my findings, the people in this study approached the news process with vision and agency. They offered ideas and stipulations. They were not subjugated or subservient. And, for four people, their relationship with the journalist was short-lived — encompassed fully within the news process.

I also discuss how two people wrestled with perceived boundaries between journalist and source. Because I excluded the journalists from this study, I can't confirm whether the exemplars' care for the journalist was reciprocated. According to Collins (2015), the dependency principle holds weight in personal or "non-personal" relationships, like that between a doctor and patient (Claim 2: Relationship Importance section, para. 11). She notes that non-personal relationships "can give rise to (perhaps lesser versions of) the claims of relationship importance" (Collins, 2015, Conclusion: Claim 2 section, para. 1). Nonetheless, if the relationship is merely non-personal, obligations still arise. If the relationship becomes personal, and according to multiple people I interviewed, it did, those obligations may be even stronger.

Practical implications. The dependency principle requires moral agents to fulfill a recipient's "important interests" (Collins, 2015, 'Important Interests' section, para. 1), and the people in this study approached the news process with several. All six hoped the journalist would properly represent them and the story's central issue. Multiple people also hoped the article would raise awareness and contribute to systemic change. The journalists with whom they worked took various measures that addressed or failed to address these interests. Here, I outline the practices that worked and expand upon them, offering six recommendations for journalists that arose from the data: Select representative exemplars, reposition exemplars as experts, seek informed consent, take time to listen, delve into research, and avoid omission.

Select representative exemplars. The people in this study cared deeply about the issue explored by the article, as well as how the journalist portrayed it. In doing so, multiple people considered not only what the journalist's selection of neighboring exemplars said about their own story, but also how those exemplars illustrated (or failed to illustrate) the greater issue. In one article, the journalist placed three exemplars next to each other, and the person I interviewed said she felt she didn't fit with those other two: "I didn't believe I belonged there — because of different circumstances." She understood why the journalist grouped the three, but wished she'd included a few families with more similar situations.

Another person expected to share her expertise on the issue, not her personal story. Her interview with the journalist went awry in part due to these mismatched role expectations. After the article published, the experience worsened. She felt her story and the other exemplar's story misrepresented the issue — they were completely separate

examples and reflected an extreme, rather than a normal case. She was also disappointed in the dearth of voices; she expected her story to be one of many, not the central of two. She mused whether articles like hers, which offer extreme cases and little context, contribute to polarization among readers. Her criticisms tap into exemplification research about how exemplars can sway a reader's perception of an issue more than data (Brosius & Bathelt, 1994). The consequences matter: If an exemplar doesn't represent an issue, its inclusion can mislead readers' thinking.

The journalist's selection of exemplars may, of course, be limited. Still, they should seek to include exemplars that reflect the data they've collected about the issue. Furthermore, they should garner manifold and nuanced perspectives, especially when writing about marginalized communities. Zou (2018) commends a "hybridity of identifications" (p. 393), the inclusion of many distinct, first-person perspectives. An assembly of "equally conscious and cogent" voices reflects complexity and problematizes monolithic or reductionist understandings of a specific group (Zou, 2018, p. 393). Finally, in keeping with informed consent, journalists should keep exemplars apprised about their role in the story as well as whether the story includes other exemplars.

Reposition exemplars as experts. One person in the study stipulated that the journalist consider and explore her perspective, which differed from the storyline the journalist had originally pitched. Otherwise, she said, she wouldn't participate. The journalist did so, and ultimately allowed that perspective to shape and guide the final piece: "She told us on many occasions our story changed the whole direction of hers." The journalist allowed this person's expertise in her own experience to shift the final narrative.

Exemplars are not only experts of their own experience, but, in some cases, experts of the issue the journalist is investigating. Multiple people in this study had developed a deep knowledge of the issue on which the journalist reported, offering the journalist documents, research and where to look for data.

It's not uncommon for journalists to delineate expert and non-expert sources, and their approach toward the two groups may differ. For example, previous studies indicate journalists use exemplars to humanize news (Hinnant et al., 2013) and consider experts to be people with certain credentials (Boyce, 2006, p. 891). Journalists regularly return to sources they perceive to be credible (Reich, 2011, p. 58). To protect the privilege of access, they can't burn these relationships. Instead, they take care to cultivate and maintain them while not compromising the integrity of their reporting. People who serve in an exemplar role may not receive the same considerations; ostensibly, they're a one-off.

However, if journalists repositioned exemplars as experts of their own experience, and — if appropriate — the issue itself, they may elevate not only the story, but also the news experience for that person. They may also begin to cultivate a more robust network of sources. Finally, this repositioning may reduce systemic limitations on whose voice gets to shape the story:

> Journalists often base the credibility of their reports on the input of "primary definers" (Hall et al. 1978), namely the individuals and institutions deemed viable and competent who could powerfully shape the framing of events. In comparison, ordinary people in the news ... are often reduced to a symbol of the group they represent. (Zou, 2018, p. 383)

Repositioning exemplar as expert disallows such a reduction, empowering "ordinary" people to share their perspectives and experiences and, in doing so, truly inform the narrative.

