

File number: 2018-07 - Stephen Greig vs Globe and Mail

*For immediate release*

The National NewsMedia Council has dismissed with reservation a complaint by Stephen Greig about a January 10, 2018 Globe and Mail article, "Probe at Toronto performing-arts school raises questions for theatre community".

Mr. Greig, writing on behalf of the Board of Directors for Randolph College of the Performing Arts, said the article was biased and misleading, and that it contained serious errors and omissions.

The complainant argued the Executive Director of the College is known as Ms. Brett Randolph and cited print material to support that name and spelling, while the Globe and Mail referred to her as Ms. Randolph and pointed to letterhead correspondence related to the events of the story and distributed the day before the story was published. The source used by the paper is closest in time to the reported event, reportedly on College letterhead and signed "Lauren Randolph". In the absence of an objection by Ms. Randolph herself, there is no evidence of error in the name that appeared in the article. In light of the above, and in view of previous decisions that journalists have the prerogative to select their sources, Council dismissed this portion of the complaint.

The complainant objected to a statement in the article that the executive director declined to be interviewed, saying the reporter asked the executive director to reply by phone or email. Looking at the answers to the emailed questions, the answers are in the third person. The complainant and paper differed on the number of attempts to reach the executive director for an interview. Information around those attempts was not detailed, but it was the executive director's prerogative to decline an interview, and the College's prerogative to provide answers through the spokesperson of its choice.

Both parties agreed an interview between the executive director and the paper was conducted a month before the investigation findings were released. There is no indication that interview was on the same topic, nonetheless the Globe and Mail has offered a clarification that "Ms. Randolph declined a request for an interview this week". The NNC dismissed this portion of the complaint, with the reservation that the paper make the clarification suggested about the interview timing.

The complainant stated that the article forged an editorial link to a wider story about misconduct in the industry by referring to the College and the theatre community, and alleged that link exemplified deliberate bias around the newspaper's reporting and events related to sexual harassment. The complaint also stated the article 'recklessly' linked Ms. Lester, wife of accused director of the Soulpepper Theatre Company, with Ms. Randolph, even though Mr. Randolph had resigned prior to wider media coverage, and Ms. Randolph was not involved in complaints about harassment.

The Globe responded by stating the article was about sexual harassment in the theatre community and appeared in the context of the #MeToo movement. Randolph College made a distinction about its status as a school and not-for-profit, but to the general reader the instructors and students are broadly

considered part of the theatre community, as described on the College's own website. The reference to 'the theatre community' can reasonably be read as a transition sentence.

Council found the issue of sexual misconduct and power balance is a current event of wide public interest, and found no grounds for the allegation that the story was biased toward Globe-sponsored public events on the issue. Council dismissed this portion of the complaint.

Council further found it is reasonable for an article about sexual harassment and positions of power to examine leadership positions, including relationships among staff. The Globe and Mail noted Ms. Randolph declined to be interviewed, and, as such, the article relies on quotes from a board member. There was no allegation of inaccuracy in those quotes. For this reason, Council dismissed this portion of the complaint, with the reservation that the paper could have been specific in stating Ms. Randolph did not handle complaints about staff.

The complainant objected to the paper's failure to state that the independent investigator was appointed by the College, a distinction it said the Globe has made in other cases. The paper responded by pointing out that the findings of the investigation, not its process, were the focus of the investigation. Council found a general reader may assume the College appointed the investigator, and in any case there is no indication it was ordered by a body other than the College. In light of the above, Council dismissed this portion of the complaint.

The complainant argued that reporting the Randolphs were married "but the school said they have been separated for 2 ½ years" implied to readers that the statement may or may not be true. The paper responded that the reader would recognize the statement as indicating the College was the source of information. Accuracy around the separation of Mr. and M. Randolphs was not in question. Standard journalistic practice would accept the College as an appropriate source to confirm information, particularly if Ms. Randolph declined to be interviewed in a reasonable timeframe. Council found the journalist did not err in using the method of verification available, and dismissed this portion of the complaint.

The complainant also said the paper falsely claimed that interviews were refused, and objected to the journalist's choice of questions. Council found no evidence to indicate how many times the journalist attempted to reach Ms. Randolph, and noted it is the journalist's prerogative to ask the questions s/he believes to be relevant to the story while it is the interviewee's prerogative to answer those questions or to decline. In journalism, the interviewee can offer information but does not direct the questions. In light of the above, this portion of the complaint is dismissed.

Finally, the complainant said an alumnus reported speaking to a Globe reporter who said she had spoken with the artistic director, who did not wish to be quoted. The complainant said the interview with the artistic director did not happen, and cited the case as a "lie" intended to mislead a person who is not familiar with the media. The paper responded that the complainant was misinformed, and that a tape and transcript of the interview varied from the complainant's version. This exchange occurred nine days after the article appeared. In keeping with the NNC mandate to consider complaints about published articles, we recommend this portion of the complaint be declined.

The complainant's timeline shows four attempts to reach the artistic director, with the College offering to speak three days later for an interview four days after the request was made. This exchange occurred eight days after the article appeared. We recommend this portion of the complaint be declined.

Council found that the article in question presented a newsworthy situation important to the existing debate over the ability to speak out about sexual harassment in cases of imbalance of positions of influence. It also presented the point of view of actors and steps being taken to address harassment in the theatre community. In the context of this story, it was reasonable to point out similarities in the power structures at two centres where harassment was alleged.

While Council understands that sensitivities are heightened in cases of accusation and reputation, it is concerned about the use of language and accusations leveled at the news organization by the complainant. It found no evidence to support the allegations of 'malicious' or 'reckless' reporting and is concerned with the use of strong language in making such damaging claims.