ABSTRACT

The Authentic “I”: Authenticity in First-Person Narrative Journalism

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This research examines how writers demonstrate their authenticity in first-person narrative journalism. It uses a textual analysis of eight long-form narrative journalism articles by four magazine journalists who write in first person. The writers studied include: David Foster Wallace, John Jeremiah Sullivan, Susan Orlean and Jeanne Marie Laskas. The research concluded that journalists employ techniques or tools to construct and demonstrate their authenticity to the reader. The techniques include: authenticity of reporting, biographical details, irony, self-consciousness and authenticity of the source. Furthermore, within the tools to demonstrate the authenticity of the reporting, there are four subcriteria: a conscious use of first-person, access, inference about the source and an analysis of reporting as an effective truth-telling device. All of these factors, when combined, help to contribute to the overall authenticity of the writer. Ultimately, this research suggests that just as objectivity is a process reporters use to justify credibility, authenticity involves techniques journalists who write in first-person use to justify their credibility. This also suggests that authenticity is a truth-telling technique specifically tailored to and necessary for journalists who write in first-person.