Seek informed consent. During member reflections, one person in the study wrote about how the journalist kept her perennially informed and included: "[The journalist] would walk us through things that were happening to ensure we understood where we were in the process." He also let her know he'd need to include quotes from people with whom she disagreed. Then, before the story published, he asked for her permission to include an audio recording in the final piece. She said his approach was "very mindful."

Seeking informed consent throughout the news process develops trust and serves to empower, rather than exploit. This precept expands on recommendations by Vanacker & Breslin (2006) who, from a care-ethics framework, advocate that journalists pursue informed consent when reporting on crime victims: "In an ideal situation, a journalist would engage the victim in a dialogue to determine what would be in that person's best interest" (p. 209).

Opportunities for dialogue abound. The exchange may be a small one, perhaps over text or email, and may simply require education about the news process. For example, journalists can share why they chose to pursue the story, how they found their sources, what the story will look like, whether the story will include other exemplars, which facts and quotes they plan to use from the exemplar's interview, and when and where the story will publish. Or, the exchange may create space for input and pushback.

The people in this study who received some form of pre-publication review — whether fact checks or the chance to read the whole story — spoke glowingly of the opportunity.

One person, whose article centered litigation, was especially thankful for the review. The journalist emailed her a list of facts she planned to include in the article, and for nearly two weeks they emailed back and forth to make sure those facts were straight. She said the journalist was "sensitive" to the high stakes for the lawsuit and her family. Another person who received "redlining privileges" from her journalist was especially floored. She was able to read and edit the story before it went to press. Becoming a co-creator of meaning, she offered additions that the journalist included in the final piece. Conversations like these, whether they look like check-ins over text or in-person editing sessions, educate and empower people who serve as exemplars.

Take the time to listen. Nearly everyone in the study spoke about how the journalist made them feel heard. The journalists' methods for doing so took multiple forms; mainly, though, they carved out time — be it at home, a coffee shop or over the phone — to listen. For one person, it was an off-the-record conversation over coffee before she agreed to participate in the interview. Another person experienced something similar: she approached the journalist at a hearing, and the journalist gave her "the time of day. And she listened. She sat there, we sat outside the courthouse and she listened to me and she let me pour my heart out." Finally, a third person complimented the journalist's accessibility, as well as her willingness to let him speak freely during the interview, even if he went on tangents. Unhurried spaces like these allowed for trust to develop, as well as for what Walsh-Childers et al. (2011) calls "cathartic rapport" (p. 199) between journalist and source. A listening posture also makes room for the

dialogue-centric model inherent in care ethics, one that "reflects a desire to come to deeper understanding of each other" (Vanacker & Breslin, 2006, p. 201).

Another journalist broke down barriers by making connections with the person he interviewed — over parenting, sports and their current life stage. The journalist also validated the significance of the person's story. The interview went on for three hours and felt authentic, according to the person in this study. Furthermore, it shifted his thinking; no longer did the stereotype of the hit-and-run journalist who asks a few questions and bolts hold.

Finally, journalists listened by considering and exploring their sources' input. One journalist followed through on a tip from the source to obtain a specific type of public record. Her findings from the tip added significantly to the article. Another journalist had pitched one throughline to her editor but was willing to consider an alternate take led by her source's experience. In the end, she allowed her source's story to mold the direction of the final piece. Journalists face myriad time constraints; however, slowing down to listen and consider a person's story can deepen trust, build relationship and make for a more comprehensive piece.

Delve into research. Although studying the topic may appear to be a minimum requisite for journalists to pursue a story, in one person's experience, it wasn't. She expected the journalist to have done the work before their interview, but it soon became clear that wasn't the case. She wasn't alone — she'd heard stories from friends and colleagues about similar experiences with uninformed journalists.

Knowing and seeking knowledge, however, served for other people in this study as a form of caring. Steiner & Okrusch (2006) connect knowledge and care, writing that

"caring may be even better understood as a way of knowing" (p. 110). They refer, specifically, to practicing care in how a researcher comes to know the people they study. Journalists, however, added another dimension to their care when they sought not only to humbly know the exemplar, but become experts in something the exemplar deeply cares about: the story's subject matter.

These journalists who did the work before or during the interview process impressed the people they interviewed and inspired confidence. One person lauded the months of research the journalist brought with her into the interview. Her care and commitment to the work made him feel "glad to be a part of it." Another emphasized the investment her journalist made into understanding her case — he'd pored through thousands of documents and hours of voice recordings for the story:

> He relived the most horrific moments of our lives in great detail. Between the amount of time he spent with us and the intimate nature of the subject, he knew more about what happened to us than our closest friends.

