

Understanding the Strategic Ritual of Emotionality in Feature Journalism: A Case Study of Pulitzer Prize-Winning Articles

Molly A. Sposato

Journalism
Elon University

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Abstract

Objectivity and emotionality have long been viewed as opposing forces in the field of journalism. While journalists follow a strategic ritual of objectivity, this paper uses the theory of the strategic ritual of emotionality and argues that the two can, and should, be understood as concepts that can work together throughout feature journalism. This article uses the Pulitzer Prize as a marker of “cultural capital” of journalistic lore and analyzes the winning feature articles through the strategic ritual of objectivity in conjunction with the strategic ritual of emotionality (Tuchman, 1972, p. 134). This research attempts to answer how, and in what ways, journalists use these two rituals to create affect in feature writing.

I. Introduction

Objectivity is defined as the “lack of favoritism toward one side or another, freedom of bias” (*Definition of OBJECTIVITY*, n.d.). In 1972, Gaye Tuchman introduced the idea of objectivity as a “strategic ritual” in journalism. In her writing, she notes objectivity for journalists as “a bulwark between themselves and critics,” arguing that “newspapermen” use objectivity to avoid being criticized for potentially controversial presentations of facts (p. 130). The strategic ritual of objectivity has been mobilized across all fields of journalism as a consistent and safe professional norm that protects the journalist. Historically, publications and journalists have relied on objectivity as a means of meeting deadlines and avoiding libel suits, some argue (Tuchman, 1972). However, the idea of objectivity in journalism is still central today to journalistic conceptions of professionalism and the truth.

However, as journalism and related research has evolved, so have the strategies journalists use to convey a message. In 2013, Karin Wahl-Jorgensen put emotionality into conversation with Tuchman’s strategic ritual of objectivity. Wahl-Jorgensen argued that there is also a strategic ritual of emotionality that can be consistently seen throughout the field. In her study, she looked at a variety of Pulitzer winning articles across all categories of journalism from 1995-2011, finding that most of the pieces she analyzed relied heavily

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Email: msposato@elon.edu

on “emotional story-telling” (Wahl-Jorgensen, 2013a, p. 129).

While both objectivity and emotionality are crucial concepts to consider across all aspects of journalism, this article will focus on one category in particular: feature writing. Feature journalism typically refers to longer-form journalism that covers a niche or complex topic in-depth (Roberts, 2016). Unlike journalists who cover hard news, feature journalists often use creative tactics to explore topics in a compelling way. For feature journalism to be successful, however, it must intrigue, captivate, and move an audience. To do so, the journalist must evoke emotion in the reader. So how does the journalist move an audience to evoke emotion, while maintaining objectivity in feature journalism? To explore this question, the following research will analyze the pieces that have won a Pulitzer Prize in the features category in the four decades it has existed and much like Wahl-Jorgensen (2013) did in her study, examine how emotionality is used as a strategic ritual by journalists in *conjunction* with objectivity (p. 129).

II. Literature Review

Ideas of journalistic objectivity and emotionality have inspired scholars to weigh the strengths and limitations of both these journalistic rituals, questioning whether they can be used in tandem. Ultimately, the discussion suggests that these two practices do not need to be mutually exclusive. The following review of the existing literature about objectivity and emotionality in journalism will further explain them both and put these concepts in conversation with one another.

What is Objectivity?

Sociologist Gaye Tuchman, known for her influence on journalistic research with her 1972 article, *Objectivity as Strategic Ritual: An Examination of Newsmen’s Notions of Objectivity*, outlines three factors that help a journalist define an objective fact: form, content, and interorganizational relationships (Tuchman, 1972). She explains that form is the way in which a story is told, while content is what the story is about. Interorganizational relationships in this context can be understood as “two separate entities to produce something of greater value” (*Forms of Interorganizational Relations*, n.d.). She uses these factors to show that the best way for a journalist to “claim objectivity” is by citing procedures that show the formal elements of a newspaper (Tuchman, 1972). She argues that journalists must be able to invoke some sort of objectivity to accurately write about the existing social reality.

