

## **Romance in Journalism**

In 2002, when the Harvard Business Review was looking for a reporter to write one of its signature features in on Jack Welch, former CEO of General Electric, then-editor Suzanne Wetlaufer (now Welch) was pegged for the task. During the interviewing process, the pair got close and she eventually called her editor, asking him to not run the story. Her editor reassigned it before it was published. Fast-forward to October 2011, and Michele Norris, co-host of NPR's "All Things Considered," a news radio program, is faced with a similar dilemma. Her husband accepted a new position as senior adviser with President Barack Obama's campaign. She approached NPR management and they decided that she would temporarily step down until after the presidential election was over. More recently, college football reporter Samantha Steele has been revealed to be dating Minnesota Vikings quarterback Christian Ponder. ESPN saw no conflict of interest given that the two are in different parts of the industry, but some say she has to be prepared to deal with the way in which people will perceive her skills and success as a reporter. In all three cases, the same issue comes to the surface: when is the right time to speak up about a romantic relationship with a source?

The Committee of Concerned Journalists, an organization run by the Pew Research Center's Project for Excellence in Journalism comprised of reporters, editors, publishers, producers, owners and academics who are concerned about the future of journalists, outlines nine core principles to meet the main goal of journalists: "to provide citizens with accurate and reliable information they need to function in a free society." In particular, the fourth principle calls on journalists to "maintain an independence from those they cover." What journalists should keep in focus, the principle states, is

“independence of spirit and mind” as opposed to neutrality. For example, since editorialists and commentators are not neutral, “the source of their credibility is still their accuracy, intellectual fairness and ability to inform—not their devotion to a certain group or outcome.” In other words, journalists have a responsibility not to their sources but to their readers. Journalists should not have plain friendships or romantic relationships with sources because it would cloud their ability to report as fairly and accurately as possible. Sure, reporters and sources can maintain amicable friendships but a reporter remains a reporter and a source, a source — and that line should never be crossed. That line has been reached in fundamentally different ways in the aforementioned cases, but they all bring us back to the key question of how close is “too close.”

Wetlaufer met Welch, former General Electric chairman, on October 11, 2001 to interview him for one of HBR’s key feature stories, the HBR Interview, Wetlaufer said in an interview with the Harvard Crimson on June 5, 2006. She conducted interviews in which she asked him to explain the management lessons that he discusses in his autobiography, “Jack: Straight from the Gut,” according to TIME Magazine. By the time she flew down to New York City in late December from her home in Boston, where she wrote the story, the article had been edited and shipped into production. While in New York, she took a photograph with Welch, who was a married man at the time, for her Letter from the Editor. After having lunch together, which was reported to be their first date, they realized that they had feelings for each other. The following day, she called her boss, Walter Kiechel, editorial director of Harvard Business School Publications at the time, asking him to pull her article. She told Kiechel that she felt that she had become too close to Welch and that their relationship could make people doubt the credibility of her

story and that of HBR. One staff member said that she was enjoying the relationship and did mention any ethical issues — she even showed off an expensive bracelet, a gift from Welch. The staff member acknowledged that they should have said something sooner, TIME Magazine reported.

Kiechel subsequently reassigned the interview to two other staff members, which was published in HBR's February 2002 issue. Still, staff members were upset over the fact that she had waited nearly one month after the affair began to approach Kiechel, doing so in large part after receiving a phone call from Welch's wife, Jane Welch, who allegedly knew about the affair and asked her if she had the capacity to write the article without any bias. Wetlaufer was thus reassigned to the position of editor at large, which allowed her to write and still have an office, the New York Times reported. The reassignment did not mitigate tensions among staff members — two senior editors quit in response, and other staff members were still upset. Finally, in late April 2002, after four of her senior editors asked her to step down, she announced her resignation. In her statement, she said that although she felt that the strength of her relationships with her colleagues and HBR's success were strong enough, "Harvard Business Review will never again be a place where I will be able to work to my full potential." She told the Harvard Crimson in June, however, that she was fired — New York Magazine reported that her bosses were talking about firing her after reporters raised questions about her romance with Welch but a second round of negotiations led to her forced resignation. Regardless of how her departure transpired, Wetlaufer admitted to the Harvard Crimson that the timing could have been better. "This was the middle of the corporate malfeasance frenzy,

and people didn't take me at my word that we weren't romantically involved when the article was written," she said.

The fact that she was working for a publication as prestigious as HBR made the relationship appear more controversial, said Lori Robertson, managing editor for FactCheck.org, a nonpartisan, nonprofit "consumer advocate" for voters, and a former editor for the American Journalism Review. "In that case it was the Harvard Business Review so being in a relationship with a major former business executive is a conflict of interest," Robertson said. "It's hard to be top editor of the Harvard Business Review and not see that as a conflict." And Wetlaufer gets it — she herself acknowledged that the publication has a reputation to uphold. "You have the editor of the Harvard Business Review, and whether you like it or not, the Harvard name carries all sorts of free fall. Harvard has this reputation as being this upstanding institution." But journalists cannot necessarily detach themselves completely from their sources. "I do feel like an emotional connection is okay and if we tell ourselves as reporters that we can't be emotionally connected, we're doomed," said Loretta Tofani, an American Pulitzer Prize winning reporter, who worked for The Washington Post and The Philadelphia Inquirer. Still, when the relationship starts to become romantic, that is when the reporter has to take action. "It's really dangerous if you are in what's becoming a romantic relationship and that's when it's necessary to stop giving signals and if you can't, you do need to go to your editor and say, 'Oops, someone else needs to do this story,'" Tofani added.

Norris, co-host of "All Things Considered," NPR's leading news radio program, since 2002, took a more swift approach — approaching her editors immediately about her husband, Broderick Norris, accepting a senior adviser position with the Obama campaign.

Norris temporarily stepped down from her post as of October 2011. She continues to report and produce projects for NPR but they are unrelated to the presidential election. In her official statement on the matter, she said that she wanted to inform her “NPR family” about the decision and that Broderick’s new position “could make it difficult for me to continue hosting *ATC*.” Most importantly, she stressed that the decision was the best way to prevent her husband’s position from adversely impacting all facets of her life, both personal and professional: “This all happened very quickly, but working closely with NPR management, we’ve been able to make a plan that serves the show, honors the integrity of our news organization and is best for me professionally and personally.” During the 2008 presidential election, Norris’ husband was an informal and unpaid advisor to the Obama campaign, the New York Times reported in October 2011. However, when her husband was a senior adviser for congressional affairs for John Kerry’s presidential campaign in 2004, she did relieve herself of election coverage duties.

On October 24, 2011, Gawker published an article titled “Michele Norris Leaves NPR for Husband’s Dumb Job Thing” in which it implies that Norris was the one who had to make a sacrifice in regards to her husband accepting the position. The reporter, Hamilton Nolan, writes: “Selfish. Selfish, selfish job-accepting, Broderick. Come check me out, Mee-shell. I will *never* be offered a better job. Gurl U no U don’t need him.” However, others argue that Norris stepping down was the right move, if not the only way to protect NPR from accusations that it is a “liberal mouthpiece.” Erik Wemple, a media critic for The Washington Post, wrote an editorial in which he states that in an ideal world, a journalist should not have to sacrifice their responsibilities due to their spouse’s occupation but that Norris’s job and her husband’s position pose a real conflict: “How

could Norris be expected to cover the 2012 Obama campaign in a neutral fashion if her husband is all tied up in it? How could she be expected to cover Obama's opponent's campaign given those same considerations?" It would be hard for her to consistently issue a disclaimer about her husband's position prior to starting her show: "Every time she issued a disclosure, NPR's funding opponents would pounce and denounce, saying that the awkward moments merely shore up the outlet's reputation as a liberal mouthpiece."