Still another said the journalist was willing to deeply explore the "curve balls" she threw at her; those curve balls ultimately changed the direction of the story. These efforts not only improved the representation of the story but augmented the source's trust in the journalist.

Avoid omission. Despite their feelings about the final article — most of which were positive — all six people said they felt, at least initially, the journalist didn't include something they deemed important. These omissions ranged from personal details (one journalist didn't mention the source's 12-step program) to context surrounding the central issue (one journalist didn't explore the issue's consequences for children). These omissions didn't really matter if the journalist captured what one person dubbed the

"metamessage." For her, it was a particular quote she felt reflected the integrity of her decisions in the story. Because another person received pre-publication review, she was able to correct some of the omissions. Through her "redlining privileges," she suggested additions to the article she felt were important, and the journalist included them in the final piece: "She checked all my boxes, if you will. So I was happy." But for another person, who said the journalist failed to add context, the final article felt "cherry-picked and exaggerated."

Journalists must navigate restrictions of time, energy and word count — they can't include everything. Still, they can take a simple and practical step to make sure they understand their exemplar's metamessage: Asking the person which ideas they've provided should absolutely remain in the final piece, even if all else were cut. This practice moves toward a dialogue-centric narrative approach that seeks to equalize the voices of writer and subject (Zou, 2018, p. 386). When those written about define what matters, they move toward being able to "resist the finalizing and closed definition of their identities by journalists. They choose to be defined in their own words, on their own terms" (Zou, 2018, pp. 387-388). Creating space for this kind of dialogical representation allows journalism to move "toward the ethics of care" (Zou, 2018, p. 395).

Consequences. What, then, happens when a journalist fails to take these measures? One person I interviewed offers a case study. Of the six people, she alone experienced an overwhelmingly negative interaction with the journalist. Her only communication with the journalist, a less-than-30-minute phone call, was disappointing; reading the published article was worse. For one, she expected the journalist to know her

stuff, and she didn't. She also expected to discuss the issue from a place of expertise, but the journalist wanted to focus on the "quote unquote emotional side of the story."

After the interview, she never heard from the journalist again — she only discovered the article had published after a friend sent it to her. The article, she felt, was "cherry-picked and exaggerated," not quite fake news, but close. It lacked context and included two disparate anecdotes that didn't accurately reflect the issue. These were, in her eyes and mine, the consequences:

1. She posited articles like hers contribute to polarization in the country, because they fail to capture nuance.
2. She buried the story. She didn't share it with anyone, didn't even tell people, because she felt embarrassed by it.
3. She's less willing to speak to journalists in the future, and if she does speak to them, she said she'll spend at least a week researching them to see if they're credible.

Not only did the journalist who interviewed this person lose her as a source for future stories, the journalist made it harder for other journalists who might want to interview her down the road. For journalists hoping to garner eyeballs, amass sources, and build a more positive image of the press, her response doesn't bode well.

Even so, the dependency principle offers some grace for journalists. It acknowledges that some interests, for some people, have such high importance that few measures can fulfill those interests:

> The less important the interest, the more likely it must be that some measure will fulfil it, in order for the measure's likelihood to be proportionate to the interest's importance. Conversely, for an extremely important interest, a measure might

> have a low likelihood of fulfilling it (if the measure is taken), and yet it might be proportionate. (Collins, 2015, 'Sufficiently Capable' section, para. 2)

For one person, whose article centered her child's death, the journalist did almost everything right, including (mostly) following the recommendations I outlined above. The person I interviewed said she didn't think the experience "could've gone any better." Still, when I asked her if the article was the platform she'd hoped it would be, she said this:

> Yes, I think it was. I think it, it was, yes. As advertised, absolutely. Do I want it to be, did I want it to be more, for it to have more power, I mean, more reaction? Absolutely. Because I don't think, there's, there's not enough out there. There, I don't think there could have been a platform large enough, frankly. Because it's just such an emotional topic for me.

Of the six people I interviewed, she received the most advanced notice from the journalist: She read and edited the story draft before it went to print. She offered edits and the journalist made them. These days, she considers the journalist a friend. And yet, though the journalist did all the right things, the issue about which she wrote was of such deep and personal significance that nothing, truly, could've done it justice.

Limitations and Further Study

This study has at least two limitations, and the first is within me. I came with a bias. As a new journalist, I'd included a person as an exemplar in a story about a systemic (and traumatic) issue. After the article published, they told me they felt I'd portrayed them as a victim and stereotype, and they wanted their name removed from the story.

Since then, I've worried (agonized, really) over the capacity for journalists to mislead and abuse their sources, especially people they use as exemplars. I've hurt over the hypothetical exemplars in the world whose stories have been extracted and mangled

by journalists. I came into this study expecting people to confide in me their woebegone tales of being in the news.

