

Authenticity Matters: How authenticity readers are incorporated into the editorial process

Melinda Jasmine Crouchley, MA candidate

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Research Question

What is the role of an authenticity reader, and where and how are they most often incorporated into the editorial process of a manuscript? By whom are they most often employed: authors, editors, or publishers? What is the ultimate goal of employing an authenticity reader: more accurate cultural depictions or censorship?

Keywords

Authenticity reader, authenticity, sensitivity reader, sensitivity read, targeted beta readers, targeted beta reading, book publishing, editing, editorial process, editing process, writing process, revising process, book publisher, censorship, diversity, we need diverse books, diversity in publishing, editors, writers, own voices

Abstract

Authenticity readers have been utilized at publishing houses and by authors for a decade or more, but their role is arguably growing more controversial. Why is that? Authenticity readers have influence over manuscripts, but they aren't editors. So what is their ultimate role in the editorial process? Through interviews with authors and editors, as well as a survey of 72 publishing professionals, and an ethnographic case study at Ooligan Press, this research paper seeks to determine where in the editorial process sensitivity/authenticity readers should be involved and how authenticity readers influence the overall editorial process.

The result of the collected data is that manuscripts featuring communities that are not part of the authors lived experience should undergo authenticity reads in order to more accurately depict those cultures or communities. The reads should happen before or during the developmental edit. Both authors and editors should take part in employing authenticity readers, and it is suggested that multiple authenticity reads take place. Authenticity reading is not prescriptive, and individual authenticity readers are not wholly representative of their communities. Authenticity readers should not censor a manuscript, nor should they be used to shield it from criticism. Their role is purely to vet a manuscript for inaccurate or stereotypical portrayals.

The data compiled in this research will be used as the basis for moving forward with formalizing the authenticity reading process for Ooligan Press and developing a database of PSU students and alumni to serve as volunteer readers for future acquisitions.

Introduction

An Ethnographic Case Study at Ooligan Press

In October 2019, Ooligan Press was preparing a book manuscript to shift from one part of the editorial process to another. We'd just wrapped up the final round of copyediting and the next stage in the production timeline was for the content to be XML type coded.

And then the bombshell was dropped. The author and project manager were concerned that the manuscript needed an authenticity read. The book was written by an author who did not share the lived-experience of the fictional narrator from a marginalized community.

It had been talked about months prior, but no one was quite sure whose responsibility it was to make the reading task happen. And as no one had determined who should manage the process or when exactly it should happen, it simply hadn't gotten done.

At that point it didn't matter, the authenticity read needed to be conducted. Fortunately, there were enough volunteer authenticity readers from within the press to vet the material, and the author revised it in time for a quick copyedit. It ended up being a short hiccup in the timeline, but it was enough to cause a ripple effect.

Since October 2019, only one other Ooligan Press manuscript has been submitted through a formal authenticity reader process. But two manuscripts in the course of one academic year is enough to put the authenticity reading process in place and to raise questions about how authenticity reading shapes the editorial process and how to best include it in our own manuscripts.

As an author and editor myself, I started a journey to seek out the answers to the questions of who should manage an authenticity read and where it was best placed in the editorial process to create the maximum impact on the manuscript.

Authenticity: Terms and Definitions

Throughout this paper we will use the term *authenticity reading* to refer to the act of reading a manuscript to determine whether or not it contains inaccurate, offensive, or negative stereotypes of marginalized individuals and communities ([Douglass 2017](#)).

We will use the term *authenticity reader* (i.e. *sensitivity reader*, *targeted beta reader*, or *cultural consultant*) to refer to an individual who reads a manuscript and provides notes to an author, editor, or publisher about whether or not the manuscript contains inaccurate, offensive, or negative stereotypes of marginalized individuals and communities ([Venard, Gussine 2018](#)).

I have chosen to use the term authenticity to describe the role of the reader because I believe that the term “sensitivity reader” has taken on needless negative connotation and controversy. There is a desire to equate the term “sensitive” with “overly-sensitive” and devalue the work done by these readers ([Alter 2017](#)). Additionally, the term “targeted beta reader” strikes me as an overly wordy and technical publishing term that seems cold and mechanical.

I selected “authenticity reader” specifically to dissociate it from the hot-button and the technical and instead marry it to a different controversial concept that often comes up in this discussion: authenticity readers as gatekeepers or censors ([Clayton 2018](#)). The heart of this argument against these authenticity readers is: who gets to determine what is culturally authentic or relevant?

For the purposes of this research paper, the term *authentic* will be defined as “that which is perceived to be ‘real’ or ‘genuine’ or ‘true’” ([Lehman, O’Connor, Carroll 2019](#)). As in, a reader giving the author notes on a more accurate depiction of a culture or community. The quoted study also goes on to indicate that “contemporary individuals seek authenticity...in many products and services as well as in themselves.” The idea being, that consumers of products (i.e. books), are seeking conduits to genuine truth and authenticity.

An authenticity reader can steer an author back towards a more accurate depiction but cannot forcibly make the change themselves. In this way, a sensitivity reader is not functioning as a gatekeeper, but rather a helpful guide to navigating cultural representation.