Tuchman then introduces the idea of rituals. She notes a ritual for the purposes of her article as a “routine procedure” where adherence is “frequently compulsive” (p. 661). So, a journalist must follow a ritual of objectivity for their work to be deemed acceptable by both the public and professionals in the journalism field. Tuchman notes that because of this, journalists practice these rituals almost as an “anticipatory defense mechanism” to criticism of bias (Tuchman, 1972, p. 661). In doing so, these rituals become performance strategies; hence, the strategic ritual of objectivity.

However, Tuchman’s research does not address the challenges that come with adhering to a single ritual of objectivity in journalistic practices. Leo Bowman (2006) notes that studies like Tuchman’s are “based on an examination of the final product, completed newspaper accounts, rather than on the processes through which such accounts were created” (p. 628-43). Because of this, he argues these examinations of objectivity in a final product fail to show evidence of “journalistic judgement” that can come about through analyzing how journalists *do* objectivity. In other words, Tuchman’s strategic ritual of objectivity fails to account for *how* a journalist adheres to objectivity in the field, and how objectivity itself must adapt to various subject matters. Today’s world of journalism operates on “a somewhat more complicated set of epistemological assumptions, yet the premise of outsourcing emotional labor persists” where a single adherence to the strategic ritual of objectivity can become trapping (Wahl-Jorgensen, 2013a, p. 130).

What Does Emotionality Look Like in Journalism?

While objectivity is implicit to journalism, as the field has grown and changed, scholars have challenged the perspective that objectivity is the *only* strategic ritual journalists follow. In 2013, Wahl-Jorgensen brought the concept of emotionality into the conversation around strategic rituals. In looking at Pulitzer Prize-winning articles from 1995-2011 across all categories, Wahl-Jorgensen examined the ideals

of emotionality in journalism through a content analysis and found that the analyzed stories relied heavily on emotion in their story telling (Wahl-Jorgensen, 2013a). She suggests that “there is an institutionalized and systematic practice of journalists narrating and infusing their reporting with emotion, which means that journalistic storytelling, despite its allegiance to the ideal of objectivity, is also profoundly emotional” (Wahl-Jorgensen, 2013a, p. 130). It is crucial to understand that Wahl-Jorgensen is separating the two ideals for different purposes. She notes that the ideal of objectivity, like Tuchman says is “central to journalistic lore” while the strategic ritual of emotionality “constitutes a form of tacit knowledge” that is crucial to the socialization processes of journalism (Wahl-Jorgensen, 2013a, p. 130).

Wahl-Jorgensen argues that the strategic ritual of emotionality does not mean journalists should express their *own* emotions, but rather rely on an outsourcing of emotional labor to non-journalists so that they can objectively methodize the way emotions are presented (Wahl-Jorgensen, 2013). The strategic ritual of emotionality explores how emotions can be built into a narrative using various methods such as emotive language, creating dramatic tension, and detailed descriptions to create an affective force of emotion (Wahl-Jorgensen, 2013). While Tuchman suggests that validation for evidence (proving objectivity) comes when journalists use quotes as a source of fact, Wahl-Jorgensen found in her study that only 6.2 percent of all feature stories were based on direct or indirect quotes (Wahl-Jorgensen, 2013). With this, Wahl-Jorgensen argued that these feature stories relied on an “alternative epistemology” to the strategic ritual of objectivity by resting on the idea that “the epistemic authority of the excellent journalist can be taken for granted, so that the power of the narrative and the feelings described in it and evoked through it speak for themselves, without having to rely on key aspects of the strategic ritual of objectivity” (Wahl-Jorgensen, 2013a, p. 130).

How Objectivity and Emotionality Can Coexist

Wahl-Jorgensen argued that objectivity and emotionality can - and should - exist *together* in journalism, noting that the strategic ritual of emotionality is not to be used on its own in journalistic practices, but alongside that of objectivity. And while it is also important that objectivity is recognized and adhered to, it must be done so without trapping journalists in its ideologies.