Even more recently, sideline college football reporter Samantha Steele was revealed to be dating Minnesota Vikings quarterback Christian Ponder, Huffington Post reported on October 21. Kyle King, a former Florida State University player, wrote a tweet on October 18 in which he asked if Steele and Ponder were dating and saying that they should if they are not currently dating — Ponder responded, "actually yes they are." Ponder, while speaking to reporters on Friday, accepted the nature of the industry: "There's been a thousand articles today about it. You can't really worry about it. You've got to try to keep it private, but that's just part of the industry, part of the job. I don't know. Comes with the territory." Though Steele received a less than warm response in light of the news, she tried to take the high road, tweeting the following on October 20: "S/O to all the grown men critiquing my wardrobe/relationship choices. If it weren't for y'all, I might've forgotten how awesome JR High was;)."

On October 19, Examiner reporter Abraham Gutierrez wrote an article in which he congratulated the Minnesota Vikings on their successes over the course of six NFL weeks and focused particularly on Ponder. He refers to Steele as "hot girlfriend," "Erin Andrews' replacement from the mountain tops," "mystery blonde," "a 26-year-old

bombshell” and “the latest ESPN ‘eye candy.’” Though he acknowledges her job responsibilities, he makes many statements about her appearance throughout the article. USA Today sports reporter Chris Chase said he was surprised when the news broke because athletes typically do not go public with this sort of information, despite the fact that “you always hear whispers about athletes dating sideline reporters.” Chase suggests that the conflict surrounding Steele’s relationship with Ponder has more to do with fans thinking that she got her job because of her relationship with Ponder. These games tend to be dominated by fraternity males, he said: “Erin Andrews [American sportscaster] had well documented issues. When she would go on campus, she was gaining as much attention for her looks than her reporting and I think now, Samantha Steele, in the same role as Erin Andrews as a host on the younger side, is going to get as much attention for looks as for her relationship status.” One of Steele’s on-air colleagues stated that Steele dating an athlete is “now prime target material” but that they are in different parts of football and that no one voiced concerns about her ex-boyfriend being a football player. Her colleague suggested that she continue “to crush Saturdays and stay above the gossip,” Richard Deitsch, a writer and reporter for Sports Illustrated and an adjunct professor at Columbia University Graduate School of Journalism, reported on October 22.

Journalists are indeed human beings — and human beings cannot just shut off their emotions. But having an overly amicable or romantic relationship with a source has its repercussions. First and foremost, when a journalist develops feelings for a source, there is a big chance that the fairness and accuracy of his reporting will be at risk. Even if the journalist feels that he is able to separate his professional and personal lives, the

public may not perceive the situation the same way. In February 2008, Don Carreon of Eye on Ethics, a project of the Center for Media Freedom and Responsibility, raises two key issues stemming from a romantic relationship between a reporter and a source. The first is the chance that a reporter will gain the upper hand over other reporters because he is linked to the source. “A journalist in such a position would be the first to get leads from the source he or she is close to, which in turn can and often leads to biased reporters,” Carreon writes. The second is that both the reporter and the source may take advantage of their relationship to further their objectives. “A source in a romantic relationship with a journalist may think that it assures him of constant media exposure and prominence, while the journalist is assured of getting exclusives and other career boosts.” Still, he stresses that romantic relationships and plain friendships do happen between reporters and sources — it is just that if the reporter plans to pursue either, he should be prepared to inform his editor as soon as it becomes clear.

The New York Times Company has a section in its journalism ethics policy called “Keeping our detachment.” The 24<sup>th</sup> rule of this section states that “staff members, especially those assigned to beats, must be aware that personal relationships with news sources can erode into favoritism, in fact or appearance.” Editors, the rule reads, should be careful when being partial towards certain individuals, given that they typically have a variety of relationships. Journalists, the rule continues, should be careful when dealing with friends and neighbors who are also newsmakers. “When practical, the best solution is to have someone else deal with them,” the rule concludes. The following rule cautions against developing a personal friendship with a source — for example, it would be okay to see a source for a drink or meal informally but not to go golfing with him once a week.

As for romantic relationships, the 26<sup>th</sup> rule states that “romantic involvement with a news source would create the appearance and probably the reality of partiality.” Any staff members who become close to sources should speak with a responsible newsroom manager privately — the discussion could either end there, leading to staff members recusing themselves from coverage or modifying assignments or changing beats.

Timeliness is a key issue in all three cases. When a reporter finds himself in a situation where a romantic relationship has developed or is developing between him and a source, when is the right time to speak up about it to his editor and should this affect the reporter’s punishment? For some, the answer is simple: reporters should disclose the information as soon as possible. “A reporter should disclose an intimate relationship, certainly a romantic one, but also if they feel they’re becoming too chummy with somebody and they’re feeling it’s affecting their ability to report objectively, I think they should disclose that as soon as possible with their editor and discuss it,” Robertson said. However, is it really possible to pinpoint the exact moment at which a reporter should reveal that he is getting too close to a source? Deitsch said that it’s not that difficult to determine whether or not you are getting close to a source but that only the reporter can make that call. The journalist has to figure out when his relationship with a source is straddling that line. “The only person who knows that is the journalist,” Deitsch said. “At some point, you know when you’ve gotten too close to a subject.” Though he could not comment on whether or not Wetlaufer approached her editor soon enough, he did praise Kiechel for reassigning the interview. “The one person who seemed like they made the right decision was the editor who took the story from her and gave it to someone else,” he added.

The challenge that arises in the cases of Norris and Steele is that they are assigned to a specific beat and so having a relationship with someone within that industry presents more challenges to them than it did to Wetlaufer, given that she was just assigned to write a feature on Welch. Carreon cautions that reporters may have to sacrifice their beats if they are in a romantic relationship with someone who is a key source for their beat.

“Romantic relationships with possible and past sources may also lead to conflicts of interests,” Carreon writes. “Journalists in long term relationships but whose partners have become possible sources when they’re assigned to a particular beat must draw the line.”

In Norris’ case, one might think that her temporarily stepping down from her hosting duties for ATC and then resuming her job once the election is over will help eliminate the conflict of interest in her reporting, but this is not necessarily the case. “In some cases, you’re doing a story and that happens to be somebody involved in that story and will never be a big player again in your stories and so after this story is published and this person is no longer a source, I think it’s probably okay if that source is no longer a source,” Tofani said. “But then it becomes dicey because that person is plugged into what you’re doing.” Norris’ husband is involved in politics and so this will have repercussions on what she can and cannot report on in the future. The same logic can be applied to Steele’s case — “Because she’s in a relationship with him [Ponder], she may also learn things she wouldn’t learn otherwise but then that also ends up becoming a problem,” Tofani added.

The key to successfully dealing with such a situation is being as honest, open and transparent as possible about possible breaches of ethics and taking responsibility for one’s actions if it becomes public knowledge. What may have perhaps saved Steele and

Ponder from backlash is the fact that they both made a point to acknowledge outright that they are dating. “If we’re going back to the perception thing, timing is everything and getting out with every story tends to be the way to control it,” Chase said. “If the story comes out before you’re ready to deal with [it], then the story controls you. And perhaps that’s an advantage to Ponder-Steele.” Indeed, if Steele were to keep the information from her editors, then it would seem like she was trying to hide it. At the end of the day, he said the only people whose opinions matter the most in Steele’s position are her bosses, colleagues and others in the industry. “I think that move, in admitting and playing it down but not denying it, I think that people take a cue from that. If you have nothing to hide, why should I be skeptical of your happiness?”

There does not appear to be as much discord over the Norris case given that she acted swiftly in approaching NPR about her husband’s new position. “Michele Norris is an absolute first-rate journalist and I think in this situation, she proves yet again that she has the profession and ethics at the forefront of her mind,” Deitsch said. “I think she absolutely made the right decision. I think she made the decision like a true professional.” NPR’s ethics handbook states that journalists should inform management when they have a familial conflict of interest. In the event that a spouse, family member, or companion is engaged in some political activity that the NPR journalist is covering, the code states, “the NPR journalist should advise his or her supervisor to determine whether s/he should recuse him or herself from a certain story or certain coverage.” NPR presents her case as a case study in its ethics code, stating that she recognized the conflict and “appropriately raised the issue with senior management before her husband formally took the job.” Subsequently, the case study review reads, “a plan was put together that would allow her

to continue being a key contributor to NPR's news operations, but would also separate her from its coverage of politics."