Indeed, Venard and Gussine tell us, “if anything...the reader is looking specifically at how a culture or group has been portrayed.” And in the process the readers ask themselves: does this ring authentic to my own experience?

What’s the Problem?

The process of authenticity reading, for many, is tantamount to censorship or laden with fear that a reader will sanitize or scrub anything potentially offensive from a manuscript ([Prose 2017](#)).

One of the bigger conversations in the dialogue around authenticity readers is the role that they play in shaping culture. If they decide how a certain community or minority group is featured in a manuscript, then have the power balances of the publishing industry shifted? Are authenticity readers the new cultural intermediaries, acting as the secret tastemakers of the publishing world hellbent on hijacking the reins from publishers?

That’s assigning a lot of power to a job title that’s one step above a beta reader.

For one thing, authenticity readers are not *cultural intermediaries*. “Cultural intermediaries impact upon notions of what, and thereby who, is legitimate, desirable and worthy, and thus by definition what and who is not ([Maguire, Matthews 2012](#)).” Publishing houses, especially the major ones, are still in charge of determining what material is published. Books shape culture and publishing houses and editors shape books. Venard and Gussine boldly remind us that, “sensitivity reads are not the same as editing.”

They go on to state, “the purpose of a sensitivity read is not to avoid offending if the portrayal is authentic, but it is to avoid harming a marginalized group that may already have suffered through such portrayals.”

If authenticity readers aren’t cultural arbiters or censors or tastemakers: what are they? They are voices to be heard in the editorial process.

Authenticity and the Editorial Process: A Baseline

It’s important to look at the role authenticity readers play in the editorial process with a little more depth before wading into research findings. Authenticity readers are asked to look at both major and minor issues in a manuscript, ranging from the structure and narrative of the story to the language used ([Venard, Gussine 2018](#)). But they’re only asked to comment on those items specifically having to do with the community they represent. They provide suggestions for revision to the individual that hired them, not commands or declarations.

Venard and Gussine (2018) indicate that authenticity reads commonly happen in the initial stages of the editorial process, before a manuscript has entered any rounds of developmental editing or copyediting. Some presses even conduct authenticity reads before acquiring a manuscript, allowing them to determine if issues in the manuscript can be fixed. Many authenticity readers are not even professional editors, but are rather authors, librarians, or voracious readers with in-depth knowledge of the subject matter of concern.

Now the big question: what does all of this look like in practice? How are authors, editors, and publishers handling authenticity reading and its role in the editorial process?

Research Findings

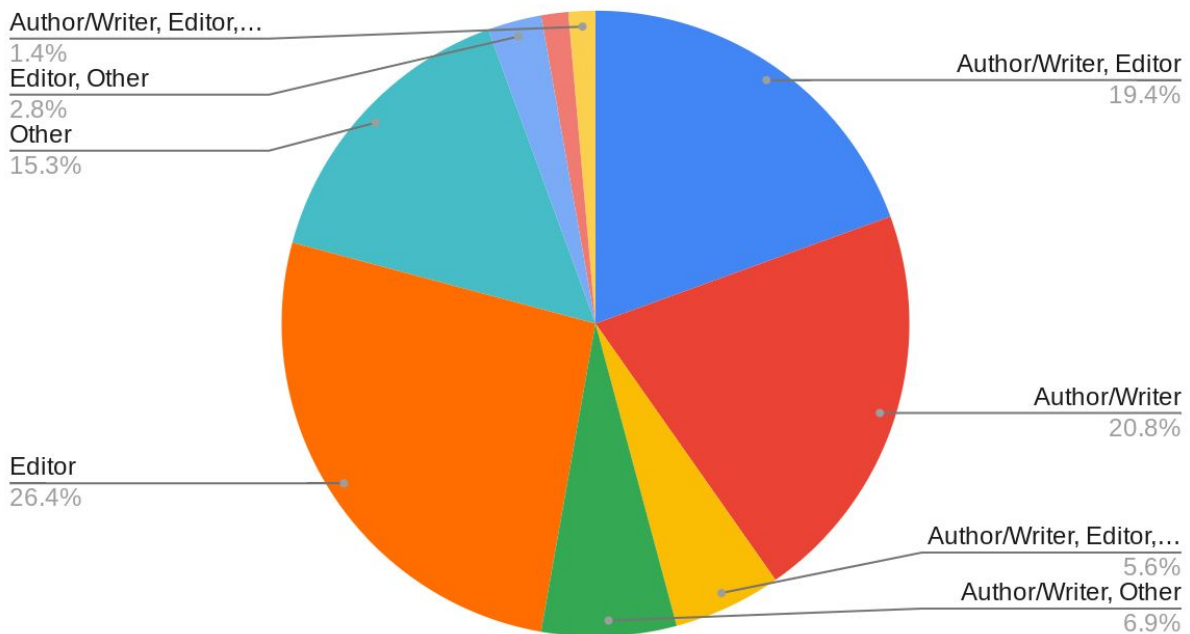
Data was collected through survey and interview methods to determine how authors, editors, and publishers were incorporating authenticity readers into their editorial process and the influence the readers had on that process.

Survey Data

Demographics in the Publishing Industry

72 individuals responded to the online survey, with 26% identifying as editors, 20% solely identifying as author/writers, 19% identifying as author/editors, and 7% identifying with three or more roles within the publishing industry.

