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Ruth Palmer. *Becoming the News: How Ordinary People Respond to the Media Spotlight.* New York: Columbia University Press, 2017. 280 pp. \$35.00 (paper), ISBN 978-0-231-18315-4.

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Ruth Palmer's *Becoming the News: How Ordinary People Respond to the Media Spotlight* provides comprehensive insight into the personal experiences of eighty-three participants and their interactions with journalists, while also exploring the various facets of the participants' positive and negative reactions to being featured on the news. The individuals discussed in the book had all previously appeared in a local newspaper and were either residents of New York City or a midsized city in the western United States that Palmer refers to as "West City." As Palmer explains, the participants were not celebrities or public figures; rather, they "were all private citizens who had popped up in the news for different reasons, some quoted as people-on-the-street or consulted as experts, others featured in stories on trends, issues, or events" (p. 3).

The interviews were conducted between 2009 and 2011. Although they had already been featured in the news, Palmer promised participants anonymity in the book; therefore, the names of all interviewees were changed and specific identifying details of their news coverage was also excluded. While it may initially seem a bit strange to promise anonymity to subjects who were already featured in the spotlight, Palmer admits that she was glad she did so, arguing that "the power balance between subjects and those who write about them is inevitably uneven because only one party will ultimately write their version of events" (p. 224). In turn, throughout the book Palmer delicately carries the responsibility of sharing and discussing the participants' stories without bias or judgment, in the process striking a more even balance of power.

The principal purpose of the book is to provide the reader with the perspective of how individuals unaccustomed to the spotlight respond to being featured on the news, a subject that has largely been ignored in the literature of journalism-related studies. Palmer states that "scholars who study journalism usually analyze either how journalists do their work or the content of the news," and she goes on to explain that "one consequence of the 'newsroom centrality' 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" (p. 11). While a commonly held perception is that the public and the media share a tumultuous relationship, particularly in relation to the former's dislike and distrust of the latter, Palmer's work reframes the issue by offering a closer look at the complex nuances of the subject-journalist relationship from beyond the walls of a newsroom.

Becoming the News steps away from the traditional journalism lens often used in analyzing journalistic practices and focuses on documenting and attempting to understand how and why regular folks become central figures in local or national news stories. In many ways, the book adopts a sociological perspective, while applying an anthropological methodology in its process of documenting the personal experiences of the eighty-three individuals featured.

As Palmer highlights throughout the book, the subjects' experiences cover a wide range of thoughts, feelings, and reactions—from the very negative to the very positive. Important, however, are the key distinctions

Palmer makes regarding the meaning and the motivations behind the subjects' negative or positive experiences. Journalists and their subjects utilize different criteria in assessing errors in a given story, as journalists are more often preoccupied with factual errors in their reporting (i.e., information accuracy), whereas subjects are more concerned with negative perceptions and damaged reputations resulting from the story itself. In other words, "unlike journalism professionals who prioritize getting the facts straight in the product, perhaps it is not errors per se but their *effects* that are news subjects' primary concern" (p. 107, emphasis on the original).

For example, Shannon, a business owner who had been profiled in the newspaper, did not mind that the reporter covering the story had misspelled her last name (seen as an objective error), because Shannon's main goal was in seeking publicity in order to grow her business. In contrast, Kim, an unemployed woman who had spent a considerable amount of time with a reporter, was disappointed that the published news article was not about her personal story and circumstances; rather, it was a generalized coverage of a public unemployment program. Kim's situation is an example of a subjective error, where there are no factual errors in the story, the main concern of reporters, but the framing of the story by the reporter greatly differs from the way in which the subject had intended and hoped to be portrayed. The aforementioned individuals are two of many examples discussed throughout the book as a way of highlighting the many complexities and nuances in how ordinary individuals react to being featured in the news.

The book is divided into nine chapters, each addressing various elements within the wide spectrum of subject experience, including, but not limited to: dis-

cussing whether the participants were victims of the press, weighing the pros and cons of becoming a news subject, providing a detailed breakdown analysis of the interview stage (from subject-journalist interactions to the published news story), the perceptions and consequences of how subjects judge the accuracy of their stories, subjects' emotional reactions to being featured on the news, the negatives and positives of audience feedback, as well as the permanency of making the news in the digital era.

Palmer concludes by providing some lessons for both subjects and journalists that emerged from her research, as well as discussing her methodology. Palmer's notes on method are helpful in shedding light on the specific reasoning behind some of her decisions, such as providing subjects with anonymity. Lastly, Palmer also addresses sample bias and lacunae in the work, acknowledging that the difficulty in recruiting subjects may have generated an even greater discrepancy between the sample frame and the actual sample of subjects in the study.

Becoming the News offers its audience a fresh perspective, while adding a needed voice to the established literature of current journalism-related scholarship. As Palmer mentions throughout the book, speaking *to* news subjects, rather than *about* them, has been an underrepresented approach in much of the related literature thus far, and there continues to be room for further research and exploration of this significant topic. Ultimately, *Becoming the News* is a useful and relevant resource for those who teach or study journalism, for veteran or budding journalists working in the industry, as well for anyone who may share even a general interest in media and journalism studies.

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