Although the Michele Norris case was pretty clear-cut, the other two cases seem to fall in a gray area. Wetlaufer said that the reactions to the news that she and Welch were dating were mixed: some people were sympathetic to her plight while others were simply upset and in some cases, angry. She conceded that although she believes that one's capacity to write a "fair and balanced story" becomes more difficult when you become too close to a source, she is still unsure of how to draw the line between being fair in your reporting and becoming close to a source. "I'm not an authority on it," she told the Harvard Crimson in June. "Clearly, I tested the limits on it. And I paid the price for it." At the end of the day, she said, she has come to terms with what happened — some people criticized her and others said she acted correctly in approaching her editor. She assumes responsibility for her actions nonetheless: "We were grown-ups, we weren't kids, this wasn't a crush, these were two people whose lives were now changed. I should have quit the next day. That was my mistake."

As for Steele, it's not exactly clear yet what the effect of her relationship with Ponder will be on her career. As far as Steele's colleagues and bosses at ESPN are concerned, there is no conflict of interest. An ESPN spokesperson said, "We do not comment on, or confirm, personal aspects of employees' lives. Regarding any policies, we expect any commentator to raise any relationship that could be a conflict with the sport they cover. This does not fit that scenario as she covers college football." Chase said that he doesn't view the relationship as having a positive or negative impact on her reputation and reporting but just having some kind of impact. It's a test of her capacity to

deal with it and “how she deals with that will show her professionalism and whether or not this is something that will impact her career.” Her reputation is not at stake and if anything, he credits her for choosing to brave through such a situation. Once again, only the journalist knows when the reporter-source relationship is extending beyond the boundary. “It’s unfair as it is that there may be some perception consequences from that,” Robertson agreed. “Does that mean she shouldn’t be in this relationship? I can’t say. I think that’s not anyone’s decision to make but hers but from a purely conflict of interest standpoint, I don’t think that that’s a conflict.”

Ultimately, reporters must approach their editors as soon as they feel that a relationship is forming. Tofani said that reporters will often encounter sources who are naturally flirtatious and that it would not make sense to report all of them. If there is a “mutual current” that extends beyond the “everyday flirtatious stuff,” Tofani added, the reporter should take action. This is for the sake of protecting the person’s job but it is also about the credibility of your work and that of the news organization at large. Journalists can be friendly with their sources because that makes sources more comfortable sharing information with them, but they have to remember that their responsibility is to the reader, not to their source. “I think that if you get along with your subject, I really do think the story can be better but there’s always a line that has to be acknowledged. I think you can like people, I think you can be friends with people as long as it’s known that you’re the journalist and they’re the subject and those are the defined roles.”

However, one has to consider the perspective of the reporter, who has to decide not only when to disclose a potentially inappropriate relationship with a source but whether or not the relationship has actually reached that level of inappropriateness. “To

me, the only firable offense is if you publish the story or they air the story and you didn't tell your employers that this relationship existed, and I'm not even sure that's firable but I think that's the only situation that's firable," Deitsch said. Indeed, it is true that it is not that easy to determine whether a relationship with a source has become unprofessional but nonetheless, if a reporter has even the slightest feeling of uncertainty, he should immediately approach his editor. If he does not approach his editor and news of an inappropriate relationship between him and a source breaks, the reporter would have to assume responsibility for not speaking up in the first place. It is important that journalists speak to their editors immediately when this sort of issue arises — and most of the time, journalist are able to make that call, even if the lines between being friendly and being too friendly sometimes do get blurry. "I think that's something that reporters would have to discuss with their editors and use their best judgments and I think most reporters can tell when there's a casual friendship where you have a friendly relationship with someone as a source and then taking that to some kind of further degree where they feel that they can't report on this person objectively," Robertson said.

Whatever the journalist's intentions, how the public views a journalist's actions cannot be discounted. Perception tends to trump reality. Chase stressed that if Steele has done well enough to get to the point at which she is currently in her career, "she's smart enough to know that she's a good enough reporter and a good enough analyst to not let this affect her." But ultimately, people will not care about her intentions or how good of a reporter she is. "I think to some people, it doesn't matter if Samantha Steele is going to be as professional as she can and not let her relationship with a Vikings affect her," Chase said. The reputation of HBR by default makes any of its journalists dating anyone

in the business world appear in the hot seat, even if there might not necessarily be a conflict. “If you were a reporter for a local paper and you were a restaurant review columnist and you were dating the fire chief I mean obviously there’s not a conflict there but this is Harvard Business Review and dating any really major business executive would be a conflict,” Robertson said. At the end of the day, the reporter has nothing to lose in erring on the safe side — a reporter’s responsibility is ultimately to the reader, to the public. Jeanine Edwards drives home the point in an October 22 interview with Deitsch: “Public perception is critically important, and we can’t afford to put ourselves in a position to be overly scrutinized or have our journalistic integrity questioned in any way. I consider myself a professional who would always be objective, but the public might not know that. Avoiding a potential conflict is the best way to go.”

## Works Cited

### **The Committee of Concerned Journalists**

**Author: Journalism.org**

**Date: 1997**

[http://www.journalism.org/resources/about\\_ccj](http://www.journalism.org/resources/about_ccj)

The Committee of Concerned Journalists is a consortium of reporters, editors, producers, publishers, owners and academics worried about the future of the profession. To secure journalism's future, the group believes that journalists from all media, geography, rank and generation must be clear about what sets our profession apart from other endeavors. To accomplish this, the group is creating a national conversation among journalists about principles.

### **Principles of Journalism**

**Author: The Committee of Concerned Journalists**

**Date: 1997**

<http://www.journalism.org/resources/principles>

#### 4. ITS PRACTITIONERS MUST MAINTAIN AN INDEPENDENCE FROM THOSE THEY COVER

Independence is an underlying requirement of journalism, a cornerstone of its reliability. Independence of spirit and mind, rather than neutrality, is the principle journalists must keep in focus. While editorialists and commentators are not neutral, the source of their credibility is still their accuracy, intellectual fairness and ability to inform--not their devotion to a certain group or outcome. In our independence, however, we must avoid any tendency to stray into arrogance, elitism, isolation or nihilism.

### **Suzy Welch**

**Author: Katherine M. Gray**

**Date: June 5, 2006**

<http://www.thecrimson.com/article/2006/6/5/suzy-welch-when-suzy-r-welch/>

She met Welch, the retired CEO of General Electric, on October 11, 2001—the date is engraved on her wedding band, she says—to interview him for an HBR article. She then wrote the article, she recounts in her spacious Boston home, adding that it had been edited and shipped into production by the time she flew down to New York City in late December to take a photo with Welch, who was married at the time.

After a lunch together, which in her words “was the longest in the history of mankind,” and dinner later that evening, Jack and the future Mrs. Welch realized their relationship was a romantic one.

The next day, she called her boss Walter Kiechel '68, editorial director of Harvard Business School Publications, to tell him that he should pull the article she had written on Jack Welch. Four months later, she resigned.

“I was fired,” she says now. “They would tell you I resigned. Whatever, I left.”

“When you look back at it now, you see the unbelievably glowing coverage of our wedding in People magazine, and the flashy feature of me in Bazaar magazine,” Welch says, referring to recent articles about her and Jack Welch. “All the beautiful coverage you get now, it’s like it never happened.”

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And then, a year after divorcing Wetlaufer, love for a source struck.

“Our timing was exquisitely bad,” she says. “This was the middle of the corporate malfeasance frenzy, and people didn’t take me at my word that we weren’t romantically involved when the article was written.”

Welch says she understands why journalists jumped on the story.

“You have the editor of the Harvard Business Review, and whether you like it or not, the Harvard name carries all sorts of free fall,” she says. “Harvard has this reputation as being this upstanding institution.”

Some HBR editors called for her resignation in the spring of 2002, according to a Crimson article. She was then put on what she calls a “house arrest kind-of-thing,” where she was not allowed to enter the HBR building.