My committee and, I think, my methodology, saved me from myself. Grounded theory analysis, especially line-by-line coding, forced me again and again to consider the data, not my preconceptions. I compared the frequencies of my focused codes with the findings I wrote as a sort of "gut check," making sure my work reflected the data. Member reflections, too, served as a method for checking the validity of my findings. And, the loosening of the knot in my stomach, if I can offer it as academic evidence. I know now that not every person used as an exemplar in a news story — probably not even the majority — experiences something as dreadful as I'd come to assume.

But I can't say so for certain, which leads me to the second limitation. My sample size (n = 6) is quite small. Central, underlying themes can arise with as few as six participants and data saturation can for the most part occur with 12 participants when the group is mostly homogenous (Guest et al., 2006, pp. 76–78). Although I did observe saturation with some themes, the experiences of those I interviewed — predominantly white, female and well-educated — may not reflect the experience of exemplars from other backgrounds. Opportunities for further study abound here; I hope future researchers focus their studies on how people from specific intersections experience being an exemplar: people of color, people who identify as trans or non-binary, people without papers, people seeking refuge in other countries, people without stable housing, etc. These people were particularly difficult to find, as the journalists who wrote about them didn't provide their full names or their real names, or I couldn't find their contact

information. Furthermore, several people who might've provided alternative perspectives declined to participate or never responded to my recruitment email.

Diversity of context may likewise bear rich insight. For example, journalism scholarship leaves room to explore the exemplar experience across platforms, markets and beats. One person in this study contrasted print journalism and TV journalism. Being on TV news, she said, involved a wholly different interview style than she experienced for the newspaper piece. Further studies could examine what it's like to be an exemplar on TV, in a podcast or radio piece or photo essay, and (hopefully) garner platform-specific insights for journalists who don't work in print. Community papers may likewise create an experience distinct from metro dailies or national news networks; nonprofits' philosophies and methods may differ from those of for-profits. Finally, the story's subject may also shift the experience. People who serve as exemplars in health stories may offer separate themes from those who serve as exemplars in a crime story or environmental piece. Suffice it to say, the exemplar experience remains fertile ground. May we approach it with compassion and curiosity.

This study also fostered questions about journalism practice. One person spoke about mismatched role expectations. She expected to share her expertise during the interview; instead, the journalist asked for personal details. A future study could center the positionality of journalists in relation to different types of sources: exemplars, experts, men/women-on-the-street, public figures, etc. Journalists may think about and approach these sources with different methods and postures. Finally, regardless of a journalist's personal ethic, they may work within a newsroom culture hostile to that ethic. Future research could examine how journalists navigate that tension. My own study offers

simple practices for journalists, but if newsrooms discourage those practices, then culture really might eat strategy for lunch.

Conclusion

The six interviews described in this study are, I hope, only the beginning. More conversations between journalists and exemplars need to take place, especially in spaces where unseasoned reporters come to learn and grow. In journalism schools and newsrooms I advocate a kind of "repositioning pedagogy," an approach to teacher education in which young people come into the "physical spaces of university-based teacher preparation as educational consultants to teach future teachers about learning, curricula, teaching, and/or other aspects of schooling" (Petrone & Rink, in press, p. 4). Applied in a journalism school setting, professors would invite people who've served as exemplars in published news articles to speak to classes about their experience. The resulting dialogue would work to disrupt common power dynamics between journalist and source, prioritizing students' "*listening to* and *learning from*" (Petrone & Rink, in press, p. 4) exemplars. Such a practice may not only inform fledgling journalists as they develop ethical codes and customs but prove particularly weighty for people from communities that have been historically marginalized or ignored by the press.

When I was a novice journalist, a space like this certainly would've helped me. As I write in the beginning, this study grew from a problem of practice. My mind has returned again and again to the person who felt manipulated by my reporting. The lessons I've learned here both clarify and complicate my thinking about what happened.

I know now that I am not, or at least not wholly, to blame. This person had experienced a deep trauma — it's possible no journalistic practice would've been

enough. In Maercker & Mehr's (2006) study on how media coverage affects trauma victims, the respondents' emotional reactions to the news reports were "predominantly negative" (p. 141) — regardless of the reports' accuracy. Furthermore, people who suffered more from post-traumatic stress disorder were prone to more negatively evaluate their coverage (p. 141).

One person in this study experienced a trauma with loosely related themes but spoke, overall, contentedly about being in the news. The journalist who wrote the piece navigated with seemingly similar methods to mine — for example, they also allowed a form of prior review. But there were key differences. More years had passed between the article's publication and the trauma experienced by the person in this study. The person I wrote about and the person in this study also differ across multiple demographic dimensions. My own positionality as a white, mid-20s, cisgender and heterosexual woman may have intersected differently — and problematically — with my source than the other journalist's positionality did with theirs.

