Reviewed Episode 5 Transcript

Fri, Apr 12, 2024 11:58AM • 20:25

**SUMMARY KEYWORDS**

pronoun, editors, journalist, queer, policies, journalism, interviewed, change, communities, extra, article, lim, sources, outdated, called, story, review, houston, lgbtq, newsrooms

**SPEAKERS**

Mariana

00:01

This year the review of journalism turns 40 Welcome to reviewed Welcome to reviewed Welcome to reviewed where we go through the past 40 years of the review of journalism to understand if the stories are still relevant and impactful today. Join us as we ask, are the issues too relevant? Is the reporting controversial?

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How has journalism changed over the years? After four decades on assignment,

**Mariana** 00:25

it's time for the review to be reviewed. Welcome to the final episode of refute. I'm your host mighty initiates.

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And I'm Sahana Ranganathan. In this episode we'll be talking about the role of media narratives in featuring and reporting on trans communities.

**Mariana** 00:43

There are only a few stories in the review of journalism, that look at how Canadian media has covered and featured the trans community. One of them is Alyssa Garrison's 2013 piece titled in transition, the

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piece explores the increased visibility of the trans community, their calls for change and the insistence of media outlets or misreport. On a community that they have little knowledge on.

01:08

My name is Alicia Lim. I am a professor of the humanities at York University. My students call me Dr. loom, they're the best and I go by they them pronouns.

**Mariana** 01:23

In transition begins with a story about Dr. Lamps activism. As a well known queer activist and artist, Lim hoped to implement they then pronouns in an interview in 2011, their interviewer, extra refused.

01:36

culture has changed so much that this story feels very outdated, happily, now. But so yeah, so digging back into my emails, I found all these dates and names and I found that have first had this interview in March 2011. And I was so excited about it. At the time I was, I had my first major art exhibit the illustrated gentleman, and it was in the home of my local queer heroes, this amazing power couple Alison Mitchell and Deirdre Logue, and it opened up their garage, and they called it the fag the feminist art gallery. And I was their inaugural show, so I was so stoked, and extra, interviewed me. And it was also the first time that I was using the pronoun de, or not the first time, but it's just really early in that. And, you know, it had just been sort of building traction at that time. Now, I guess this is 12 years ago. But not a lot of people were using it yet. And I was really inspired my roommate who started first. And so yeah, so I was kind of shy about it at the time now. It's just like, blah, blah, blah, pronoun thing or whatever. But back then I was so shy. And so I said to the journalist, I'm going to use the pronoun date feeling really nervous. And his answer was, Oh, we're not going to do that. Anyway, so blah, blah, blah, like and moved right on. And at the moment, I kind of pushed back a little bit, I was like, Oh, well, surely, extra observes trends. And this is kind of like a new trend in the culture. And he said, and I want to say like, he was really smart, and nice, I've really enjoyed my time with him. But he just explained that it would be really challenging for him to use it, which sounds so funny and outdated now, but that was his experience. And he explained that he had before interviewing me, he had interviewed a band, where someone in the band, use the pronoun de, and it was completely confusing for the for the audience, and they couldn't follow like when you say they, is this the band, or is it the person? And he said, After that he would never repeat it again. And he said, that he subsequently just like, doesn't accept using the pronoun day and that, even if he tried to, he felt like his editors would probably try to push him and say things like, so come on, is it a he or she? And looking back at the articles written at that time, I see that he was right. Like, the articles were so disrespectful. I mean, it's refreshing to be able to say that now, you know, at that time, it was like, oh, you know, I can't dare ask for better, like, what could I possibly deserve? I'm trying to experiment. Nobody should have to come along with me. But now Thank goodness, attitudes have changed and it just looks so disrespectful. Like, yeah, I looked back. And at that time, I asked friends and fellow activists about their experiences. And there was a few other of my trans community members who told me about what had happened. Like, for example, someone in all of Hershey was interviewed, and they had their they pronoun altogether dropped throughout the article, it just wasn't used. This is what extra and another name, Scott, her had asked to use the day pronoun, and instead they just use a he pronoun, just were like, whatever. And at that time, I was emailing back and forth with the journalist and with his editor. And with another editor at extra, I'd actually had like a long standing relationship with extra and some friends there. And my friend editors had had sent me an email about another trans artists and they were like, This is the kind of treatment you could have like this is we'll do this for you, and it would be good. And it was an article about my geeky, who was an awesome performance artist in Montreal. But it opened with what I thought was really disrespectful as well. The article Open With, in quotation marks, they are co hosting an event in Montreal, blah, blah, blah. And there, they will prepare the audience for quite a few surprises. It was just so I was like, I don't want to be treated like this like by Kiki shouldn't be treated like this either. Like, why are we in quotation marks, it makes it sound like some kind of novelty act or something. So I want to say to frame all of this discussion, I was told by another editor that they actually did have policy, they did have it in their style guide to us. They it's just that enforcing it, you know, in the moment, seemed it was hard to get editors and other journalists on board. And so that's I think what the original journalist who interviewed me was trying to say he was saying, Yeah, sure, it's a policy, but I'm going to get pushed back. It's going to be really hard to do. Yeah, but I would love to hear your thoughts because this dark theme is so outdated. Now. What do you think?

