**JRP Canada Podcast Transcript — Episode 5 with Laura Moorhead**

*[Upbeat intro music begins. It plays into the background of the voiceover]*

**Karen Owen** 00:04

Hello, my name is Karen Owen. I'm with Mount Royal University in Calgary and I'm part of the Canadian JRP group. Welcome to another episode of our Meet the Researcher podcast, a series of interviews in preparation for our upcoming event, *Between Ideals and Practices: Journalistic Role Performance in Transformative Times.* This is a one-day pre-conference to ICA taking place at Toronto Metropolitan University (TMU) on May 24, 2023. Visit [jrpcanada.ca](https://jrpcanada.ca/) to register now. Joining us today is Dr. Laura Moorhead from San Francisco State University. She is one of the presenters at the Between Ideals and Practice conference. Thanks so much for joining us on our podcast today. And you'll be presenting original research at the conference. So what we're hoping for is a little sneak peek into what you'll be talking about.

**Laura Moorhead** 01:07

Well, thank you, I'm happy to be part of this. I've got some original research at the pre-conference and then also part of this larger project, I'll be presenting another paper, which is part of the larger effort, but different. And with the pre-conference, I'm excited because this is kind of research I've been collecting.

About five years ago, I interviewed 21 journalists about their experience working on the [San Francisco Homeless Project](https://www.sfchronicle.com/projects/homeless-project/), which was a real effort to try and change how the journalist had been reporting on homelessness. They felt as though they had kind of hit a wall of sorts in terms of impact, societal impact through their coverage. Many of the journalists felt that they were writing the same story kind of over and over and there—there wasn't enough change or improvement happening for the various communities in San Francisco.

02:15

And what I'm excited about is to kind of hear the voices of the journalists because oftentimes, as a researcher, we do the research, and we don't always get the voice of the person practicing. Where in fact, with my second paper, it's looking at, it's a content analysis that looks at the articles, what they actually reported, as well as quotations and who they gave a voice to. And so that paper kind of raises these professional norms and practices, these tensions of journalists who are generally trying to do a good job, but often their reporting, it doesn't hit the mark that they're aiming for, or that we'd like for them to hit.

02:56

And one obvious in the type of research I'm doing is this notion that as journalists, we want to give a voice to the voiceless, a voice to marginalized or underrepresented populations. And so with the content analysis, I actually looked at: do the journalist succeed in doing that? Long story short, not really. But I also feel as someone who did work as a journalist, before going back to school for my PhD, you know, there's frustration that it's a tough job. And there's a lot of constraints, and particularly in time– in terms of professional practices. So I wanted to get the voice of the journalist. So with these interviews, there's some general questions, but they also involve a talk aloud, where I can say, “Here's an article that you did, it was part of the SF Homeless Project, walk me through the process.” And in a case like that, I might get somebody and in fact, I did, where they pretty much said, “During the first part of the interview, I always interview someone experiencing homelessness when I'm doing a story on this topic.” And then when you actually give them the article, they're like, “Oh, gosh,” and usually they're kind of laughing or, you know, it's that little awkward moment, and they're like, I see that I didn't do that, in this instance, in this article. Let me explain why. And so I, you know, I'm, you know, I'm really excited with the interview, the qualitative research to just kind of see, you know, asking journalists, why do they do what they do, and where do they know they're falling short, and what, you know, kind of almost reflection and suggestions that they might have in terms of improving professional practice.

**Karen Owen** 04:35

Now, was this just newspapers or TV radio?

**Laura Moorhead** 04:39

So there were 77 organizations that formally participated in the SF homeless project, and they were across the board. There were traditional legacy news organizations native what I would consider those that have always been online, and then radio and TV. So in terms of capturing the journalists who were sampled from this data set of articles—so even if, you know, KTV does a newspot, they're gonna have their text online and so those were the articles. And then these journalists were selectively sampled from those who'd published articles, but it didn't include a really wide set of publications.

**Karen Owen** 05:27

Why do you think it's important to study journalistic roles?

**Laura Moorhead** 05:31

Well, I think journalism has societal impact. And I think anytime you've got, you know, a practice with standards, norms, but at the same time, anyone can be a journalist really. You know, it's wonderfully fraught, you know, there's so many research questions. I also think, for me, personally, I'm interested in that intersection of research and practical, you know, for the profession, you know, I worked as a journalist for a long time, and then, you know, went into research.

06:10

And for me, there is that tension. And so even with my work, that's why I like to do the content analysis, I look, I like to look at that type of data. But then I also want to hear from the journalists. Because I would say, certainly, when I was a journalist, and sometimes I would see this research, I would hear this criticism, it would be like, but you don't understand, you know, kind of the constraints of the job. So on some level, I think it's intellectually interesting. But I also think, in terms of making a profession better. You know, you want to you want to look at the practices. And, you know, and I do think there's something of value of what we think we do in a profession. And then oftentimes, what the data shows we actually do.

**Karen Owen** 06:54

Well, thank you so much. This sounds very interesting. I'm really looking forward to hearing more about this. Thanks for joining us today. And we will see you very shortly in Toronto. Thank you. And for those of you listening, if you have not already please don’t forget to register for the conference taking place on May 24. We will have presentations from researchers all over the world and cheap accommodations available in Toronto Metropolitan University's residence for the duration of our conference and ICA 2023. Check out details on our website [jrpcanada.ca](https://jrpcanada.ca/) for more.

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