Which term best describes your role in the publishing industry?



The numbers indicate a bias towards editor representation. That can be attributed to the survey link going out to Ooligan Press and the Northwest Editors Guild. It was also sent to Willamette Writers and the Oregon Chapter of the Society for Children's Book Writers and Illustrators.

Of the individuals represented in the survey, the overwhelming majority hailed from a fiction background (96 respondents over three fiction categories), with nonfiction coming up second (59 respondents over three categories), and non-traditional/academic publishing bringing up the rear (27 respondents over five categories).

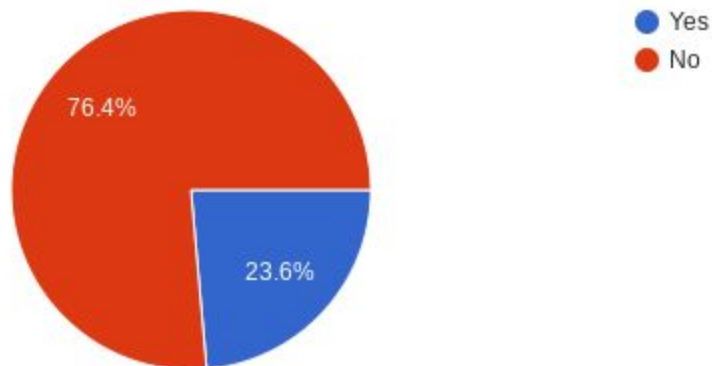
The majority of the respondents identified as female (75%), white (86%), between the ages of 25-54 (78%), and having no disability (79%) which is consistent with the overall demographics of the publishing industry ([Jiménez, Beckett 2020](#)).

Prevalence of Authenticity Reader Use

The majority of the individuals surveyed (55 respondents) have not used authenticity readers in any of their processes, either writing, editing, or publishing, which indicates that despite the popularity of the conversation within the industry, the majority of authors, editors, and publishers are not using authenticity readers to vet manuscripts.

Have you ever employed an authenticity reader?

72 responses

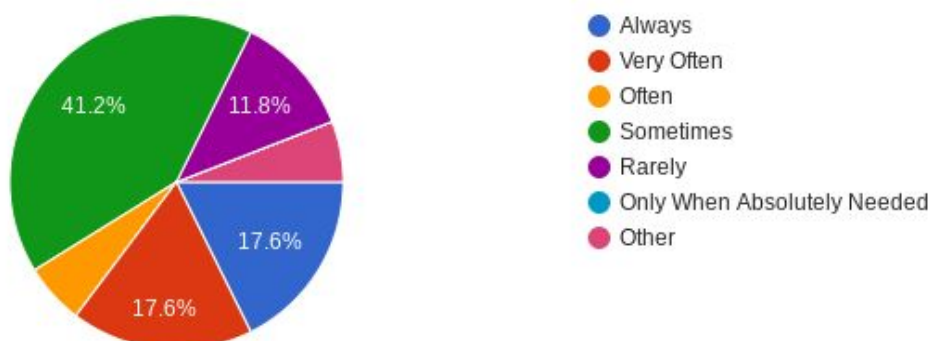


Of the 17 respondents who employ authenticity readers, 59% only use them “sometimes” to “only when absolutely needed,” and 41% use them ranging from “often” to “always.” Which indicates that when readers are utilized, the majority of that time they are only employed when perceived as absolutely needed.

17.6% of the individuals indicated that they “always” employ readers, and those individuals indicated they utilized these services because they were writing outside of their own experiences, for general worldbuilding, for historical accuracy, for racial stereotypes, and for sexual or gender representation.

How often do you employ authenticity readers for manuscripts?

17 responses



The majority of those surveyed (76.5%) had only recently used authenticity readers within the last 3-18 months. 23.5% of respondents had employed them within the last 7-60 days. Writers and editors also commonly employed one authenticity reader per manuscript (82.4%), and only 17.7% of respondents employed 2-6+ readers per manuscript. Several respondents were from Ooligan Press, and when authenticity reads have been conducted at the press, they have usually consisted of multiple individuals.

Why Utilize Authenticity Readers

Unsurprisingly, the reasons that both authors and editors might employ authenticity readers do not dramatically differ. In fact, the dual author/editors can perhaps give us the best insight into why they sought out these individuals.

The author/editor respondents included diverse characters and experiences in their books, but recognized their limitations in providing an authentic portrayal:

- *I pay different readers if I am writing outside my own experience or working with characters from other experiences.*

The authors written responses to the questions were generally shorter and followed the same trajectory of the author/editors:

- *My manuscript features characters whose experience is outside my own*
- *General overview of historical world building*
- *Novel deals with issues of race, colonialism, and gender*

Perhaps because the manuscripts were not their own and they have a more holistic view of the process, most editors had carefully considered reasoning for utilizing authenticity readers. Likely they had to either justify the cost to the author or to the press.

- *The work of our clients often benefits from feedback not only on their writing but also on their treatment of sensitive concerns and representation of communities. We include this in our developmental editing services, and in some cases, we will recommend the author*

hire another authenticity reader from the community featured in the book for further feedback.