“Things were wild,” she says, referring to her experiences going back to work after she told Kiechel about the affair. “Some people were really understanding and compassionate, and other people were just downright mad.”

When asked where she personally draws the line between objectivity and getting too close to a source, she says that when a relationship with a source “compromises your judgment to write a fair and balanced story,” you have violated the principle. But the answer to this “eternal question of journalism,” as she calls it, is still not concrete for her.

She admits, however, that she is not the one to ask for a definitive answer to the question of how close is too close.

“I’m not an authority on it,” she says. “Clearly, I tested the limits on it. And I paid the price for it.”

Some of her colleagues in the field have told her that she violated one of the most essential codes of journalism, she says. Others have told her that she did the right thing by stopping the story from ever being printed. Regardless, she says she has no complaints and does not blame anyone.

“Could I have met Jack under different circumstances, it sure would have been better for the institution, but it didn’t happen that way. Jack and I have reconstructed all the different ways we could have met,” she says. “One of our favorite parlor games is sitting around talking about when we could have met where it would not have caused a detonation.”

If she could go back and handle the situation differently, she says, “We would have had a press conference and said, ‘Look, we plan to marry.’”

“We were grown-ups, we weren’t kids, this wasn’t a crush, these were two people whose lives were now changed,” she adds. “I should have quit the next day. That was my mistake.”

### **Ex-Editor Quits Harvard Review**

**Author:** Lorne Manly

**Date:** April 25, 2002

<http://www.nytimes.com/2002/04/25/business/ex-editor-quits-harvard-review.html?pagewanted=print&src=pm>

The former editor of The Harvard Business Review, who last month was relegated to the role of editor at large after complaints that her relationship with the former General Electric chairman and chief executive John F. Welch compromised an interview with him, left the magazine altogether yesterday.

Suzy Wetlaufer, the former editor, said in a statement announcing her resignation that the continuing distraction over the controversy could be resolved only by her departure from the magazine.

The furor over Ms. Wetlaufer arose late last year after she met with Mr. Welch for one of the magazine’s signature features, the HBR Interview. During the usual give-and-take between the subject and the magazine to prepare the interview for publication, Ms. Wetlaufer has acknowledged, she became too close to Mr. Welch. She has also acknowledged their relationship could lead some to question both her objectivity and that of the business review.

She asked her boss, Walter Kiechel, the editorial director of Harvard Business School Publishing, to not publish the article. Instead, he reassigned the interview, which was published in the February issue.

The incident continued to roil the staff of the magazine, however, leading to Ms. Wetlaufer’s reassignment in early March from the position that in 2000 paid her \$276,963, including a bonus. But management’s attempt at a compromise -- stripping her of her managerial duties while allowing her to keep writing and having an office at the business magazine -- did not take. Two senior editors have quit, while the anger of other staff members continued to simmer.

Ms. Wetlaufer, in her statement, said: "I was confident, however, that over time, the fundamental strength of my professional relationships with management and subordinates alike, as well as the success of the publication would be sufficient to overcome any lingering doubts and allow me to function as a full-time contributor and collaborator.

Unfortunately, what has become clear is that Harvard Business Review will never again be a place where I will be able to work to my full potential."

Ms. Wetlaufer declined to comment further, although her spokeswoman said Ms. Wetlaufer's departure was amicable.

### **Too Close for Comfort**

**Author:** Michele Orecklin

**Date:** March 10, 2002

<http://www.time.com/time/magazine/article/0,9171,216323,00.html>

Stories about romantic escapades rarely get much coverage in the financial press. Given that the business world's most prominent figures include people like Bill Gates and Alan Greenspan, this is perhaps not surprising, nor unappreciated. But leave it to Jack Welch, who pioneered so much else during his two decades as the chief executive of General Electric, to upend tradition.

As first reported last week in the Wall Street Journal, Welch--age 66, married and recently retired--ended up having an affair with Suzy Wetlaufer, 42, a divorcee who edits the Harvard Business Review. Wetlaufer told colleagues that she became intimate with Welch after completing a series of interviews in which she asked him to elaborate on the management lessons contained in his best-selling autobiography, *Jack: Straight from the Gut*.

In December Wetlaufer asked her boss Walter Kiechel, editorial director of Harvard Business School Publishing, to spike her article. She worried that the "close" relationship that had blossomed between her and the corporate legend might lead some to challenge her objectivity. Kiechel hastily reassigned the piece to two other staff members, whose Q&A with Welch ran in the February issue of HBR, a monthly covering business-management issues.

But the resolution of this personal-professional conflict was not as tidy or swift as many would have liked, and four of her senior editors called for Wetlaufer to step down. Last Friday she did just that, after conceding that she had lost the confidence of her colleagues.

Wetlaufer is widely considered a talented editor who successfully oversaw HBR's transformation from a bimonthly to a monthly. But her staff was upset that she waited almost a month after the affair with Welch began before facing up to the potential conflict of interest--and even then acted largely at the urging of someone outside the magazine. That someone was Jane Welch, 49, Jack's wife, who reportedly knew about the affair and called Wetlaufer to question whether the editor could be neutral in her article.

Jane seemed more concerned with journalistic ethics than did Wetlaufer's colleagues, several of whom had known of the affair since it began last November, after Wetlaufer and Welch met for lunch at the clubby Manhattan restaurant "21." The meal was set up so the pair could be together for a photograph to run with Wetlaufer's Letter from the Editor. They reportedly had their first date that night.

Not long after, Wetlaufer, a gregarious and charismatic woman who often speaks with colleagues about her personal life, told several people in the magazine's Boston-area office of the relationship. "She was having fun," says a staff member. "She didn't raise any ethical concerns. She was on Cloud 9." At one point, she reportedly flaunted an expensive bracelet--a gift from Welch. "Much to our discredit," the staffer says, "no one came forward to challenge her the way we should have." Kiechel has organized a task force to clarify guidelines about author- subject fraternization. How this will affect Wetlaufer remains to be seen; her publicist says the relationship with Welch continues.

In an e-mail to her staff, Wetlaufer wrote that she plans to take a few weeks off but will return to HBR as an editor at large. This did not satisfy some employees, who complained at a meeting following Wetlaufer's e-mail that she would retain her office and continue to work among them. As a result, two senior editors resigned.

**Lori Robertson, Managing Editor for FactCheck.org and a former editor for the American Journalism Review (Expert)**

Date of Interview: October 30, 2012

*What do you consider to be an appropriate relationship between a reporter and a source?*

"I think that human beings are human beings and it can be tough not to be friendly or to become friends but I guess there's degrees to friendship and if you already knew the person, if the reporter already knew the person and had a relationship of some sort outside of work, it's a little bit of a conflict of interest and something that should certainly be disclosed to an editor. If there was any kind of romantic relationship, that should certainly be disclosed to the reporter's supervisor or editor immediately and the reporter should be taken off that beat. You can't have a romantic relationship with someone and then interview them and quote them in a story, that's inappropriate."

"I think that's something that reporters would have to discuss with their editors and use their best judgments and I think most reporters can tell when there's a casual friendship where you have a friendly relationship with someone as a source and then taking that to some kind of further degree where they feel that they can't report on this person objectively."

*What is your take on the Samantha Steele-Christian Ponder case?*

“I think as long as she’s not covering him or not covering NFL, then it’s okay. I think you would like at that incident, incidentally you would look at any incident with a reporter. If you were on the police beat and you were romantically involved with the police officer, I think that would obviously be an inappropriate relationship. If she’s not on the NFL beat, I don’t see what the conflict was.”

“I think that’s an incredibly valid point. It’s unfair as it is that there may be some perception consequences from that. Does that mean she shouldn’t be in this relationship? I can’t say. I think that’s not anyone’s decision to make but hers but from a purely conflict of interest standpoint, I don’t think that that’s a conflict.”

*What do you make of the Suzy Wetlaufer case? Did she speak up soon enough?*

“Ethicist experts I interviewed for this said she did the right thing.”

“It certainly made this case much more high-profile, the fact that she was the top editor at the Harvard business review and he’s also in a very prominent position.”