Empathy, defined as “the ability to understand and share feelings of another,” is a crucial linking factor in preventing this (*Empathy*, n.d.). Antje Glück pointed to empathy as a means of discussing emotionality in journalism, and the ways in which it is crucial to understand: “Empathy can be a mediator between the prevalent self-understanding of journalism practitioners as ‘messenger of reality’ and journalists reflecting about emotions; between the ideal of detached passionless reporting and a ‘strategic ritual of emotionality’” (Glück, 2016, p. 894). Glück makes a clear separation between empathy and its related concepts (such as sympathy, compassion and primitive empathy) by distinguishing empathy as a means of adaptation and emotional processing in the journalistic processes, rather than *personal* distress or emotional contagion – which would contaminate objectivity” (p. 895).

Emotionality cannot be obtained without some element of empathy. Empathy, for the purposes of this article, can be thought of as the connecting link between emotionality and objectivity. With empathy, a journalist can both understand and authoritatively relay their subjects’ emotions *objectively* in a story. For a journalist covering stock markets and data-heavy pieces, employing empathy will likely not be as crucial in their journalistic practices. However, feature pieces, which often put their subject into cultural context, benefit from empathy. A case study of the multi-faceted emotionality journalists must navigate when reporting on stories of genocide found that journalists need empathy to manage the emotional labor of covering heavy topics. In focusing on reporters covering the 1990s genocide in Rwanda and Srebrenica, Caitlin Knight (2020) found that journalists managed their emotions in three main ways: professionalism, process, and emotional silencing.

Knight (2020) discusses this difficult balance of emotionality and professionalism that the reporters had to maintain, saying their emotionality “was not completely silenced” during their reporting, raising the question if it even should be (p. 22). She argues there is an “inherent emotionality associated with reporting in extraordinary situations,” meaning emotionality and professionalism (in this case objectivity) must be cooperative (Knight, 2020, p. 22). During the reporting process, empathy is needed for a journalist to appropriately adapt their objective practices across various subject matter. Further, when a journalist goes to write the story, practicing emotionality must also include an ethic of solidarity alongside empathy.

In a case study of the *San Francisco Homeless Project*, Anita Varma analyzed 325 articles and conducted nine interviews with journalists who wrote for the project. Her findings are based on the distinction

between empathy and solidarity when humanizing a marginalized community. She argues that “while both empathy and solidarity encourage concern for marginalized communities, the logic of empathy constrains this concern to worthy or exceptional individuals, whereas solidarity techniques expand the scope of concern to the entire affected community,” (Varma, 2020, p. 1706). This refers to the ways in which these stories are portrayed to audiences, and for a journalist to do this properly, they first need empathy in their practices – as Knight discusses. Varma found that a common thread among the journalists she interviewed was that they didn’t have specific strategies of humanizing techniques; instead, they attributed their approaches to being “obvious,” “intuitive,” or “natural” (Varma, 2020, p. 1719). According to Knight’s research, Knight would attribute this to the journalists having highly developed empathetic strategies to help maintain professionalism (Knight, 2020). So, while the two have slightly differing research topics, their findings complement each other in discussing the complexities of evoking emotion objectively as a feature writer.

Building Affective Force

In 2012, Eli Sanders won the Pulitzer Prize in feature journalism for his story “The Bravest Woman in Seattle” (*Feature Writing*, n.d.). The article contains graphic and tragic details of a near-death attack on two women in their home in Seattle. Ronnie Agnew, a four-time Pulitzer Prize judge, praised Sanders for his ability to let the story read like a work of fiction with his ability to *show* not *tell* in saying the reader can “draw her own conclusions about whether the convicted man got what he deserved” given the outsourced facts presented. (*Narrative Gold*, n.d.) In another comment, Amy Ellis Nutt (winner of the 2011 Pulitzer for feature writing), said of Sanders’ piece:

The tension in the story comes as much from what is not said as what is. Instead of detailing every grim act, we get the reactions to the survivor’s descriptions of those acts – from the bailiff, the court reporter, the prosecutor, even another reporter. By the end, we are reminded that violence is not ordinary, nor are the victims of violence (*Narrative Gold*, 2012).

The crucial point here being that Sanders was able to present the *facts* and emotion of the story not by specifically listing them, but by writing in such a way that allowed the details and characters to speak for themselves, building affective force.