- *The manuscript dealt with sensitive themes, and the author had written characters with identities and experiences that were not her own. We wanted to make sure these elements were being handled appropriately.*

For those individuals that selected other, whom we can intuit might be publishers, copyeditors, or serving in other roles connected to the book publishing community, their reasoning echoes the other

- *To ensure that our books were not offensive or insensitive to communities represented in the story.*
- *To establish that the portrayals and representations were authentic; so that readers would like the book.*

Where and How Do You Find Authenticity Readers

There was a diverse array of answers as to how author/editors found and hired their authenticity readers including:

- asking industry connections for referrals
- putting calls out on Twitter or other social media outlets (but mostly Twitter)
- sourcing via agents
- an online database
- organizations and resources available to publishers
- volunteers within the publishing house
- a pool of editors

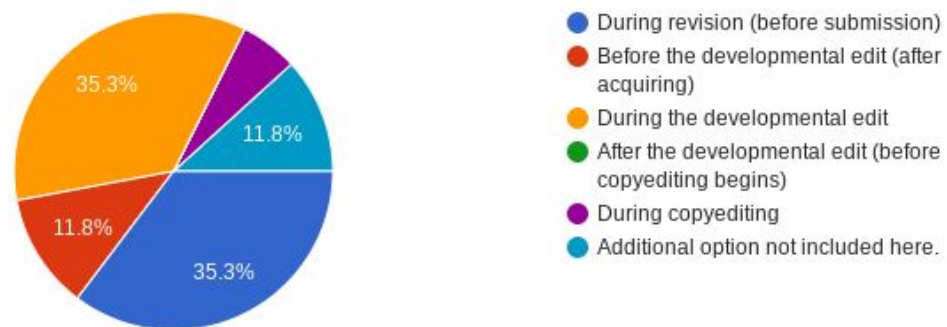
What the survey and the sensitivity reader booklet published by Venard and Guissine (2018) highlight is that there is not a consistent way in which services are advertised or in which content creators or editors can easily find and vet authenticity readers. At least, not in the same way individuals can evaluate freelancing editorial and design services through their profiles listed on membership websites and organizations. Since this tool is growing in popularity and the idea of using an authenticity reader is gaining credibility, it's likely those services may eventually coalesce into their own membership associations, rather than just exist as a footnote on a profile.

Authenticity in the Editorial Process

When readers are employed, the majority of them are utilized before the copy editing process takes place, when developmental and content editing and revision is at its peak.

Where in the revision / editorial process do you commonly employ authenticity readers?

17 responses



Author/editors most commonly chose to employ authenticity readers “during revision: before submission”:

- *I like doing this kind of legwork first, before I send it out.*
- *Because issues with characters can have dramatic impact on the plot and revisions.*

Authors primarily sought out readers during the revision process, before submission. However, some of them indicated they utilized reader services during the developmental edit, and only one person indicated they used readers during copyediting. Their responses are listed below.

During revisions (before submission):

- *To show editors that I've done my research and am willing to edit based on real experiences.*
- *It's early on enough that I can easily correct any issues that pop up.*
- *I have employed readers as a final check before submission as a way to make sure there's nothing glaringly wrong in the premise or world-building.*

During developmental edit:

- *I feel that in the middle of the process, I've got enough of a handle on how I want to write the story that I'm strong enough creatively and solid enough with where I'm at writing wise that I can course correct with no trouble.*

During copyediting

- *Because it's closer to the final product that people are going to see, and I don't find it to be helpful before then.*

Editors primarily utilized readers during the developmental edit phase, with only one mentioning they employ readers before the developmental edit (after acquiring), and one person indicating that it varied depending on the project (additional option not included here).

During the developmental edit:

- *It's the easiest place to make changes. For comics, this is the script phase, and it is doubly hard to make changes after this because art changes take a lot more work and time than changing the description on a script page.*
- *Developmental editing is the point in which we are recommending large-scale revisions, and if the author needs to rethink a major part of the book due to authenticity concerns, that is the best time to bring that up. Note that we are freelance editors, so we are typically working with authors before they have a publisher.*
- *It's the part of the process I drive, as the publisher and acquisitions editor. Waiting for copyediting might be too late if some story specifics need changing.*

Before the developmental edit (after acquiring):

- *To ensure that we catch any major/global sensitivity issues early enough to address them in a developmental edit. Ideally, a sensitivity/authenticity read would be done in two rounds: one before DE and one before CE.*

Differing places in the process:

- *There is no single answer to this question. I wanted to select multiple options listed here. Authenticity reads happen when the editor/publisher wants insight and feedback, which might happen at any of these stages. Most often in my personal experience, it has happened after the developmental edit, before copyediting. But every book and every process is different.*

Others within the publishing industry (i.e. publishers) included a wide variety of responses to the question.