“I mean, it’s hard to say, hypothetically what would happen in another situation but I think that this case got a lot more attention because of her position, because she was the top editor.”

“In that case it was the Harvard Business Review so being in a relationship with a major former business executive is a conflict of interest. It’s hard to be top editor of the Harvard business review and not see that that’s a conflict. If you were a reporter for a local paper and you were a restaurant review column and you were dating the fire chief I mean obviously there’s not a conflict there but this is Harvard business review and dating any really major business executive would be a conflict.”

“I think what the bottom line is with these things is that one, a reporter should disclose an intimate relationship certainly a romantic one but also if they feel they’re becoming just too chummy with somebody and they’re feeling it’s affecting their ability to report objectively I think they should disclose that as soon as possible with their editor and discuss it.”

**Loretta Tofani, Former Washington Post and Philadelphia Inquirer Reporter (Expert)**

Date of Interview: October 30, 2012

*What do you think is the appropriate relationship between a reporter and a source?*

“You are emotionally connected. You’ve lived, you’ve experienced things, you have a way that you grew up that you know well about a certain part of the world, so you bring that. I feel like it’s an asset. You bring that to who you are when you’re doing a story and you don’t have to be a robot transcribing notes when you’re doing an interview. The

connection is important, the connection is good, it loosens things up, it helps you get to what's going on in that person's mind, that person's heart."

"I don't think that there's something bad about that. But here's the thing: in that situation where maybe they're talking about having a drink. People know when it's going beyond a reporter, when it's becoming romantic. Then the warning bell should be coming and maybe you do need to excuse yourself from doing that particular story. I feel like people know when it's becoming romantic."

"I do feel like an emotional connection is okay and if we tell ourselves as reporters that we can't be emotionally connected, we're doomed. But it's really dangerous if you're in what's becoming a romantic relationship and that's when it's necessary to stop giving signals and if you can't, you do need to go to your editor and say, 'Oops, someone else needs to do this story.'"

"The most difficult situation is when you are covering a beat. Say you are covering a courthouse and you have to see somebody all the time and you always have to rely on that person for information. In that case, it's really difficult and that's really honestly requires talking to an editor about how this can be best handled. In some cases, you're doing a story and that happens to be somebody involved in that story and will never be a big player again in your stories and so after this story is published and this person is no longer a source, I think it's probably okay if that source is no longer a source. But then it becomes dicey because that person is plugged into what you're doing."

"There were a lot of flirtatious people. That's their style but I guess in my case I never felt like I needed to report them because we were not having a relationship. That was just their style of relating to me and I somehow made it clear that 'okay, you can say what you want but it's not going to be on that.' It's sort of a matter of signals and how you respond. In my case, I've never had to refer to an editor on it. I think that once you know that it's mutual and you want to pursue the relationship and it's clear that the other person does too, I think at that point, safety suggests that you approach your editor about it or else risk losing your job or facing embarrassment for the rest of your life."

"I think the safest policy for a reporter who cares about her job, the safest thing is tell her editor and clearly describe what's going on. What I would accept from that there's always going to be a lot of flirtatious sources. I think it would be ridiculous for a reporter to report all the various flirtatious men but if there is kind of a mutual current that is developing and it's more than sort of the everyday flirtatious stuff, then maybe just as job protection. Job protection mainly but also concern for the credibility of what you're writing, it's best to tell an editor. That ends up being the issue: it's a matter of credibility. If it becomes a truly mutual relationship, if it becomes a love relationship, then you're not seeing straight ... what you're writing is maybe a bit off kilter so you need to protect both yourself and the public and the editor or the newspaper or magazine's reputation from all of that."

*What do you make of the Samantha Steele-Christian Ponder case?*

“To me, that’s a bad situation where if it’s clear that there is a relationship, then that shouldn’t be there. It’s partly a matter of perception but I think it really gets in the way of what the goal is, which is to tell these stories about what’s going on with the team. There are things that you can’t really see. Maybe there are rivalries with this guy, they won’t feel comfortable talking to her. It changes everything. Some of it is perception and it will get in the way of what she’s doing because maybe someone doesn’t like him and so they don’t like her and some of it is just: you need to have more distance rather than be in a love relationship. Her editor should reassign her, that’s it.”

“Because she’s in a relationship with him, she may also learn things she wouldn’t learn otherwise but then, that also ends up becoming a problem. But then maybe she shouldn’t be covering these things because ‘is this story his viewpoint?’ ... kind of form it out, tell another reporter and have that reporter follow it rather than yourself. It’s a matter of just being able to see clearly. You always have to do other interviews when someone tells you something but it’s a matter of how much weight you’re giving others. If you’re involved with someone, you tend to give that person’s story more weight. It compromises your judgment, I think.”

### **NPR’s Michele Norris Stepping Away From Hosting Duties**

**Author: Mark Memmott**

**Date: October 24, 2011**

<http://www.npr.org/blogs/thetwo-way/2011/10/24/141650212/nprs-michele-norris-stepping-away-from-hosting-duties>

Michele Norris, an All Things Considered co-host since December 2002, is stepping away from that post until after the 2012 presidential campaign because her husband has taken a senior position with President Obama's re-election effort.

She is not leaving NPR's airwaves, however. While she will not be involved in coverage of the 2012 election, Norris will continue to report and produce projects for the organization.

In a message just sent to NPR staff, Norris says:

**"I need to share some news and I wanted to make sure my NPR family heard this first.** Last week, I told news management that my husband, Broderick Johnson, has just accepted a senior adviser position with the Obama Campaign. After careful consideration, we decided that Broderick's new role could make it difficult for me to continue hosting ATC. **Given the nature of Broderick's position with the campaign and the impact that it will most certainly have on our family life, I will temporarily step away from my hosting duties until after the 2012 elections.** I will be leaving the host chair at the end of this week, but I'm not going far. I will be wearing a different hat for a while, producing signature segments and features and working on new reporting projects. While I will of course recuse myself from all election coverage, there's still an awful lot of ground that I can till in this interim role.

"This has all happened very quickly, but working closely with NPR management, we've been able to make a plan that serves the show, honors the integrity of our news organization and is best for me professionally and personally. I will certainly miss hosting, but I will remain part of the ATC team and I look forward to contributing to our show and NPR in new and exciting ways."

**Michele Norris Temporarily Leaving Position at NPR's 'All Things Considered'**

**Author: Brian Stelter**

**Date: October 24, 2011**

<http://mediadecoder.blogs.nytimes.com/2011/10/24/michele-norris-temporarily-leaving-position-as-co-host-of-nprs-all-things-considered/>

Michele Norris, the co-host of the flagship NPR news program "All Things Considered," will leave that position for a year, she said Monday, because her husband, Broderick Johnson, is joining President Obama's re-election campaign.

Ms. Norris has co-hosted "All Things Considered" alongside Robert Siegel and Melissa Block for nearly a decade. She announced her decision in an internal memorandum Monday morning and will explain it on the program on Monday afternoon. Mr. Johnson started on Monday as a senior adviser to the Obama campaign.

"I will be leaving the host chair at the end of this week, but I'm not going far," Ms. Norris wrote in the memo. "I will be wearing a different hat for a while, producing signature segments and features and working on new reporting projects. While I will of course recuse myself from all election coverage, there's still an awful lot of ground that I can till in this interim role."

She said she intends to return to hosting after the election at the end of 2012. She did not immediately respond to an interview request.

An NPR spokeswoman said there would be a substitute host for Ms. Norris, but that those plans have not yet been finalized.

"This has all happened very quickly," Ms. Norris said in the memo.

She said she informed her superiors at NPR of her husband's new position last week, and that "after careful consideration, we decided that Broderick's new role could make it difficult for me to continue hosting" the program. She cited both the potential ethical problem and "the impact that it will most certainly have on our family life."

Jim Messina, the Obama campaign manager, said in a statement that Mr. Johnson would serve as a member of the senior staff and be the campaign's "representative at key events around the country." A news release described him as an "ear to the ground for the campaign's political and constituency operations."

