

Barbara Kay: Collapse of basic fact-checking helps feed the fake-news narrative

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Fake news is a big problem. Increasingly, serious citizens look to mainstream media for responsible reportage. When media betrays the public's trust, it's scary. And the media does fall short, sadly, both in matters large, which arouse public ire, and in matters that are only apparently small, and don't. Not by publishing purposefully fake news, but by publishing "news" that hasn't been adequately (or even) fact-checked. Nothing beats the Patrick Brown affair for "matters large." CTV's apparent fact-checking delinquency and its devastating consequences for Brown is the single biggest Canadian journalistic scandal in ... since I can't remember when. (Weirdly, the now-discredited original story, which wrongly reported that Brown provided alcohol to a woman below the legal drinking age, remains on the CTV site, and contains no corrections or updates to reflect the now-changed story.) Fact-checking used to be a big deal in the mainstream media. But diligence in that area has gone somewhat by the board. One reason is budgets. In their salad years, all respectable mainstream media employed people whose sole job it was to copy edit and fact-check both news and opinion columns. In these straitened times, that's a luxury only well-endowed magazines — or penurious but conscientious bloggers — continue to prioritize for all but highly sensitive issues (allegations of sexual misconduct against high-placed men should, but don't always, fall under the "sensitive" rubric in this #MeToo moment). Editorial gatekeepers, consciously or not, incline toward stories and opinions they want to believe are true (--image--)

(--image--)

The second, more ominous reason for careless fact-checking is ideology. Even in relatively well-heeled publications, one can see a marked indifference to fact-checking or significant omissions of fact, when editorial gatekeepers, consciously or not, incline toward stories and opinions they want to believe are true. (The best example is Israel; corrections to left-leaning media reports is a full-time occupation for the folks at [HonestReporting.ca](#).) In fact-checking matters "only apparently small," here's a case in point. Last June, Maclean's magazine published a piece whose theme was rising Islamophobia in Canada. Their reporter described an alleged example of Islamophobia thus: "horrifyingly, last year, a woman had her hijab pulled, was punched and spat on in a grocery store in London, Ont." She noted that the female assailant was wearing a red "Canada" shirt. The obvious inference to draw was that the assailant was a bigoted white Canadian. In fact, the perpetrator, later declared mentally unfit to stand trial, was shown elsewhere on store video as dark-skinned. In court she had requested a Farsi-speaking interpreter (suggesting she was Iranian and likely Muslim herself). Barbara Kay: Delaware students can now choose their own race. This should end well Barbara Kay: Exploding the myth of cure-all female corporate boards Barbara Kay: The #MeToo court of public opinion needs some ground rules, fast A reader in possession of those material facts wrote to Maclean's and called for a correction in the next print issue. That didn't happen. In the online version, the word "horrifyingly" was dropped, and the additional facts about the Farsi interpreter, mental illness and suspended trial were mentioned. But since those additional facts annul the story's relevance for the article's thesis, why wasn't the incident excised altogether? Some publications, like the Walrus magazine, are famous for their meticulous fact-checking. But left-wing academic Ira Wells wasn't held to the normal standard when he wrote a hit piece on Jordan Peterson ("The Professor of Piffle"), stating, for example, that Peterson "is not, however, the author of any lasting work of scholarship, the originator of any important idea, or a public intellectual of any scientific credibility or moral seriousness." That is quite a whopper of an untruth, as was handily proven with relevant facts by journalist Paul Benedetti in an article for [Quillette.com](#) in which he concludes: "Claiming (Peterson) has no 'scientific credibility' is not an opinion, it's a verifiable falsehood." Different fact-checking strokes for different ideological folks. (--image--)

Foreign Affairs Minister Chrystia Freeland prepares to appear before a House of Commons standing committee on foreign policy priorities, on Feb. 8, 2018.

Justin Tang/CP

Sorry to dump again on The Walrus, but indignation demands I cite its current edition, and therein a glowing profile of Foreign Affairs Minister Chrystia Freeland, who told her interviewer: "It's important to remember that the arc of history is

pretty positive ... I'm a woman. I'm a wife. I'm a mother. One hundred years ago, I would've been beaten by my husband. That's what happened to pretty much all women." This breathtaking assertion, if factual, would mean that men as a collective are inherently and violently misogynistic, and that it is only by dint of "woke," feminism-guided state policing that violence against women by their intimate partners is kept to today's statistically low figures. But Freeland's statement is, to borrow the Maclean's reporter's term, this time properly employed, "horrifyingly" incorrect. That's half of Canadians Freeland merrily slandered, without raising a scintilla of professional skepticism in her profiler. Anyway, Freeland apparently believes her whopper. And The Walrus accepted it without annotation. Can we expect a retraction and apology from both of them in the next issue? Don't hold your postmodern breath. • Email: [kaybarb@gmail.com](mailto:kaybarb@gmail.com) | Twitter: [BarbaraRKay](#)