During the developmental edit:

- *We begin DE and address obvious concerns immediately, and then work with the author to make sure it's suitable. In many cases we also use an authenticity reader before submission.*

Before the developmental edit (after acquiring):

- *So we can feel confident about what we publish, and understand how it may be perceived by different audiences.*

Additional option not included here:

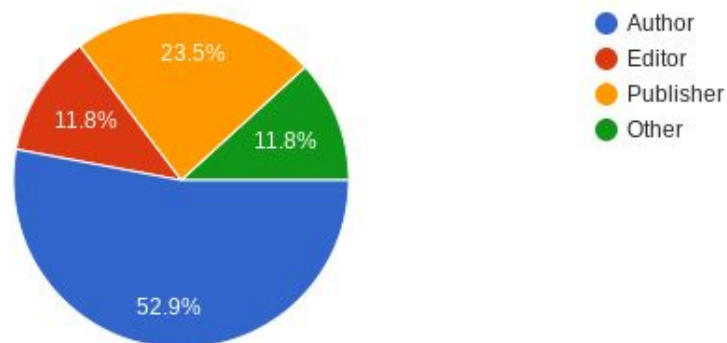
- *We want to know that the book is authentic before we acquire it for obvious reasons. It's too late to stumble through revisions if the author doesn't get it. Further, if not, why are they writing this book?*

Who Takes Responsibility for Readers: Everyone

When asked who in the production process of the manuscript should ultimately take responsibility for vetting the authenticity of the manuscript, a little more than half of the respondents (52.9%) indicated that authors should take responsibility. The rest were evenly divided between publishers or editors/others taking responsibility for vetting the authenticity. Unfortunately, this survey and data failed to capture what individuals considered to be “other,” but we can speculate that it potentially includes agents and marketing/publicists.

Who do you believe is ultimately responsible for vetting the authenticity of a manuscript?

17 responses



This question could have possibly had different results if the question had been a “select all that apply” option, especially based on some of the feedback from the respondents. Only giving respondents a single option here might have skewed the data, and not given the survey-takers a chance to answer in a way that most accurately depicted their response.

The question immediately following asked respondents if there was “anything additional they’d like to add,” and some individuals expanded on the previous question.

Authors primarily indicated it was a shared responsibility between authors, editors, and publishers, while one individual acknowledged that the process should start with the author themselves.

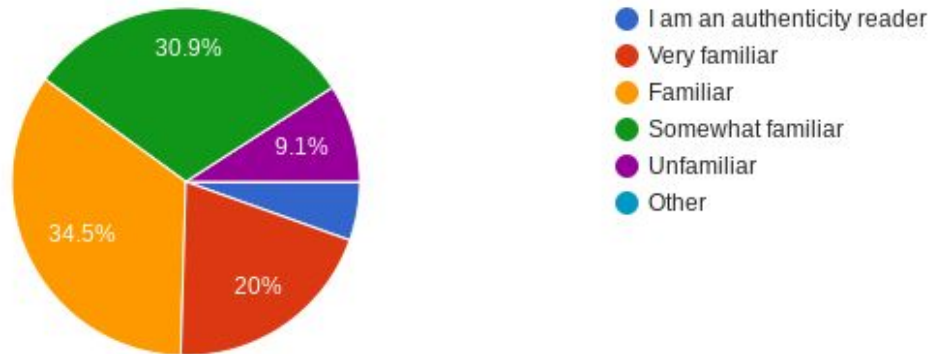
Many editors felt similar to the authors above who indicated that “ultimate responsibility” was a shared responsibility between all of those involved in the process, but that authors had the ultimate responsibility to both stand behind their work and be culturally sensitive when writing outside of their own lived experience.

No Readers... For Now

Of the 55 respondents who had not used an authenticity reader, 85.4% were very familiar to somewhat familiar with this role within the publishing industry, 9.1% were unfamiliar, and 5.5% were authenticity readers themselves (ostensibly quite familiar with the role).

How familiar are you with the role authenticity readers play in the publishing industry?

55 responses

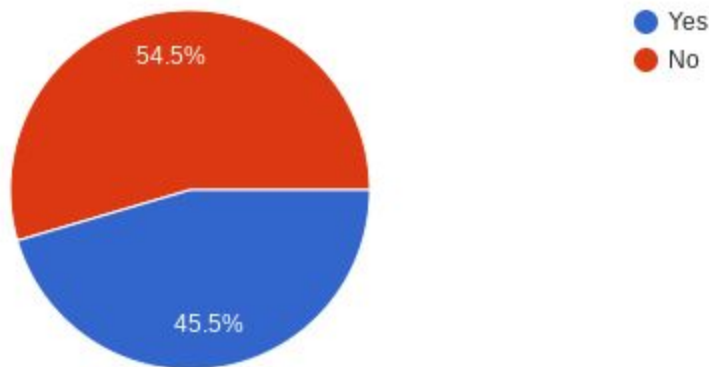


Of those 55 respondents, a slight majority have never considered hiring an authenticity reader, and slightly less than half (45.5%) have considered employing an authenticity reader at some point in the past. The data is further broken down by identified roles in the publishing industry:

- **Author/Editors:** 69% “no” and 31% “yes”
- **Authors:** 50% “no” and 50% “yes”
- **Editors/Others:** 52% “no” and 48% “yes”

Have you ever considered employing an authenticity reader?

55 responses



The most even split in terms of considering whether an authenticity read was required came from authors, with editors/publishers showing up second. Combined role author/editors were almost staunchly opposed to even considering employing an authenticity reader.

32 authors, editors, and others responded to the question of why respondents had considered employing authenticity readers (but not yet done so).