Building an affective force allows objectivity to be a vehicle for emotionality – letting the facts and quotes gradually create intimacy and emotion within the reader. Growing changes in the media have pushed people to become more personally and emotionally engaged with the world around them, meaning journalists need to grow and adapt in the way they present stories to their audiences (Beckett & Deuze, 2016, p.1). Practicing objectivity in this environment “isn’t by insisting that the authorities know best – let alone journalistic authorities. It will be about linking news to emotion: connecting with communities, creative constructive journalism that deploys positive psychology and linking up with the culture of sharing on social networks” (Beckett & Deuze, 2016, p. 4). In other words, it will be about building an affective force. As emotion continues to be mobilized throughout the field, scholars are witnessing new storytelling styles and formats incorporating both substance and affect (Beckett & Deuze, 2016, p.4), which this study will analyze.

III. Methods

This research will attempt to gain insight on how feature journalists use emotion as a strategic ritual in their journalistic practices to build affective force. Using inductive thematic analysis, this research explores and identifies patterns in which emotionality and objectivity work together to create a construction of meaning in feature articles (Wahl-Jorgensen, 2013a, p. 135). Specifically, this article will use the Pulitzer Prize, as it is a marker of “cultural capital in the journalistic field” (Wahl-Jorgensen, 2013a, p. 129).

Cultural capital is a means of distinction or identification as related to power or influence, and prizes like the Pulitzer began as a way of awarding or identifying the inherent value to exceptional written works. Winning a Pulitzer in the field of journalism gives the journalist inherently more status (Hood, 2014). Feature articles became its own category of the Pulitzer Prize in 1979. This article will look at every Pulitzer Prize-winning feature article from 1979 through 2020 to examine the emotionality of each story in the context of objectivity. While discourse analysis is helpful in coding something inherently subjective like emotionality, it

is less helpful in understanding where emotionality lies in the context of objectivity. Further, using thematic analysis, a macro-level approach, this research will analyze more broadly the ways in which emotionality and objectivity work together as strategic rituals in Pulitzer-Prize winning feature articles.

In analyzing the narrative texts at the macro-level, this article will attempt to answer:

RQ1: In what ways do these award-winning journalists use strategic rituals of emotionality to create the appropriate affective force?

RQ2: How do these strategic rituals of emotionality work in conjunction with objectivity?

IV. Findings

This study examines the strategic rituals of emotionality through all 41 years of winning articles in this category. Using a macro-level thematic analysis was effective in developing three main patterns to identify and further understand the ways in which objectivity and emotionality can work together. The winning journalists generally used three major strategies to build an affective force: outsourcing, humanizing repetition, and contextual contrast. It also found the article topic to be a strong determining factor in the ways these strategies were used in conjunction with objectivity to build emotionality.

Outsourcing

The most versatile strategic ritual used to build emotionality while maintaining objectivity across all subjects was outsourcing. Journalists outsource when they refer to non-journalists for support in the presentation of emotions. Non-journalists can be understood as sources who fit two qualifications: They are authorized to express emotions in public, and their emotions can be authoritatively described by the journalist without involving themselves. Through outsourcing, journalists can then present emotions in an objective way. To do so effectively, journalists deliberately choose what information and quotes from subjects surrounding the heart of the story to include. Outsourcing can fill in any holes that the journalist or main subject may not have been able to objectively detail themselves—thus building emotionality and enhancing the reader's investment.

While outsourcing appeared in all the articles, regardless of subject matter, journalists used it most often when writing in first person or when detailing accounts of death and tragedy. In 1983, Nan C. Robertson won the Pulitzer Prize for feature writing with her personal account of having toxic shock syndrome. In telling her story, Robertson relied heavily on outsourcing information from family, doctors, and friends to objectively use personal details to educate readers about this rare disease. To build an affective force of emotion, she began the story using quotes and recollections from her family members who were with her when it happened. For example, Robertson outsources a quote from her brother-in-law, where he describes what he saw at the hospital, a scene of people “scurrying around and telephoning, calling for help, because they knew they had something they couldn't handle, that they weren't familiar with...” (Robertson, 1982, p.1).