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When we were reading this piece, not only did this conversation feel outdated, but we were pretty surprised that it was extra, extra

**Mariana** 07:16

is an online magazine that covers LGBTQ two s plus culture, politics, relationships, and health. According to

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their site. As of 2024. They aim to break down boundaries, think outside the binaries, and build bridges within our communities and beyond. But

**Mariana** 07:35

in 2011, it was a different story.

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I went to Facebook, and I didn't intend for this to be a big deal. I just posted, you know, venting my frustrations to my friends in just like a one single post that said that, I was kind of upset because I was told by extra that they would not use my day pronoun, and that there was a good chance that it might just be deferred to a she in the article and I feel upset about this. And the response was immense. I guess that's just how community and subculture works. It might be slow in mainstream culture, but it's already such a, you know, sensitive and passionate subjects within marginalized communities. So the response was so massive that I thought I'd be collecting I don't know, like just a few responses, but it was going up to the hundreds immediately. So I wrote Dear extra, I am grateful for you grateful to you for a couple of reasons. You published a comic I was very proud of called sweetest taboo. And you've promoted me three times now. Thank you. But I've been told that it will be awkward for you to publish my pronoun as they, and you might differ to sheet. This is transphobic. But I don't want to just use big words. This is irrelevant. It's outdated, it's inaccurate. And as one of Canada's queer platforms, it's embarrassing. Please familiarize yourself with contemporary culture and adopt the pronoun they cosign by the following. And I had 1500 People cosign it was so huge. And that's, you know, where this sort of blew up into kind of a cultural moment, I guess.

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Andrea Houston is a journalist and activist who worked at extra at the time, and she was interviewed for Garrison's piece.

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Andrew Houston, journalist, I meant currently managing editor for ricochet media. I also teach queer media here at Tmu. I've been a journalist for about 20 years. I also involved in activism. I've worked in politics and in different civil society organizations. Some of my background outside of journalism is I've done a lot of work in LGBTQ spaces, obviously. Champion meaning different pieces of human rights law.

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In the article, she explained that she's used to starting every interview by asking her sources, their pronouns,

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I think it's so fundamental right? It's when we sit down or when we engage with a source. It's, you know, we're, we're, they're trusting us, the sources putting a lot of trust in us. And so I think that's the the base level of what we can do is to represent them fairly and honestly. And I think that begins with that question. How do you want to identify how should I represent you in the story? Asking them not just their name, but how they spell their name? People spell their names differently, right? It's the same issue. It's about respecting your sources and respecting how they want to be identified. So that's the question how do you want to be identified? What is your name? How do you spell your name? What pronouns do you use?

**Mariana** 10:52

Now to most it's so normalized to ask someone their pronouns. It's something we're taught to do in Journalism School. Houston explains that part of the reason this mis reporting and misrepresentation happens, it's very systemic.

11:05

I think every reporter who grew up at the time that I came of age as a reporter, and obviously, the generations before, we messed up, we messed up, we had to apologize. And we learned and that's how I learned was by making mistakes. Luckily, I never made any major mistakes in this regard, I'm very happy to say, but any mistakes that I did make, or any mistakes that ended up coming in print, let's put it that way, sometimes happened in the editing phase, I, so many of my journalism experiences have been in traditional mainstream newspaper newsrooms where you, you know, go and cover stories for the day, and then you file a story, and it's out of your hands after you leave for the day. And so it goes through, you know, different copy editing desks, and even a rewrite editor. When I was at the star, there was a rewrite editor. And so what ends up in the paper, sometimes it looks very different, at least, you know, the lead that you wrote, sometimes times changes if news changes. And so editors may take it upon themselves to change your writing, thinking maybe they're doing, they're correcting an error, maybe you didn't mean to, you know, maybe maybe you didn't write they buy, maybe maybe it wasn't an accident, and was supposed to be some other words. So I can speak from experience. And I know that that has certainly happened to me, but it's your byline on the top of that story. And so it regardless of what happened at the editing desk, it's you reflects badly on. And so I think that the same, you know, the same, the same response is called for and that's an apology to your source, if it's a newspaper, a correction, published on the same page that the news that the story ran, not buried deep in the back of the paper. And and I think it's just a matter of learning and doing better than next time. You know, we're in a moment right now in history that, you know, we're all kind of learning things, you know, that maybe we should have known already, and that maybe, you know, we should be doing actively doing better at this is one of those things journalism is learning and it needs to, but it still needs to do better.