The typical responses fall into these summarized categories:

- Writing from an experience not their own and desiring to retain cultural integrity
- Wanting to avoid inaccurate depictions or stereotypes
- Not really sure what the authenticity role is
- Already working with minority/marginalized voices or writing from Own Voices
- Cost and/or limited access
- Need has not come up in projects
- Not in a position to employ others, but have suggested them

No Readers Allowed... For Now

On the flipside of the previous questions, 55 respondents were asked some of the reasons they had not considered employing authenticity readers.

53 authors, editors, and others typical responded and fell into these summarized categories:

- Haven't written/edited a manuscript that required one
- Subject matter of books are not relevant for authenticity reading
- Didn't realize this was a role in the industry
- Censorship or concern about sanitizing content or political correctness
- Freelance editors cannot employ sensitivity readers
- Copyeditors have pointed out questionable language in manuscripts
- Time constraints
- Cost prohibitive for small publishers and presses
- Respondents write from their own lived experience
- Believes removing bias is the role of the editor
- Works mostly with nonfiction, academic, and/or memoir manuscripts
- Relies on authors to do their research

What's interesting to note about several of these dissenting opinions is that many of them acknowledged the importance and work of the authenticity reader and indicate that manuscripts should be read by multiple individuals, ideally from diverse backgrounds, who can provide constructive feedback. However, they did not believe that any individual should censor, sanitize or scrub material for public consumption.

Interviews

Two more in-depth interviews were conducted with individuals who'd indicated in the survey that they had retained the services of authenticity readers. I also specifically chose individuals who'd used authenticity readers multiple times so they could speak to a variety of experiences and provide the most informed opinions on when in the editorial process it makes the most sense to include authenticity readers and solicit their feedback.

Both interviewees are female, in the 30-40 age range, with no disabilities, and have worked in the industry for between 6-8 years in their respective roles as an editor and an author. They'd both heard about authenticity readers in the last decade, one in 2013/2014 at Ooligan Press, and the other through an online forum discussion.

For the sake of brevity, I'm only including questions/responses that dramatically varied from the data already included in the survey findings.

In response to the question, "what made you think this was the right authenticity reader for your project?" they stated:

- **Author:** *The reader I chose was both a writer and a reader. She used a wheelchair, and had insights related to wheelchair use. I also had a reader who used a wheelchair part time. This helped me get a bigger insight into what that would mean for a 12-year-old.*
- **Editor:** *They had experience with the subject matter as a member of the marginalized identity being written about.*

In response to the question, "what types of manuscripts do you believe should undergo an authenticity read?" they stated:

- **Author:** *I actually think all manuscripts should go through different sensitivity reads depending on the experiences of the characters and the themes explored.*
- **Editor:** *Most manuscripts written by people who are in a position of having more privilege than the subject(s) they're writing about (i.e., a white author writing about native Hawai'ian culture, a cis het author writing a story with a trans lesbian main character, etc.) could benefit from an authenticity read, even if the manuscript is in solid shape and the authenticity read just confirms that nothing is raising any red flags with them.*

These answers by and large reflected the responses of the survey-takers and Venard and Gussine's (2018) suppositions in underscoring that most publishing professionals are looking for the readers to be a part of the marginalized group, but did not necessarily have additional criteria, aside from perhaps having some interest in books and literature. It also reflected/confirmed/reinforced the idea that all manuscripts could or should be subject to varying levels of authenticity reads.

Conclusions

Authenticity Readers in the Editorial Process

What

Based on the data provided by publishing professionals in the survey and interviews, it feels quite safe to conclude that authenticity reads can be conducted on any manuscripts featuring communities that are not a part of the authors lived experience, despite the amount of research they might have done. “As well-meaning as authors may be and as much as they do research, they sometimes don’t quite get the nuance, the richness, or even the details of a culture or a set of experiences ([Venard, Gussine 2018](#)).

When and Where

While there is no one definitive answer for this question, as all manuscripts are unique in their own rights, it is suggested by the survey data (82.4% of respondents use authenticity readers before the copyedit) and by professional industry publications that the authenticity read should happen before or during the developmental edit ([Venard, Gussine 2018](#)).

For authors, this might happen before sending a manuscript off to a freelance editor in order to take full advantage of the often much more expensive and grueling process of the developmental edit. For an editor/publisher, this could happen immediately after acquiring, while simultaneously conducting the first round of a developmental edit.

How

Both authors and editors should take part in employing authenticity readers, and it is suggested that multiple authenticity reads take place. In practice, those surveyed for this research paper are not typically using multiple readers, but it is quite common in the industry. It was done for the controversial *American Heart* ([Alter 2017](#)) and is suggested as best practice by Venard and Gussine that, “a manuscript or article will often have two or more sensitivity readers, often from different cultures or groups.” Authenticity reading is not prescriptive, and individual authenticity readers are not wholly representative of their communities.

The role of an authenticity reader is not to censor a manuscript, nor should they shield it from criticism. Their role is purely to vet a manuscript for inaccurate or stereotypical portrayals and to bring those suggestions to the author, editor, or publisher.

The Future of Authenticity Readers at Ooligan Press

As of the writing of this research paper, I plan to use my research to include authenticity reading as a regular tool of the editorial process, to be enacted prior to, or in tandem with a developmental edit. In addition, I will partner this term with several Ooligan Press stakeholders to lay the groundwork for an authenticity reader database.