Still, I would do and be better now. If I were to do it over, I'd move more slowly. I'd ask the person to meet me for coffee first — off the record — and talk. I'd share what the interview process would look like, and what to expect afterward. I'd ask if they had questions for me. I'd ask them to share their concerns. I'd give them time to think about whether or not they want to move forward. After the coffee, I'd email them a form of my "informed consent template," below, to provide in writing what they can expect if they agree:

1. Here's what I'm hoping to learn from you and what it adds to my story, which will be published in [paper name] in print and online. Our

circulation is about [number]. It's possible other outlets may pick up the story.

2. You choose the interview setting. I'll record with my iPhone and possibly take occasional handwritten notes, but mostly I'll sit and listen so we can have better conversation. If you feel uncomfortable with a question I've asked, you don't have to answer it. You may stop the interview any time.
3. We may sit for hours and talk, and I may use quite a bit of your story in the article. Or, I may only write two sentences from our conversation. Or, your story might not be in the final article at all. No matter what, your story will inform me as I write.
4. Know that, as part of my process, I'll need to independently verify what you tell me. That could look like talking to people you mention, reviewing relevant documents, etc. It's not that I don't believe you. Good journalism requires careful fact-checking, and you and I both want to get the facts right.
5. Yours is one of many interviews for this story. I'll be in contact after we meet to keep you in the loop, but it could be weeks or months between our interview and the publication of the story.
6. After I finish gathering information, I'll write. I will include your name in the story. My editor will edit. Before we publish, I will contact you by phone or email for accuracy checks. Basically, I'll share with you what I've written in the article from our conversation so you have the

opportunity to make sure it's accurate and doesn't misrepresent what you told me. If you have something else to add, you can let me know.

7. I'll email you a link to the story when it publishes. After that, I don't know what will happen. My hope is that, at the very least, the story helps people better understand this issue.

If the person agreed to move forward, I'd ask them if they were connected with a therapist. If so, I'd recommend we align our interview with a therapy appointment, perhaps within the same week, so they could receive professional support and care around the interview. Finally, I would share the entire article (including headlines and photos) to the person before it published, rather than only the parts relevant to our conversation. Doing so, I hope, would enable them to become a co-creator of meaning and to avoid surprises.

Maybe, if I'd done these things, the person would've left the encounter feeling, at the very least, content. But at the end of the day, I'm speculating. I've processed what happened with only one side of the story: mine. I asked the person to further explain their disappointment, and they declined. Still, I'm heartened and informed by the experiences of the people in this study. I hope my own journalism, and the journalism of those who read these words, will seek to do right by the people whose stories we share. And when we get it wrong, may we learn from our mistakes and move forward. My dad, a former emergency room physician, remembers every person he thinks he should've been able to save, but who died under his care. My own list comprises the people I've harmed by writing into my work. This person's name sits at the top — a permanent reminder to center and care for the human behind the human face.

References

Adichie, C. N. (2009, July). *The danger of a single story* [Video]. TED. https://www.ted.com/talks/chimamanda_adichie_the_danger_of_a_single_story

Andersen, K., Skovsgaard, M., Albaek, E., & de Vreese, C. H. (2017). The engaging effect of exemplars: How an emotional reaction to (dis)similar people in the news media affects political participation. *The International Journal of Press/Politics, 22*(4), 490–509.

Audience summary user guide. (n.d.). http://online.audiencefax.com/AudienceFaxUserGuide111717.pdf

Barnhurst, K. G., & Mutz, D. (1997). American journalism and the decline in event-centered reporting. *Journal of Communication, 47*(4), 27–53.

Berry, R. S. Y. (1999, September). *Collecting data by in-depth interviewing* [Presentation]. British Educational Research Association Annual Conference, Brighton, U.K. http://www.leeds.ac.uk/educol/documents/000001172.htm

Boyce, T. (2006). Journalism and expertise. *Journalism Studies, 7*(6), 889–906.

Brosius, H-B., & Bathelt, A. (1994). The utility of exemplars in persuasive communications. *Communication Research, 21*(1), 48–78.

Brown, B. (2012). *Daring greatly*. Gotham Books.

Charmaz, K. (1996). Grounded theory. In J. A. Smith, R. Harre, & L. Van Langenhove (Eds.), *Rethinking Methods in Psychology* (pp. 27–49). SAGE Publications.

Charmaz, K. (2006). *Constructing grounded theory: A practical guide through qualitative analysis.* SAGE Publications.

Chun Tie, Y., Birks, M., & Francis, K. (2019). Grounded theory research: A design framework for novice researchers. *SAGE Open Medicine, 7*, 1–8.

Collins, S. (2015). *The core of care ethics.* Palgrave Macmillan.

Du Bois, W. E. B. (1903). *The souls of black folk*. Project Gutenberg. https://www.gutenberg.org/files/408/408-h/408-h.htm

Ellsworth, E. (1989). Why doesn't this feel empowering? Working through the repressive myths of critical pedagogy. *Harvard Educational Review, 59*(3), 297–324.