Later, as the article closes, Robertson has invited the reader into the most intimate moments of her battle against toxic shock syndrome through outsourcing. The reader can understand how difficult her situation is through another outsourced quote from one of her rehabilitation doctors who describes how human beings divide into two groups: survivors and “those who would rather take 50 pills and just slip under” (Robertson, 1982, p.15). With the inclusion of this quote from her doctor, Robertson can contextualize the gravity of her fight to survive against toxic shock syndrome from the perspective of a professional. Outsourcing in this article also allows Robertson to tell the story of toxic shock syndrome, not her own life. She draws upon other characters to build an affective force of emotion, maintaining her own journalistic objectivity, while her experience becomes merely a chronological map that guides the story.

Outsourcing also proved to be consistently effective in building affective force in stories of loss. “The Umpire's Sons” tells the story of a baseball umpire who lost his son to a genetic disease that damages the membrane insulating the nerves cells of the brain. At the same time, his second son was suffering from the same deadly disease. In writing the feature, Lisa Pollak did not reconstruct a scene detailing how the umpire cried when he learned of the diagnosis of his son, or how hard it was to learn that twice. Instead, she relied on

outsourcing from surrounding characters to paint the picture. In one example, Pollak outsources perspective from Dr. Hugo Moser, the specialist who worked with the umpire's family:

Years later, Moser would still remember how the umpire cried. How he sobbed, inconsolable. How he held the doctor's hand and begged him to say it wasn't true, that he wasn't going to lose both sons, not John, not Michael, too (*Lisa Pollak of The Baltimore Sun*, 1982).

Because emotions like grief can be subjective from person to person, outsourcing this quote from a second perspective contextualizes the umpire's personal emotion to the reader, creating emotionality.

However, outsourcing cannot be done accurately and effectively without the strategic ritual of objectivity in mind. For example, the winning article in 2000 details the separation of blacks and whites in Gee's Bend, Alabama. In a story where the subject matter can be polarizing to readers, outsourcing would contaminate objectivity - regardless of what it does for the emotionality of the story - if it does not account for all possible perspectives. Instead, the journalist uses tactics like humanizing repetition and contextual contrast more prominently to build emotionality.

Humanizing Repetitions

When used in media, repetition is understood as a recurring action or event, with or without agency (Repetition, n.d.) For the purposes of this paper, *humanization* can be understood as the "agency" of the repetition to build an affective force of emotionality in feature writing. The term "agency" should be thought of in the context of objectivity and emotionality as strategic rituals working together. In other words, repetition becomes the strategic ritual of emotionality for objectively humanizing an unfamiliar subject or concept to readers.

Humanizing repetition was found in this study to be most common in the form of short, declarative sentences in features about a niche way of life, or as time stamps, most commonly in features about medical issues. The 1986 Pulitzer for feature writing went to John Camp for his article "Life on the Land: An American Farm Family" (*Life on the Land*, 1986). Camp spent an entire year immersed in the life of a farm family in Minnesota during the worst agricultural crisis since the Great Depression. In detailing their daily life, the struggles of farming, and the risks of building a life in the business of agriculture, Camp was able to build an affective force by repeating short, declarative sentences throughout the article. In the fifth part of the six-part series, Camp evokes the risk and reward feeling of farming in the reader through repetition:

Wednesday was dry again. Humid, but no rain. Thursday was the same. Friday, two days ago, he picked the end rows of the bean fields. We got the field open, but the beans are still wet," Sago said by phone late Friday. "*If the weather holds*, we might get in Sunday. We hate to work Sunday, but *if the weather holds...*" *If the weather holds*, the Bensons are out there this minute, bringing in the big cash crop. It'll be a good one. *If the weather holds* (*Life on the Land*, 1986).

Camp's use of repetition allows the reader to understand how important, yet unpredictable the weather is to these farmers. The agency of humanization with this repetition brings the reader into this intimate battle of hope and fear, and a lack of control that comes with farming. It also creates a mantra of sorts, contextualizing how ever-present the thought of weather is in the brain of a farmer.