It is my firm belief, after having reviewed literature, after having conducted a survey and interviews, and after having reviewed that data that authenticity reading is an integral part of the process for almost every manuscript and formalizing its practice in Ooligan Press will only make for richer and more nuanced manuscripts.

Methodology & Limitations of Research

Methodology

Survey.

The survey was conducted entirely online and messages were sent out via email, social media sites, and my own personal website. The survey questions included some personal information, questions about authenticity reading, and general demographic information. The demographic information could be skipped or individuals could mark N/A if they desired. The survey was broken up into four sections, with the initial section gathering the important personal data. Depending on their answers, individuals were either shuttled over to section two or section three to answer corresponding questions about their experiences with authenticity readers. Both sections then dumped the survey-taker into the demographics section.

Interviews

I conducted more in-depth interviews with one editor and one author who'd both responded "yes" to having used authenticity readers in the course of their work. Those interviews were emailed directly to the interviewees and submitted back to me via email. Interviews were only conducted with those who'd worked with authenticity readers to ensure they could ultimately speak to the research question. Ideally more interviews would have been conducted, but time constraints, the onset of a global pandemic (COVID-19), and lack of access to a wider variety of authors and editors made it impossible to do so within the scope of this paper.

Case Studies.

Abbey Gaterud, Publisher of Ooligan Press, indicated that sensitivity reads conducted at the press could be used as an auto ethnographic case study (with names and information obscured to ensure confidentiality of those parties involved).

Limitations of Research

COVID-19 Global Pandemic

Unfortunately, the latter portion of this research paper was done in the early stages of the COVID-19 global pandemic. The bulk of the surveying and interviews took place at a time where people were distracted by new life changes. Because of this, I do not believe that as many individuals completed the survey. I also believe it did not circulate on some of the channels as robustly as it could have if folks' attention had not been diverted by the virus.

Number of Survey Respondents

If I'd had a longer window and more access to publishing insiders, that would have yielded additional respondents, and likely provided much more data about authenticity readers. 72 respondents was the minimum of my goals. The ideal would have been 100 or more respondents for this research project.

Survey Questions

Throughout the findings, I identified key areas that could have used more specific questions or further expansions. For most of the options that included “other” responses, there was not an option for individuals to “write-in” or further expand upon their choice. In some questions, the option to “check all that apply” would have helped provide a more accurate response. There are also additional questions I would have included in the survey to further expand the dataset.

- **Section Two:** How did you rate the overall success of the authenticity read on any given manuscript, specifically thinking about location in the editorial process?
- **Section Two:** How often did you choose to incorporate the suggested edits in the manuscript?
- **Section Two:** What has your experience been like when incorporating authenticity reads into the editorial process?
- **Section Two:** How do you believe authenticity readers influence the editorial process?
- **Section Three:** Where do you believe is the best place in the editorial process for authenticity reading to take place?

Interview Questions

The goal was to conduct multiple interviews (at least six total, with three editors and three writers) with individuals who had retained the services of authenticity readers and get a closer look at their experience and what went into the choices they made.

Ideally, these interviews would have been conducted in-person, online, or via a phone call. Unfortunately, with the global pandemic, most individuals' attention was divided, so emailed responses ended up being the fastest, easiest, and best solution to obtaining responses.

Acknowledgments

I'd like to thank Dr. Rachel Noorda for supporting and championing this research question and the research process. Her guidance was integral to narrowing down the focus area of this paper and helping me choose between two topics that I felt passionate about. Dr. Noorda and Dr. Kathi Berens provided an extra compassionate and supportive boost when I was flagging due to the global pandemic throwing my timetable and focus off-course. They allowed me to give myself the grace to accept my limitations and the current circumstances.

I'd like to thank everyone who shared and completed the survey, answering honestly and thoughtfully about their experience with authenticity readers. Creating this research paper and analyzing the data was so enlightening and I do feel like I have a richer handle on this topic. My views haven't shifted much, but I do think I have more context around why this practice is controversial, where it makes most sense to incorporate it into the editing process, and what manuscripts are in most need of authenticity reading. I also feel comfortable knowing that *who is responsible for the process* doesn't matter as much as the fact that it actually gets done when it needs to be done.

I'd also like to thank my cohort of amazing Ooligans who consistently provided motivation and encouragement along the way, even when situations turned dire. I'd like to thank the Northwest Editors Guild, Willamette Writers, and the Oregon chapter of the Society for Children's Book Writers and Illustrators for sharing this survey.

I'd like to thank my family, especially Dan Robertson, Audrey Robertson, Karen Crouchley, and Jan Robertson who allowed me the many mornings, afternoons, evenings, weekends, and holidays to zone out on my laptop, typing furiously with my glasses on and my hair up in a messy bun. Our sacrifices were not in vain. And we're almost to the finish line.

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Appendix

Authenticity Reader Survey Questions

The data collected by this survey will be used in a graduate research paper from the Book Publishing program at Portland State University. This research paper is seeking to determine the prevalence of authenticity/sensitivity reader use within the book publishing industry, specifically looking at who employs readers most commonly (writers or editors), how often readers are employed, and how placement in the process shapes the way edits are incorporated.