Farhi, P. (2014, May 12). New Associated Press guidelines: Keep it brief. *The Washington Post.* https://www.washingtonpost.com/lifestyle/style/new-ap-guidelines-keep-it-brief/2014/05/12/f220f902-d9ff-11e3-bda1-9b46b2066796_story.html

Foster, J. E., & Minwalla, S. (2018). Voices of Yazidi women: Perceptions of journalistic practices in the reporting on ISIS sexual violence. *Women's Studies International Forum, 67,* 53–64.

Gilligan, C. (1977). In a different voice: Women's conceptions of self and morality. *Harvard Educational Review, 47*(4), 481–517.

Glaser, B. G., & Strauss, A. L. (1967). *The discovery of grounded theory: Strategies for qualitative research.* Aldine Publishing Company.

Grabe, M. E., Kleemans, M., Bas, O., Myrick, J. G., & Kim, M. (2017). Putting a human face on cold, hard facts: Effects of personalizing social issues on perceptions of issue importance. *International Journal of Communication, 11*, 907–929.

Grieco, E. (2018, November 2). *Newsroom employees are less diverse than U.S. workers overall.* Pew Research Center. https://www.pewresearch.org/fact-tank/2018/11/02/newsroom-employees-are-less-diverse-than-u-s-workers-overall/

Guest, G., Bunce, A., & Johnson, L. (2006). How many interviews are enough? An experiment with data saturation and variability. *Field Methods, 18*(1), 59–82.

Hinnant, A., Len-Rios, M. E., & Young, R. (2013). Journalistic use of exemplars to humanize health news. *Journalism Studies, 14*(4), 539–554.

Hopmann, D. N., Skovsgaard, M., & Elmelund-Praestekaer, C. (2017). What have I done to deserve this? The role of deservingness in effects of ordinary citizens as cases in the news. *European Journal of Communication, 32*(4), 333–347.

Lashmar, P. (2017). No more sources?: The impact of Snowden's revelations on journalists and their confidential sources. *Journalism Practice, 11*(6), 665–688.

Leech, B. L. (2002). Asking questions: Techniques for semistructured interviews. *PS: Political Science and Politics, 35*(4), 665–668.

Lindlof, T. R., & Taylor, B. C. (2011). *Qualitative communication research methods* (3rd ed.). SAGE Publications.

Maercker, A., & Mehr, A. (2006). What if victims read a newspaper report about their victimization? A study on the relationship to PTSD symptoms in crime victims. *European Psychologist, 11*(2), 137–142.

Maier, S. R. (2005). Accuracy matters: A cross-market assessment of newspaper error and credibility. *Journalism & Mass Communication Quarterly, 82*(3), 533–551.

Malcolm, J. (1990). *The journalist and the murderer*. Vintage Books.

Meyer, P. (2002). *Precision journalism: A reporter's introduction to social science methods* (4th ed.). Rowman & Littlefield Publishers, Inc.

Miller, sj. (2016). Trans*+ing classrooms: The pedagogy of refusal as mediator for learning. *Social Sciences, 5*(3), 34.

Moll, N. E. (1978). In search of the corporate private figure: Defamation of the corporation. *Hofstra Law Review, 6*(2), 339–360.

Momaday, N. S. (2001). The man made of words. In J.L. Purdy & J. Rupert (Eds.), *Nothing but the truth: An anthology of Native American literature* (pp. 82–95). Prentice Hall. (Original work published 1997)

Palinkas, L. A., Horwitz, S. M., Green, C. A., Wisdom, J. P., Duan, N., & Hoagwood, K. (2015). Purposeful sampling for qualitative data collection and analysis in mixed method implementation research. *Administration and Policy in Mental Health and Mental Health Services Research, 42*(5), 533–544.

Palmer, R. A. (2013). *In the funhouse mirror: How news subjects respond to their media reflections* [Doctoral dissertation, Columbia University].

Palmer, R. A. (2017). *The Journalist and the Murderer* revisited: What interviews with journalism subjects reveal about a modern classic. *Journalism, 18*(5), 575–591.

Palmer, R. A. (2018). *Becoming the news: How ordinary people respond to the media spotlight.* Columbia University Press.

Petrone, R. & Rink, N. (in press). From talking about to talking with: Integrating Native youth voices into teacher education via a repositioning pedagogy. *Harvard Educational Review*.

Reich, Z. (2011). Source credibility and journalism: Between visceral and discretional judgment. *Journalism Practice, 5*(1), 51–67.

Rogers, T. (2019, July 15). *Types of feature stories for journalists.* ThoughtCo. https://www.thoughtco.com/different-kinds-of-feature-stories-you-can-write-2074322

Rosen, J. (1997). Introduction/"We'll have that conversation": Journalism and democracy in the thought of James W. Carey. In E. S. Munson & C. A. Warren (Eds.), *James Carey: A critical reader*. University of Minnesota Press.