Mr. Johnson was an informal and unpaid advisor to the Obama campaign during the 2008 presidential election. At that time, Ms. Norris did not recuse herself from election coverage. "NPR News management was consulted about it and concluded that it wasn't necessary to recuse Michele simply because her husband was a friend of Obama's," an NPR spokeswoman said.

But Ms. Norris did recuse herself from election coverage in 2004 when her husband was a senior advisor for congressional affairs for John Kerry's presidential campaign.

Other news organizations have occasionally had to wrestle with the possibility of a conflict of interest when a spouse or other family member accepts a political job. When Jay Carney was named White House press secretary earlier this year, ABC News officials said that his wife, Claire Shipman, a correspondent, would not cover the White House.

### **Michele Norris Leaves NPR for Husband's Dumb Job Thing**

**Author: Hamilton Nolan**

**Date: October 24, 2011**

<http://gawker.com/5852763/michele-norris-leaves-npr-for-husbands-dumb-job-thing>

NPR host Michele Norris (the one who's always like "Meee-shell Norris." You know who I'm talking about!) says she will "temporarily step away from my hosting duties until after the 2012 elections." Why, Mee-shell? "My husband, Broderick Johnson, has just accepted a senior advisor position with the Obama Campaign." Selfish. Selfish, selfish job-accepting, Broderick. Come check me out, Mee-shell. I will never be offered a better job. Gurl U no U don't need him.

### **Michele Norris and NPR: Tough Call**

**Author: Erik Wemple**

**Date: October 24, 2011**

[http://www.washingtonpost.com/blogs/erik-wemple/post/michele-norris-and-npr-tough-call/2011/10/24/gIQAZeOKDM\\_blog.html](http://www.washingtonpost.com/blogs/erik-wemple/post/michele-norris-and-npr-tough-call/2011/10/24/gIQAZeOKDM_blog.html)

In a righteous world, no journalist should have to adjust job responsibilities on account of a spouse's work. Yet a real conflict sits in the middle of this relationship: How could Norris be expected to cover the 2012 Obama campaign in a neutral fashion if her husband is all tied up in it? How could she be expected to cover Obama's opponent's campaign given those same considerations? NPR guidelines require its employees to disclose all such potential conflicts.

Remember: Conflict-of-interest disclosures don't work on radio. If they're a bit of a distraction in print, they sound like static on radio. Give this a try:

Good evening, I'm Michele Norris and this is NPR's All Things Considered. Today, the Obama campaign, acting on advice from senior adviser-slash-my-husband Broderick Johnson, attacked Republicans for practicing "crony capitalism."

Consider that if Norris sat tight in her host position, she'd have to be issuing such disclaimers and disclosures all the time. She'd become the radio industry's full-disclosure machine. Every time she issued a disclosure, NPR's funding opponents would pounce and denounce, saying that the awkward moments merely shore up the outlet's reputation as a liberal mouthpiece.

### **Samantha Steele, Christian Ponder Dating: Vikings QB Confirms Relationship With ESPN Reporter**

**Author:** Chris Greenberg

**Date:** October 20, 2012

[http://www.huffingtonpost.com/2012/10/20/samantha-steele-christian-ponder-dating-espn\\_n\\_1990452.html?ir=Sports](http://www.huffingtonpost.com/2012/10/20/samantha-steele-christian-ponder-dating-espn_n_1990452.html?ir=Sports)

Vikings quarterback Christian Ponder is having himself quite the breakout 2012 in Minnesota. ESPN sideline reporter Samantha Steele has also stepped into the spotlight. As each has been enjoying a rise to national prominence, they have also been enjoying one another's company, apparently.

Rumors about the possible coupling sprouted in part because of Ponder's Twitter activity. Fittingly, the former Florida State star confirmed that they are dating on the social networking site.

The 24-year-old quarterback made 10 starts during an uneven rookie campaign but has really come into his own this season, leading the Vikings to a 4-2 record to open the season. He's also impressed with himself, understandably.

"There's been a thousand articles today about it," Ponder told reporters on Friday, via Tom Pelissero of ESPN. "You can't really worry about it. You've got to try to keep it private, but that's just part of the industry, part of the job. I don't know. Comes with the territory."

Based on this tweet, Steele, who can be seen on ESPN's "College Gameday" and "Thursday Night Football," hasn't been receiving feedback on the relationship as positive as that being given to Ponder.

@Samantha\_Steele

Samantha Steele

S/O to all the grown men critiquing my wardrobe/relationship choices. If it werent for y'all, I might've forgotten how awesome JR High was:)

October 20, 2012 5:23 pm via Echofon Reply Retweet Favorite

Sounds like there might be a bit of double standard when it comes to evaluating this relationship.

### **Vikings QB Christian Ponder dating ESPN reporter Samantha Steele**

**Author:** Abraham Gutierrez

**Date: October 19, 2012**

<http://www.examiner.com/article/vikings-qb-christian-ponder-dating-espn-reporter-samantha-steele>

One of the biggest surprises this season has been the success of the Minnesota Vikings, in particular with promising young quarterback, Christian Ponder running the show.

After six NFL weeks, the Vikings find themselves trailing the NFC North-leading Chicago Bears by a single game, and the 24-year-old Ponder is in the top-ten in: total completions (144), completions percentage (68.6), quarterback rating (92.4) and hot girlfriend – ESPN sideline reporter, Samantha Steele.

This week, as the Vikings prepare for a huge test against the Arizona Cardinals, the former 12th overall pick decided to profess his love for Erin Andrews' replacement from the mountain tops, also known as the media.

"Obviously, I am a catch," Ponder joked. "But I outpunted my coverage for sure. I'm proud of the relationship, I can brag. I have bragging rights. [My teammates] call me Mr. Steele. Christian Steele is kind of a sweet name."

So, who is this mystery blonde that has the former FSU standout making up words I'm sure he didn't learn in college (outpunted)?

Born on December 11, 1985, Samantha Steele is a 26-year-old bombshell from Phoenix, Arizona. She's currently a reporter and host for the Longhorn Network and a sideline reporter for ESPN college football and NCAA basketball.

In other words, she's the latest ESPN "eye candy" who appears to be following in the footsteps of the aforementioned Andrews and the other ultra-hot sideliners, Jenn Brown.

"Kind of been intentionally trying to keep it private, but we knew it would get out at some point," Ponder added. "It's not that really big of a deal. There's been 1,000 articles today about it. Can't really worry about; try to keep it private, but that's part of the industry, part of the job, comes with the territory."

We also know that Steele is an Evangelical Christian who according to Ponder's teammates, is a strong woman that likes calling the shots.

"Yeah, she definitely wears the pants," said Vikings tight end Kyle Rudolph.

**Chris Chase, Senior Blog Editor, USA Today Sports (Expert)**

Date of Interview: October 30, 2012

*What is your take on the news that Samantha Steele and Christian Ponder are dating?  
What do you make of the reactions to each of them announcing the news?*

“I find it interesting. According to the research I did, and this was a post I did.”

“Ponder had written this tweet about it and initially I was very surprised that somebody would go public with this if it wasn't brought up in an interview or if they hadn't been outed so I was skeptical. This isn't something that usually happens. Having been in the media for a few years, you always hear whispers about athletes dating sideline reporters.”

“He's not the one who's going to get criticized for it.”

“He has less to lose whereas with Samantha Steele. In the post, I said that I didn't see anything wrong with the relationship.”

“I still thought that the perception is something that would possibly have a negative impact on her career. Not by her bosses, not by colleagues or maybe perhaps by colleagues but by fans. The perception that she's a sideline reporter, that's how she got her job.”

“They're battling this stereotype that they've gotten their jobs because of their looks, not because of what they've done.”

*Do you think that there is a conflict of interest in this matter? One could argue that there isn't, given that Ponder plays in the pros whereas Steele covers college football. Would this relationship adversely impact Samantha Steele's reporting? Should her editors have reassigned her? How did her editors react, by the way?*

“It's impossible to not have biases when you're writing. Whatever you do during the day, in your real life you have opinions about things and when you write, you try to be as impartial as possible.”