The 1981 feature winner, "Death of a Playmate," by Teresa Carpenter (which replaced Janet Cooke's revoked award), details the killing of Hugh Hefner's playmate Dorothy Stratten – shot and killed by her husband at the time, Paul Snider. As Carpenter details Snider's background, she writes that he "would kill himself, he once told a girl, before he went to jail" (*Death of a Playmate*, 2016). Twelve pages later, as Carpenter describes Stratten's murder and Snider's suicide, she writes that "the blast, instead of driving him backwards, whipped him forward over the length of the gun. *He had always said he would rather die than go to jail*" (*Death of a Playmate*, 2016). Carpenter is using the objective fact of Snider's statement to build an affective force of emotion toward Snider's actions. It allows her to not only tell the story of Stratten's death, but also show the layers of complexity in her killer's suicide that would otherwise not be as relevant or compelling.

The use of repetitive time stamps was also used in the first-ever Pulitzer Prize for feature writing, Jon D. Franklin's "Mrs. Kelly's Monster" in 1979 (*Feature Writing*, n.d.). Franklin won for his detailed account of a brain surgeon working on an almost impossible tumor. His story builds an affective force of emotion by using the humanizing agency of repeated time stamps which allow the reader to feel the suspense as if watching it happen. He begins his story by humanizing the surgeon in writing:

In the cold hours of a winter morning Dr. Thomas Barbee Ducker, chief brain surgeon at the University of Maryland Hospital, rises before dawn. His wife serves him waffles but no coffee. Coffee makes his hands shake. In downtown Baltimore, on the 12th floor of University Hospital, Edna Kelly's husband tells her goodbye. For 57 years Mrs. Kelly shared her skull with the monster: No more. Today she is frightened but determined. It is 6:30 a.m. ... As Dr. Ducker leaves for work, Mrs. Ducker hands him a paper bag containing a peanut butter sandwich, a banana and two fig newtons. (*Mrs. Kelly's Monster*, n.d.)

With the time stamp beginning the story, the reader is immediately put into the scene. Franklin's descriptions of the peanut butter sandwich and coffee humanize the surgeon. As the story continues, Franklin concludes with a deliberate strategy of repeating these two things. The time stamps allow the reader to understand how quickly the surgeon must think and react, but it also allows the reader to feel the emotional depth of how in just one minute the procedure could become deadly. After ten pages that describe every movement and moment of the surgery, Franklin concludes the article in the same way the surgery ended: abruptly, with the words "It is 1:43, and it's over. Dr. Ducker bites, grimly into his sandwich. The monster won" (*Mrs. Kelly's Monster*, 1979). Franklin uses the objective time stamps to build an affective force of emotion by contextualizing the surgery, and its outcome to the reader.

Contextual Contrast

Contextual contrast also builds an affective force of emotionality. Journalists introduce contextual contrast by putting something that might otherwise be a foreign concept, or unrelatable to general audiences, into context by using contrasting examples. Alice Steinbach's 1985 winning article titled "A boy of unusual vision," built an affective force of empathy for a 10-year-old blind boy named Calvin, describing that "he can do everything the rest of his class can do. Except see," (*A Boy of Unusual Vision*, 1985). Steinbach builds affect by starting with the context of Calvin's age and lifestyle: *He can do everything the rest of his class can do*, and then contrasting the context with Calvin's reality: *Except see*. It should be noted here that Steinbach also used this phrase in humanizing repetition throughout the article, using both strategic rituals of emotionality. Similarly, in 1996, Rick Bragg won the Pulitzer for feature writing for his series of stories on contemporary America. One of the stories told the tale of the man who caught murderer Susan Smith. He uses a similar strategy of contextual contrast, but by outsourcing a quote from the man saying "Susan Smith is smart in every area ... except life," (*Rick Bragg of The New York Times*, 1996).