Any identifying information in this survey will be scrubbed and your identity will be kept confidential. The demographic information will only be used as a comparison to the demographic information of the publishing industry.

Feel free to indicate if you'd like a copy of the research paper sent to you after it's completed and approved by the Book Publishing program at Portland State University.

All survey respondents who leave their email will be entered into a random drawing for a \$10 Powell's Books gift card.

SECTION ONE

- 1. Name: *your name will not be used in the research paper, but I'd like to conduct further interviews with interested candidates.***
- 2. Email Address: ***your name will not be used in the research paper, but I'd like to conduct further interviews with interested candidates.***
- 3. Which term best describes your role in the publishing industry? Check all that apply.**
 - a. Author / Writer
 - b. Editor
 - c. Agent
 - d. Authenticity Reader
 - e. Other (open form)
- 4. What is the type of publishing that you're involved in? Check all that apply.**
 - a. Adult Fiction
 - b. Adult Nonfiction
 - c. YA Fiction
 - d. YA Nonfiction
 - e. Children's Fiction
 - f. Children's Nonfiction
 - g. K-12 Education
 - h. Professional Publishing (engineering, etc)

- i. Academic Publishing
- j. Comic Book Industry
- k. Other (open form)

5. Have you ever employed an authenticity/sensitivity/targeted reader?

- a. Yes *Move to section 2
 - b. No *Move to section 3
-

SECTION TWO

1. **How often do you employ authenticity readers for manuscripts?**
 - a. Always
 - b. Very Often
 - c. Often
 - d. Sometimes
 - e. Rarely
 - f. Only When Absolutely Needed
 - g. Other (Open Form)

2. **How recently have you employed an authenticity reader? Within the last:**
 - a. 7 days
 - b. 30 days
 - c. 60 days
 - d. 3-6 months
 - e. 12 months
 - f. 18+ months

3. **Why did you employ an authenticity reader?**
 - a. Open Form

4. **How many authenticity readers do you commonly employ for a single manuscript?**
 - a. 1
 - b. 2
 - c. 3
 - d. 4
 - e. 5
 - f. 6+

5. **How and where do you seek out authenticity readers?**
 - a. Open Form

6. **Where in the revision / editorial process do you commonly employ authenticity readers?**
 - a. During revision (before submission)
 - b. Before the developmental edit (after acquiring)
 - c. During the developmental edit
 - d. After the developmental edit (before copyediting begins)
 - e. During copyediting
 - f. Additional option not included here (Open Form)

7. **What are some of the reasons you employ authenticity readers at *this point* in the process?**
 - a. Open Form

8. Who do you believe is ultimately responsible for vetting the authenticity of a manuscript?

- a. Author
- b. Editor
- c. Publisher
- d. Other (open form)

9. Is there anything additional you'd like to add?

- a. Open Form

(GO TO SECTION FOUR)

SECTION THREE

- 1. How familiar are you with the role authenticity readers play in the publishing industry?**
 - a. I am an authenticity reader
 - b. Very familiar
 - c. Familiar
 - d. Somewhat familiar
 - e. Unfamiliar
 - f. Other (Open Form)

 - 2. Have you ever considered employing an authenticity reader?**
 - a. Yes
 - b. No

 - 3. Why have you considered employing an authenticity reader?**
 - a. Open Form

 - 4. What are some of the reasons you do not employ authenticity readers?**
 - a. Open Form
-

SECTION FOUR

1. Which term best describes your gender?

- c. Female
- d. Male
- e. Non-binary
- f. Gender fluid
- g. Transgender
- h. Intersex
- i. A different term not used here (Open Form)

2. Which term best describes your race/ethnicity?

- j. White / Caucasian
- k. Latinx / Hispanic
- l. Black / African American
- m. North African / Middle Eastern
- n. Native American / Indigenous / Alaskan Native
- o. Asian American / Asian
- p. Native Hawaiian or Pacific Islander
- q. Bi-racial or Multiracial (two or more races)
- r. A different race/ethnicity not listed here (Open Form)

3. Do you identify as having a disability?

- s. Yes
- t. No

4. What is your age range?

- u. 18-24
- v. 25-34
- w. 35-44
- x. 45-54
- y. 55-64
- z. 65+

6. Would you be willing to participate in a short interview with different questions related to authenticity readers?

- a. Yes
- b. No

7. Would you like a copy of the completed research paper emailed to you?

- a. Yes please
 - b. No thank you
-

Authenticity Reader Interview Questions

- 1. First and Last Name. Role in the publishing industry.**
 - 2. How long have you been engaged in the publishing industry in your current role?**
 - 3. When did you first hear the term authenticity reader?**
 - 4. What caused you to initially seek out an authenticity reader?**
 - 5. How did you go about securing the reader?**
 - 6. What made you think this was the right authenticity reader for your project?**
 - 7. What types of manuscripts do you believe should undergo an authenticity read?**
 - 8. What do you believe is the ideal location for an authenticity read in the revision / editorial process?**
 - 9. What is your ultimate goal in having a manuscript read by one or more authenticity readers?**
 - 10. Why will you continue to use authenticity readers for future manuscripts?**
-