Saunders, B., Kitzinger, J., & Kitzinger, C. (2015). Anonymising interview data: Challenges and compromise in practice. *Qualitative Research, 15*(5), 616–632.

Schudson, M. (2008). *Why democracies need an unlovable press*. Polity Press.

Schultz, D. (n.d.). *Gertz v. Robert Welch, Inc. (1974).* The First Amendment Encyclopedia. www.mtsu.edu/first-amendment/article/554/gertz-v-robert-welch-inc.

Society of Professional Journalists. (2014, September 6). *SPJ code of ethics*. https://www.spj.org/ethicscode.asp

Spence, P. R., Lachlan, K. A., Westerman, D., Lin, X., Harris, C. J., Sellnow, T. L., & Sellnow-Richmond, D. D. (2017). Exemplification effects: Responses to perceptions of risk. *Journal of Risk Research, 20*(5), 590–610.

Steiner, L., & Okrusch, C. M. (2006). Care as a virtue for journalists. *Journal of Mass Media Ethics, 21*(2-3), 102–122.

Thomson, T. J. (2019). In front of the lens: The expectations, experiences, and reactions of visual journalism's subjects. *Journalism & Communication Monographs, 21*(1), 4–65.

Tolich, M. (2004). Internal confidentiality: When confidentiality assurances fail relational informants. *Qualitative Sociology, 27*(1), 101–106.

Tracy, S. J. (2010). Qualitative quality: Eight "big-tent" criteria for excellent qualitative research. *Qualitative Inquiry, 16*(10), 837–851.

Tuchman, G. (1973). Making news by doing work: Routinizing the unexpected. *The American Journal of Sociology, 79*(1), 110–131.

Ungvarsky, J. (2019). Phenomenology. *Salem Press Encyclopedia.*

Vanacker, B., & Breslin, J. (2006). Ethics of care: More than just another tool to bash the media? *Journal of Mass Media Ethics, 21(*2&3), 196–214.

Wadekar, N. (2019, August 14). Will international courts investigate pro-Trump media? *Foreign Policy.* https://foreignpolicy.com/2019/08/14/will-international-courts-investigate-pro-trump-media-fox-immigration/

Walsh-Childers, K., Lewis, N. P., & Neely, J. (2011). Listeners, not leeches: What Virginia Tech survivors needed from journalists. *Journal of Mass Media Ethics, 26,* 191–205.

Walukiewicz, E. T. (2018). "You have access to all of it." Assessing documentary participation through an ethics of care. In N. Carpentier, F. Colombo, M. Francesca M, R. Kilborn, L. Kramp, R. Kunelius, A. McNicholas, H. Ni, L. Peja,, P. Pruulmann-Vengerfeldt and S. Tosoni (Eds.), *Current perspectives on communication and media research* (pp. 217–229). Edition lumiere.

Watson, V. W. M., & Marciano, J. E. (2015). Examining a social-participatory youth co-researcher methodology: A cross-case analysis extending possibilities of literacy and research. *Literacy, 49*(1), 37–44.

Yahr, N. (2019). *Why should I tell you?: A guide to less-extractive reporting.* Center for Journalism Ethics. https://ethics.journalism.wisc.edu/why-should-i-tell-you-a-guide-to-less-extractive-reporting/#1553012465440-09f3157c-95bb

Yu, H., Si., J., & Cho, J. (2015). Effects of emotional exemplars in responsibility attribution-framed news reports on perception and evaluations of social issues. *Asian Journal of Communication, 25*(5), 525–545.

Zillmann, D. (1999). Exemplification theory: Judging the whole by some of its parts. *Media Psychology, 1*, 69–94.

Zillmann, D., & Brosius, H-B. (2000). *Exemplification in communication: The influence of case reports on the perception of issues*. Routledge.

Zou, S. (2018). From inarticulacy to care. *Journalism Practice, 12*(4), 382–399.

Appendix A: Final Newspaper List

1. Los Angeles Times
2. Daily News
3. Chicago Tribune
4. The Washington Post
5. Houston Chronicle
6. The Atlanta Journal-Constitution
7. San Francisco Chronicle
8. The Dallas Morning News
9. The Arizona Republic
10. The Boston Globe
11. Detroit Free Press
12. The Seattle Times
13. The Star-Ledger
14. Newsday
15. Star Tribune
16. Tampa Bay Times
17. Miami Herald
18. The San Diego Union-Tribune
19. The Denver Post
20. Orlando Sentinel

Appendix B: Recruiting Email

Dear [formal name],

I write to invite you to share your experience as someone whose story was recently featured in the news. As a graduate student in the University of Missouri School of Journalism, I'm conducting research to better understand what it's like to be in the news — specifically, when a person's experience is central to a news story.