In another example, Isabel Wilkerson's winning article in 1994 was a profile on a fourth grader from Chicago. Nicholas, a 10-year-old, had an incredibly difficult home life, and has had to act as a father to his siblings. Wilkerson brings the reader into this reality using contextual contrast to describe Nicholas as "is all boy – squirming in line, sliding down banisters, shirt-tail out, shoes untied, dreaming of becoming a fireman so he can save people" who nonetheless has "the stiff slog of a worried father behind on rent," (*Isabel Wilkerson of The New York Times*, 1994). With this quickly worded contrast, Wilkerson allows the reader to form this image of Nicholas, evoking a level of empathy for him.

In 2011, Amy Ellis Nutt's winning article "The Wreck of the Lady Mary" told the story of a mysterious sunken fishing boat accident that killed six men (*Feature Writing*, n.d.) As she details the story, she uses contextual contrast to evoke the rarity and tragedy of this, explaining that "on today's oceans, endangered whales have more protection than fisherman, though the scores are killed each year," (*Amy Ellis Nutt of The Star-Ledger, Newark, NJ*, 2011). With this contrast between fisherman deaths and whale deaths, Nutt contextualizes the risks in which fisherman take every day. In Robertson's article "Toxic Shock" (1983), she uses a similar strategy by showing what *did* happened to her and contrasting it with what *could* have happened: "At first, the Rockford doctors thought they would have to amputate my right leg and the toes on my left foot. Because of my treatment, my legs were saved. But the dry gangrene on eight fingers persisted. The end joints of my fingers were amputated," (Robertson, 1982). In writing about potentially losing her entire leg and foot, Robertson puts the severity of toxic shock syndrome into context for the reader. In contrasting

it with “because of my treatment, my legs were saved...” Robertson is simultaneously evoking the fear and relief she felt in dealing with the syndrome (Robertson, 1982). Like both outsourcing and humanizing repetition, contextual contrast shows emotionality and objectivity working in duality throughout the journalistic process.

IV. Conclusion

This study found that while the strategic ritual of objectivity is central to journalistic lore, it is not mutually exclusive to the strategic ritual of emotionality. Specifically for feature writing, this study demonstrates that both objectivity and emotionality can, and should, work together as strategic rituals to successfully build an affective force of emotion. The Pulitzer-winning journalists studied in this article did this through methods of outsourcing, humanizing repetition, and contextual contrast. It should also be noted that the Pulitzer Prize sample does not reflect the broad diversity of written works throughout the entire field of journalism, but it helps the understanding of how objectivity and emotionality work together in a general context of the field (Wahl-Jorgensen, 2013).

As the scholars noted have also made clear, the mobilization of affect is not possible without empathy, solidarity, or emotional labor of journalists to both maintain objectivity while remaining relevant to an emotionally networked culture. In the context of feature writing specifically, this is increasingly important if journalists are to accurately contextualize different cultures and voices. Kristen Cook, a now retired feature writer of 26 years for the Arizona Daily Star, wrote about her career in feature writing upon her retirement and the importance it holds:

It's a huge responsibility to be trusted to tell someone's story. When you write a feature, you're invited in. You hear dark secrets, great joys. You laugh with strangers, cry with them. A few hours later, you're friends. And the feature stories that come from these interviews are just what people need – more than ever – after wading through headline after headline of gloom and doom. Fluff? No, it's the writing equivalent of a warm blanket, a steaming cup of cocoa that soothes as the storm rages outside (*A Feature Writer's Poignant Farewell*, 2017).

Through the lens of other scholars, Cook's comment begs the question: How does a journalist allow themselves to be “invited in” and tell an accurate story without emotional labor and empathy? And further, how can a journalist be objective on the page if they are not telling a story accurately? They cannot. So, what does a feature writer have to do to tell a story accurately? Convey the realistic emotion of the subject. Objectivity and emotionality are not, and should not, be mutually exclusive in feature writing.

For the purposes of this paper, this can be referred to as the affective force of feature writing. Through the method of outsourcing emotions, humanizing repetitions, and contextual contrast, journalists do not discuss their own emotions in their feature stories, but rather build an “affective force of their stories from the experience, accounts and retold histories of sources and subjects,” (Wahl-Jorgensen, 2013b, p. 307). Using the strategic rituals of objectivity and emotionality in tandem creates the affective force elemental to a successful feature story.

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