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across North America, there's been a wave of anti LGBTQ two s plus policies and narratives earlier this year. Alberta premier Danielle Smith proposed policies that actively spread misinformation and limit the rights of gender diverse youth. Some

**Mariana** 13:23

of the policies require schools to notify parents when a 16 or 17 year old formally requests a name or pronoun change. Another policy proposes that any third party material regarding gender identity, sexual orientation and human sexuality needs to be approved by the Ministry of Education. The policy has also been gender reassignment surgery for those under the age of 17, and hormone therapy for youth under the age of 15. All in Alberta.

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However, some doctors have denounced these policies. And there are many reports saying that gender affirming care is life saving journalism

**Mariana** 14:01

can feel misinformation that normalizes policies like this. For example, stories that focus on detransitioning often include misinformation on its prevalence and misconceptions about the gender transition process. Our

14:14

only currency is language. That is what we that is that is how we mark our work is is the language that we use and we choose. I mean, there's power on both sides you know, we have power when we write a story, the quotes that we choose to use the lead that we choose to write the the angle that we choose to take, what sources were championing and that story what sources we don't use. So we already make choices right? We already make editorial choices and in our in our writing, and we also already respect public figures who change their names. I we have we have no issue writing about those name changes. So why is this such a problem? Was was what I kept coming back to. And I think that that for a lot of people they started to see See it, as you know, just another hurdle that we have to overcome in our overall understanding of how to be better in journalism, how to respect human rights more. And as far as LGBTQ people goes, you know, as we've seen, over the last, you know, 10 years, this issue has only gotten more mainstream, and newsrooms and style guides and legacy publications and wire services have all come up to speed. I mean, that's, that's the, that's the Ark of progress that, you know, and, frankly, in the in the newsroom, that extra at the time, those of us who who were fighting this fight, we knew, we knew that this would happen. You know, even if you have no, you have no goals in life, to be the kind of journalist that covers queer history or queer communities, you will at some point have to speak to a queer person, you will at some point probably have to interview a trans person. So you know, it's important that we understand how to engage communities most respectfully, and to the best of our abilities. Do what's right, if we make a mistake, that's should be fundamental, not just with queer communities, but all marginalized communities. But it's a really great way to learn that lesson is by through through LGBTQ information.

16:18

Part of the importance here is that it's essential to create safe spaces for trans journalists in newsrooms, there needs to be trans journalists in leadership roles in order to challenge the status quo. Similar to our past episodes, we see this running theme of making more space for underrepresented voices to take on decision making roles. This way,

**Mariana** 16:39

with a larger diversity of voices in the decision making process, we can potentially avoid many reporting issues that can be harmful.

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After all, our own code of ethics as journalists call for us to minimize harm and be accountable for our mistakes.

**Mariana** 16:54

Lim expresses the now their pronouns are very normalized, and it's become common to talk about them in professional, personal and journalistic contexts. But they question the root of the change. This is a genuinely seek to address the problem. I

17:07

so our conversation started about me and my struggles to have the the pronoun established. But now that it is established, and it's very easily established. To me, the story has changed in its significance. And how I just am so curious to know, what are the investments in certain issues being valued and other issues not like, to me, this isn't really a triumph of transgender respect, instead is a triumph of something else. And I can't put my finger on what like the investments that have thrived, you know, because of the pronoun de whether its institutions being able to sort of have a veneer of moral right, you know, in a very simple little gesture, like, just like Miranda said, it's just language change. Is that why, you know, or is it to do with niche markets, queers have money entered? Is that why? But to me, yeah, this story is it has changed to a question of, really, I guess, broader investments in and disinvestments and such profound disinvestment in in racialized communities. Houston

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stresses that despite the emotional burden, it's important to keep pushing editors and news agencies to change.

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And I think that journalists have to be combative to a certain degree, you have to defend your sources, you have to defend the most marginalized, even if that's in your own newsroom. And that might mean going up against editors, editors who maybe don't understand you don't understand concepts like intersectionality don't understand colonialism. And yeah, that's a lot of unpaid emotional labor to have to do that. And it sucks. But it's really important to do that. And it's really important to be that if you are that type of person, like I am that type of person. I am that girl, that I think you have to be that person and you have to stick your neck out. Whether that is defending LGBTQ people and sources or that starting a union and defending your co workers and standing up for the rights of journalists and the marginalized wherever you go.

**Mariana** 19:33

If you want to learn more about the review of journalism or other articles we've published, including Elissa Garrison's in transition, visit review of journalism.ca.

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And while you're at it, don't forget to check out our print issue of the review of journalism coming to New stands. This may thank

**Mariana** 19:51

you to Alicia Lim and Andre Houston for talking to us today. And special thanks to Angela Glover, Daniela Are you and Lindy Hannah, for technical support And finally,

20:00

thank you for listening to us over the past year. To connect with us. You can find us on tick tock and acts at the review of German.

**Mariana** 20:09

This episode of reviewed is hosted, edited and produced by Sahana. Ranganathan, Medina shoots him and Lydia region.