

# Researcher reveals newspapers' historic resistance to granting reporters' bylines

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A new study by Dr. Zvi Reich, a researcher at Ben-Gurion University of the Negev (BGU) in Beer-Sheva, Israel, documents the process through which journalists at major newspapers fought to receive byline recognition of their work, paving the way for today's celebrity journalists.

According to the study published in the December 2010 issue of *Journalism*, an academic [journal](#), "the proliferation of bylines characterized the news as an imperfect, all too human account of reality, and opened the way for celebrity journalism."

Dr. Zvi Reich explains that the byline is a relatively new phenomenon in the history of journalism and that newspapers as respected as The New York Times went out of their way to avoid using bylines as a means of underplaying the importance of the individual reporters.

"Today, when we open a [newspaper](#) or click on a Web site, we take it for granted that we will see a byline – the name of the reporter who authored the piece, at the beginning of each article," explains Reich, a faculty member in BGU's Department of Communications Studies.

"This study traces the complicated and fragmented policies that the newspapers used to maintain the balance of power over reporters and the process that the writers and other contributors underwent to push for recognition and control of their work," Reich says.

Focusing on The New York Times as the chief case study and The Times of London, Reich explores the phenomenon of bylines in modern journalism and their major impact on the way news is consumed and understood, and documents the process through which [journalists](#) fought to receive name recognition of their work.

Reich writes in his paper that bylines opened "the way towards journalistic stardom, altering power relations within the news industry and shifting news organizations from a position behind the news to one behind the people who gather and compose it."

His research covered more than 12,000 articles published in the two newspapers. Reich found that in both cases, the growth of bylines was a painfully slow four-step process, which took more than 70 years to become an established practice.

- First, the newspapers tried to avoid specific names, in an effort to maintain an authoritative, omnipresent "god-like" voice.
- Second, bylines were used to promote organizational goals, in the form of generic (i.e., staff writer) and [news](#) agency credits.
- Third, the papers attributed stories to the names of a select few staff writers.
- Finally, the papers gradually gave up the selective bylines, crediting everyone in nearly all instances.

Provided by American Associates, Ben-Gurion University of the Negev

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