“Political reporters have their own opinions, their own slants, their own biases but the good ones try to put that aside. If you're doing news stuff, you try to be as fair as possible.”

“I think to some people, it doesn't matter if Samantha Steele is going to be as professional as she can and not let her relationship with a Vikings affect her.”

“Without knowing Samantha Steele and without knowing her reporting, if she has done well enough to get to the point in her career she's smart enough to know that she's a good enough reporter and a good enough analyst to not let this affect her.”

“I asked a buddy of mine or two at ESPN if they heard anything and they said there were whispers about this for a while. From what I heard she did have permission from her editors.”

“It’s about knowing exactly what Samantha Steele did. There’s clearly an opportunity for conflict of interest. It’s not hard to put some scenarios in your head where you could figure out ...” a guy who becomes Christian Ponder’s teammate who is her source

“I wouldn’t say it has a negative or positive impact on her job, I just think it has some sort of impact.”

“It’s just like saying that someone who lives in Manhattan reporting on what’s going on there has a different view than someone who’s reporting it from Los Angeles. I don’t think it’s a good thing or a bad thing, it’s just a thing.”

“I don’t think it’s a good thing or a bad thing, I just think it’s something. At some point she’ll have to deal with it and how she deals with that will show her professionalism and whether or not this is something that will impact her career.”

“You know how college students can get and when you’re going onto college campuses every week and you have what is the population that goes into game day and holds up signs? It tends to be dominated by the fraternity male. Erin Andrews had well documented issues. When she would go on campus, she was gaining as much attention for her looks than her reporting and I think now, Samantha Steele, in the same role as Erin Andrews as a host on the younger side, is going to get as much attention for looks as for her relationship status.”

“It doesn’t besmirch her reputation and it doesn’t affect how she does it. I think you have to be very confident and very sure of yourself to do that because going to these environments every week and facing criticism...the fact that she’s able to do it, more power to her.”

*What do you consider to be an appropriate relationship between a reporter and a source? Can a reporter and a source get coffee or dinner together? Is it okay for a reporter and a source within the same industry to date so long as the reporter is covering a part of that industry that the source is not a part of?*

“I would say up until the 80s, it was common for reporters and athletes, especially baseball reporters, you’re on the road all the time and you’re getting”

“That has changed in this culture now where reporters are in the locker room and athletes are guarded because everything is on the record.”

“The culture has changed.”

“Usually, this was men hanging out with other men. Female reporters in the 50s and 60s back when reporters were more chummy with their subjects weren’t as prevalent.”

“I think that the function of the 24/7 media culture we live in where it doesn’t benefit Tom Brady to hang out with the guy from the Boston Globe.”

“It’s just better to be boring and non-controversial than otherwise.”

“I think being friendly with a source is okay and that’s how you cultivate sources: getting to know them and having them trust you.”

“I think getting too close does have an impact and I’m a blogger. I have the ability to go to some events and go in the locker room or interview athletes. I always try to avoid those opportunities because I don’t want to get to know some athletes because at some point, if I get to know an athlete too well.”

“I’m not a reporter. I’m not someone who has to go in the locker room every day. Because I have that choice, I’ve chosen not to do that.”

“I think keeping a fine line is important but at the same time, some of the best reporting come from athletes who are close to sources.”

*If a reporter senses that they are becoming close to a source romantically, should they say something right away? Does the timing of the revelation affect the degree of outrage?*

“If we’re going to go back to the perception thing, timing is everything and getting out with every story tends to be the way to control it. If the story comes out before you’re ready to deal with, then the story controls you. And perhaps that’s an advantage to Ponder-Steele.”

“I’m going to assume that somebody somewhere wrote on a message board about this.”

“If you’re being secretive about something or you’re hiding it from an editor, then it looks like she has something to hide.”

“You have to be open and it does look, from my vantage point, it looks more legit when everyone’s admitting it and no one’s denying it and they’re acknowledging that they’re two adults ... if you have that attitude, that’s the attitude that others will take.”

“It matters what her bosses, her colleagues and others in the industry think about it. I think that move, in admitting it and playing it down but not denying it, I think that people take a cue from that. If you have nothing to hide, why should I be skeptical of your happiness?”

### **Romancing the source**

**Author: Don Gil K. Carreon**

**Date: February 20, 2008**

**<http://www.eyeonethics.org/2008/02/20/romancing-the-source/>**

**Disclosure is key**

A journalist's primary obligation is to report the truth to the public he or she serves. However, he/she may end up writing biased reports if he/she develops romantic feelings for a source.

Although a journalist may be convinced that he/she can detach him/herself from his/her emotions while on the job, the public may not be as confident. What's worse, the public may not even be aware that the reports it's getting from a journalist romantically involved with a source are no longer as fair, balanced, or even truthful as they have a right to expect.

There's also the issue of the journalist's gaining an undue advantage over his/her colleagues because of his/her relationship with a source. A journalist in such a position would be the first to get leads from the source he or she is close to, which in turn can and often leads to biased reports.

The relationship can also become mutually exploitative. Both the journalist and the source could be so cynical as to deliberately cultivate a relationship in furtherance of their respective agendas. A source in a romantic relationship with a journalist may think that it assures him of constant media exposure and prominence, while the journalist is assured of getting exclusives and other career boosts.

This is not to say that authentic romantic relationships, or plain friendships, between journalists and their sources don't happen. The proximity and constant interaction, the trust that develops between them can turn a journalist-source relationship into a romantic, friendly, or special one.

Journalists in romantic or very friendly relationships with their sources must be ready to share the information with their superiors, who would then be duty-bound to assign the journalist to other beats, and to leave covering the sources they have become romantic or friendly with to other reporters.

### **The New York Times Company Policy on Ethics in Journalism**

**Author:** New York Times Company

**Date:** October 2005

<http://www.nytc.com/press/ethics.html#keeping>

### **Keeping Our Detachment**

24. Relationships with sources require sound judgment and self-awareness to prevent the fact or appearance of partiality. Cultivating sources is an essential skill, often practiced most effectively in informal settings outside of normal business hours. Yet staff members, especially those assigned to beats, must be aware that personal relationships with news sources can erode into favoritism, in fact or appearance. Editors, who normally have a wide range of relationships, must be especially wary of showing partiality. Where friends and neighbors are also newsmakers, journalists must guard against giving them extra

access or a more sympathetic ear. When practical, the best solution is to have someone else deal with them.

25. Though this topic defies firm rules, it is essential that we preserve professional detachment, free of any hint of bias. Staff members may see sources informally over a meal or drinks, but they must keep in mind the difference between legitimate business and personal friendship. A city editor who enjoys a weekly round of golf with a city council member, for example, risks creating an appearance of coziness. So does a television news producer who spends weekends in the company of people we cover. Scrupulous practice requires that periodically we step back and look at whether we have drifted too close to sources with whom we deal regularly. The test of freedom from favoritism is the ability to maintain good working relationships with all parties to a dispute.

26. Romantic involvement with a news source would create the appearance and probably the reality of partiality. Staff members who develop close relationships with people who are likely to figure in coverage they prepare or oversee must disclose those relationships privately to a responsible newsroom manager. In some cases, no further action may be needed. But in other instances staff members may have to recuse themselves from certain coverage. Sometimes assignments may have to be modified or beats changed.

**Richard Deitsch, Writer/Reporter for Sports Illustrated, Adjunct Professor at Columbia University Graduate School of Journalism (Expert)**

Date of Interview: November 10, 2012

*What do you consider to be an appropriate relationship between a reporter and a source?*

“Ideally, there should be no relationship.”

“For whatever the subject matter is, a reporter cannot have a personal relationship with a source unless, and again I think a lot of places would have diff viewpoints on this, you let the viewer and or reader know of the relationship and editors can make a decision about how close the relationship is or should you end up publishing the story based on the relationship.”

