

Do journalists have to say they are journalists?

 blogs.lse.ac.uk/polis/2008/06/09/do-journalists-have-to-say-they-are-journalists/

2008-6-9

At the tail end of Hillary's failing campaign Bill put his foot in it again with some intemperate [remarks](#) about a journalist who had written a nasty article about his missus. The remarks only got reported because he made them to a 'citizen reporter' for the [Huffington Post](#) (a liberal political website).

[Jay Rosen](#) of New York University has written a very thorough and balanced [article](#) on the ethical dilemma raised When Mayhill Fowler Met Bill Clinton at the Rope Line. The [HuffPost](#) reporter Mayhill Fowler was one of a number of 'amateurs' recruited to cover the election in a different way to 'mainstream media'. The [Huffpost](#) article is entertaining and reveals something about the nervousness of the Clinton campaign. It was a good example of [Networked Journalism](#) that fed in to mainstream media coverage.

But Fowler only got her story because Bill Clinton obviously thought she was just a member of the public. She didn't say she was a reporter. You can listen to the whole exchange on the [HuffPost](#). His tone was very much that of a cross politician talking to someone he thought was a supporter. Rosen points out that Fowler's language was that of a supporter not an 'impartial' observer.

Does that matter? My basic position is:

1. Anything that is said in public by anyone to anyone is fair game.
2. What ethics there are apply equally to all reporters, citizen or otherwise.
3. If you use dishonest techniques you may get a story but both politicians and public will trust you less in the future.

I think *HuffPost* were right to publish but their reporter has not covered herself in glory. She admits that. However, I have seen far worse deceit from 'professional' hacks. But judge for yourself by reading Rosen's [article](#).

Thanks to [Tim Watts](#) for spotting that.

- Copyright © 2014 London School of Economics and Political Science