I read the article titled "[headline]" ([URL]) and published in [outlet]. Would you be willing to speak to me about your experience being in the news? I would very much value your insight for this study. Your identity will be kept confidential, and you will be reimbursed for your time (either $25 or $50, depending on your availability).

The study involves a recorded interview via phone, Skype or Zoom, and could take 1-1.5 hours. I'll be asking you about your experience with the news process, including why you were in the news, what being interviewed was like, and how it felt to read about yourself in a published story. I will also ask if you have other interview questions you think I should add. Toward the end of the study, I will contact you to share my findings and ask for feedback. For more information, here is the study's informed consent form: [URL]

If you're willing to participate, please let me know your availability in the next 2-3 weeks. My number is [number] and my email is [email]. If you have questions, comments or concerns, please don't hesitate to contact me by phone or email.

Sincerely,
Alexis Allison

Appendix C: Informed Consent

Study Title: Behind Human Faces: How Exemplars Experience the News Process
Investigator: Alexis Allison

Study Summary: This interview study will explore what it's like to be a central figure — one used to illustrate a greater social problem — in a news story. The purpose of this research is to inform how journalists think about, interact with and write about the sources they use as central figures in a news story. The investigator plans to publish the results in the form of a peer-reviewed journal article and/or a conference paper.

You and others who've been a central figure in a news story are being asked to share your experience with being in the news. The interviews will be recorded and may last between an hour to 1.5 hours. You will also be asked to provide feedback on the study's findings via email or phone, which could take 30 minutes to an hour, depending on your feedback.

You will be paid for participating in this study. Following the interview, you will receive $25 via mail. If, after the researcher sends you a summary of her findings, you review them and offer feedback, you will again receive $25 via mail. You will be asked for the mailing address where payment can be sent.

You will encounter risk no greater than that faced in ordinary everyday life. There are no physical, psychological or social risks associated with the research procedure.

Your identity will remain confidential. Only the primary investigator will have access to the recordings or transcripts. No identifying information will be present in the final report.

If you should have any questions about this research project, please feel free to contact the investigator: Alexis Allison at [number] or [email]. For additional information regarding human subject participation in research, please feel free to contact the University of Missouri Institutional Review Board at 573-882-3181.

Your participation in this study is voluntary. You are free to say yes or no, and you can stop taking part at any time, without giving us a reason. Also, you do not have to answer any questions that may be asked.

Appendix D: Interview Guide

THE NEWS EVENT
Tell me about the experience that put you in the news.

INITIAL CONTACT
How did the journalist get in touch with you?
What questions did you have for them?
How did they set up your expectations?
Why did you agree to speak with them? What did you hope for the story?

INTERVIEWS
What was it like to be interviewed?
What did the interview process look like?
What did you think of the journalist?
After the interview(s), how did you think and feel about what you'd shared?
After the interview(s), what did you expect the story to look like?
Did you have any other interactions with the journalist between interviews and the story's publication? If so, what did they look like?

PUBLICATION
How did you encounter the published story? How would you describe the story?
What was your experience of reading it? What was it like reading about yourself?
Was the story accurate?
How were you represented? Did the representation align with how you see yourself?
What happened after the story came out?
What did you do with the story after it published — did you share it? Post it? Refer it to people? Post it on the fridge?
What feedback did you receive from people about the story?
What were your interactions like with the journalist after the story came out?

POST-PUBLICATION
Ultimately, did your expectations align with what happened?
In the end, were you glad you did it?
Would you speak to a journalist in the future?
Is there anything you know now that you wished you'd known in the beginning?
What else should I ask the next person I interview about their experience?

Appendix E: Member Reflection Email

Hi,

I hope this email finds you well.

As promised, here is the first draft of my findings. You'll notice highlighted lines as you read — these indicate the line comes from our conversation.

I have two requests of you, if you have time, energy and willingness (responding, of course, is voluntary):

1. I ask you to review these findings for accuracy and representation within the next week. Did I miss the mark anywhere? Did I include an error? Is there something important I've left out? Anything you'd like to add? It's important that I get this right, so please don't hesitate to tell me if something feels off.

2. If you feel comfortable doing so, please email me the following demographic details. I may or may not include them somewhere ... possibly my methods or discussion sections.
   Current age:
   Gender:
   Race(s)/ethnicity:
   Highest education level attained (I.e. high school diploma, some college, bachelor's degree, graduate degree, etc.):

Please send your thoughts via email (you can also comment directly in the Google doc). If a phone call works better, we can do that, too — just let me know. Once I receive your feedback, I'll pay you $25 more for your insight via our original channel.

Finally, know that this document will shift in the coming six weeks as other participants provide feedback and my committee offers edits. As I revise, I am happy (and planning) to share the final draft with you for your reading pleasure. If I alter one of your portions substantially, or need to check with you for clarification, I will let you know. As always, you are welcome not to respond.

Finally, if you have questions, comments or concerns, please let me know. I look forward to hearing from you!

With you,
Alexis