“You obviously really can never report objectively on your family, on your spouse, on your girlfriend, boyfriend. Are there exceptions? Yea. I would say if the news organization gets comfortable giving full disclosure to the public that hey this is the relationship and judge the information based on the fact that you know the relationship exists.”

“You don’t want reporters being involved financially, personally with subjects and if they re involved, and you do decide to use that, maybe you're writing a first person narrative...you have to disclose that.”

*What is your take on the Samantha Steele-Christian Ponder case?*

“Samantha Steele, in her current position does not report on Christian Ponder so I would say that in this situation, at least ethically, she’s okay. She’s not reporting on Ponder.”

“Her relationship with Christian Ponder could probably give her access to information that a traditional reporter would not have.”

“If I was ESPN, to avoid any potential conflict or impropriety, I would not have Samantha report on Florida State.”

“I think reasonable people can disagree. Christian Ponder is not part of that team now.”

“Samantha Steele cannot do any NFL stories, that’s an absolute conflict of interest.”

“I think you have to, when you're dating somebody who’s potentially within your orbit of reporting, I think you should tell your supervisor and I think she did do that with ESPN. I think that was really smart.”

“I spoke on the record with Janine Edwards and spoke off the record or not for attribution with a number of people.”

Edwards “said she would never feel comfortable reporting on somebody she had a relationship with within that sport.”

“The problem gets into when you don’t tell anybody about it, the relationship gets exposed and then it makes both you and your employer look bad.”

“It’s just not honest when you don’t disclose the relationship with your employer. It’s not that hard to figure out what’s conflict and what’s not. The general rule is that you can’t report on somebody with whom you’re having your personal relationship with or your financial relationship with.”

“I think that’s an unfortunate result of such a relationship and I think actually unfair to women because for the most part, it’s the ridiculous perception that somehow Samantha Steele has gotten into sports journalism to meet athletes or to date athletes.”

“I think if the reverse happened, I don’t think a male reporter” would be thought of in a lesser light.

“So I think the perception game, that’s very fair and I think it totally exists and I think there would be a lot of female sports reporters who would say you shouldn’t date an athlete for that reason.”

“She’s handled her relationship being public with Ponder through humor, she’s been self-deprecating about it. She’s been smart about it.”

“If they’re comfortable with Steele reporting on college football while dating an NFL reporter” and she’s abiding by it, she’s fine.

“I think she’s done everything correctly, in terms of what her responsibilities are to ESPN, in terms of covering college football and dating an NFL player.”

“There are others would say that my take is too strong and that she should be allowed to cover Florida State because Christian Ponder’s been gone from there for a long time.”

“Her work and her journalism, if she is indeed serious about journalism, will carry the day.”

“Hopefully you do a good job on your body of work and you strive objectivity and accuracy and the reader and or viewer sees that.”

“Not being in the office, none of us could know what really happened.”

“I remember that story and you’re never really going to know the truth.”

*What is your take on the Suzy Wetlaufer-Jack Welch case? Do you think that Suzy Welch should have spoken up sooner?*

“The only person who knows that is the journalist. At some point you know when you’ve gotten too close to a subject to write objectively.”

“I think only Suzy Welch can answer that question.”

“The one person who seemed like they made the right decision was the editor who took the story from her and gave it to someone else.”

*What about the Michele Norris case? What do you make of her swift action?*

“Michele Norris is an absolute first-rate journalist and I think in this situation she proves yet again that she has the profession and ethics at the forefront of her mind. I think she absolutely made the right decision. I think she made the decision like a true professional.”

“I think that’s exactly how you handle it. You handle it like an adult.”

“To me, that’s a textbook case of a journalist who really cares about ethics, who really understands these conflicts and she really did the right thing.”

*What kind of punishment do you think is appropriate for a reporter and a source pursuing a romantic relationship?*

“If the story was published and they never told their employer, that probably would be grounds for dismissal. I think if you tell your employer midway through it or before it’s published, I think it’s probably grounds for assignment.”

“You should not be punished or disciplined for falling for someone, even if it’s a subject.”

“To me, the only firable offense is if you publish the story or they air the story and you didn’t tell your employers that this relationship existed, and I’m not even sure that’s firable but I think that’s the only situation that’s firable.”

“I think that if you get along with your subject, I really do think the story can be better but there’s always a line that has to be acknowledged. I think you can like people, I think you can be friends with people as long as it’s known that you’re the journalist and they’re the subject and those are the defined roles.”

### **Case Studies: When a spouse becomes involved in politics**

**Author:** NPR

**Date:** 2011

<http://ethics.npr.org/?s=spouse>

Michele recognized that her husband’s position in the Obama campaign would unduly complicate ATC’s coverage of the presidential election.

She appropriately raised the issue with senior management before her husband formally took the job.

A plan was put together that would allow her to continue being a key contributor to NPR’s news operations, but would also separate her from its coverage of politics.

Being fair, honest, accurate, complete, impartial, independent and respectful are wonderful principles — but ultimately won’t mean much if we don’t also hold ourselves accountable. That means making sure we live up to the principles we espouse, and taking responsibility and making amends when we fall short.

### **Samantha Steele heads into the unknown; Shulman stays at ESPN**

**Author:** Richard Deitsch

**Date:** October 22, 2012

[http://sportsillustrated.cnn.com/2012/writers/richard\\_deitsch/10/22/media-circus-samantha-steele-dan-shulman/index.html](http://sportsillustrated.cnn.com/2012/writers/richard_deitsch/10/22/media-circus-samantha-steele-dan-shulman/index.html)

Samantha Steele has been with ESPN for only 15 months, but she’s already been assigned two high-profile college football roles: sideline reporter for ESPN’s Thursday Night Football and, more famously, replacing Erin Andrews as co-host of ESPN’s College GameDay on Saturday. She’s well-liked internally (especially by producers) and has quietly grown on the job in a short period.

But the quiet ended last week with the news (first reported by SI.com's Hot Clicks) that Steele was dating Vikings quarterback Christian Ponder. Predictably, the relationship caused a sizable disruption on the web, from mainstream places jumping on the story (Declared USA Today: NFL QB Brags About Dating ESPN Reporter) to a massive uptick in Steele's name being typed into search engines. (On Friday, the search term "Samantha Steele ESPN" rose near the top of Google hot searches with more than 50,000 searches, a couple of notches below "Jessica Biel" and "Sweetest Day.")

What happens next? Who knows? There is no blueprint for a high-profile sports television reporter dating a professional athlete in today's social media world, and Steele's personal life now becomes part of the Twitterverse. She should expect plenty of commentary such as this and this (the latter comment came from a member of the Minnesota House of Representatives).

"I suppose simply him being an athlete is now prime target material," said an on-air colleague and a friend of Steele's. "But she covers college football. Her ex played ball and no one said a word. I hope she just continues to crush Saturdays and stay above the gossip."

For its part, ESPN does not consider the relationship a journalistic conflict given that Steele covers college football and Ponder plays in the NFL.

"We do not comment on, or confirm, personal aspects of employees' lives," an ESPN spokesperson said. "Regarding any policies, we expect any commentator to raise any relationship that could be a conflict with the sport they cover. This does not fit that scenario as she covers college football."

"My humble opinion is that our personal lives should remain personal, but that any potentially touchy relationship should be brought to the attention of management," said Edwards, in an interview with SI.com on Monday. "I do not feel that as reporters we should be covering events that our spouses or mates are directly involved in (as in Samantha covering a Vikings game). If I were in this position I would make management aware of it and let them assign me as needed. Public perception is critically important, and we can't afford to put ourselves in a position to be overly scrutinized or have our journalistic integrity questioned in any way. I consider myself a professional who would be always be objective, but the public might not know that. Avoiding a potential conflict is the best way to go."

Steele, 26, declined to comment, but she took the right tone on Saturday by mocking all the hubbub around her. "S/O to all the grown men critiquing my wardrobe/relationship choices," Steele tweeted on Saturday, her first public comment since the news broke. "If it weren't for y'all, I might've forgotten how awesome JR High was;)"

Madina Toure  
Business, History, Ethics of Journalism

Professor Robert Lloyd  
15 November 2012