

ABOUT GHOSTWRITING

Audio Transcript – Bonnie Bauman

Most thought leaders, experts in their fields and celebrities are decidedly NOT writers. For that reason, when it comes to the non-fiction books these individuals regularly crank out, more often than not, a so-called “ghostwriter” is involved in the process.

The problem is that many readers have no idea that their favorite political pundit, relationship expert, health guru or celeb didn’t spend months doing the intensive labor involved in writing a book.

This begs the question: What exactly are the ethical implications of working with a ghostwriter?

The answer to this question is not black and white.

At the end of the day, it all depends on the specifics of the ghostwriter’s involvement in the project as well as the contractual author’s level of participation in the writing process. (For the purposes of this discussion, going forward I will refer to the contractual author as simply “the author.”)

Today in the publishing industry, there are two main ways that the author-ghostwriter dynamic plays out.

One scenario is when the author works closely with the ghostwriter to turn his or her ideas into readable, structured narratives. In this case, ghostwriters deploy their interviewing, writing and editing skills to translate the author’s story into a book.

Sometimes, in this scenario, the authors themselves will pen drafts, which the ghostwriter will then edit and/or craft into that aforementioned readable, structured narrative.

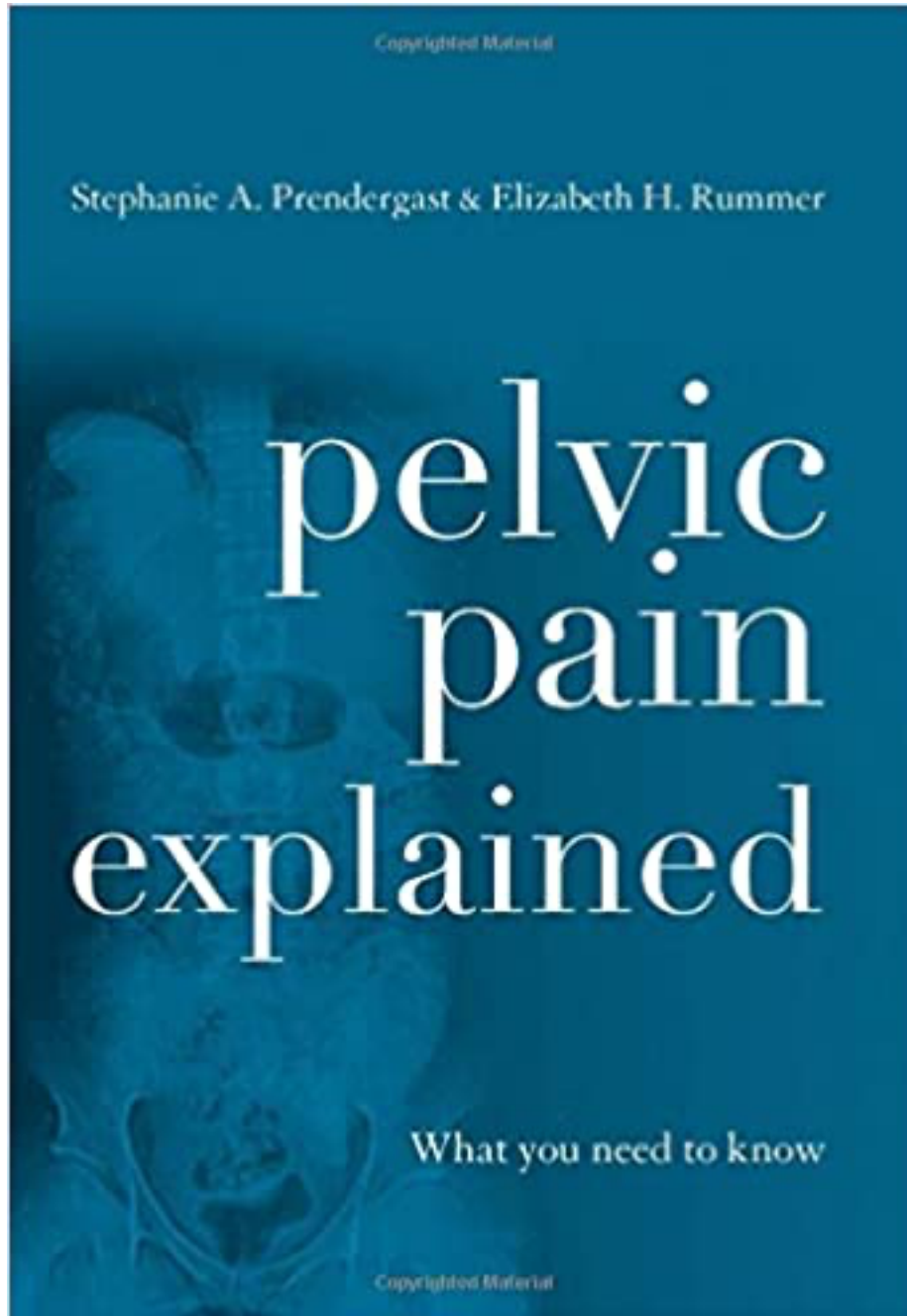
Other times, the ghostwriter will be the one doing the writing; however, the writing will be based on the author’s input, ideas and knowledge of the topic. Typically, the ghostwriter gathers this information with the help of extensive interviews with the author. At the end of the day, the ideas are the author’s. The ghostwriter acted simply as a conduit to shape those ideas into book form.

This process is viewed as a collaboration. And oftentimes, in this case, the ghostwriter is referred to as a “book collaborator.” Most thought leaders in the publishing industry view this type of arrangement as ethical and aboveboard.

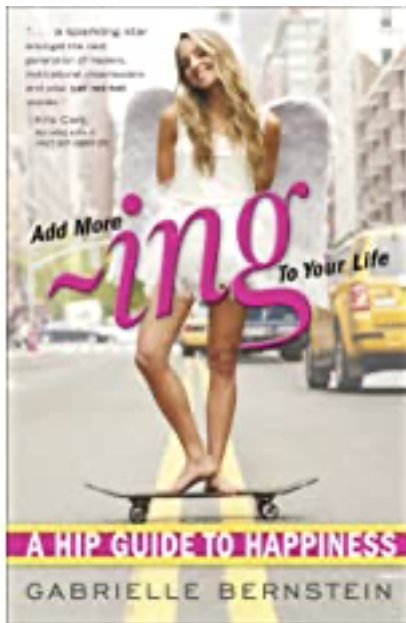
Typically, the collaborator will contractually require a mention in the book’s acknowledgements as part of the collaboration agreement. And more and more often, book collaborators are demanding full-on cover credit next to the author’s own name using the signifier “with” to convey that the book was a collaboration between the two parties.

The second common author-ghostwriter scenario is when the author has little to no participation in the book's authorship. Rather, the ghostwriter is the one who does all the research and writing. And this does happen...often in fact.

In this case, readers are being misled. They assume that the content of the book they are reading represents the thoughts, opinions, and ideas of the person whose name is on the cover. If this is not the case, and that content was conceived by someone who is not given credit, then there is indeed an ethical breach, especially when the author is benefitting financially and reputationally as a result of taking credit for the book.



A true collaboration between journalism instructor Bonnie Bauman and physical therapists, Stephanie Prendergast and Elizabeth Rummer.



Another non-fiction book collaboration between Bauman and a self-help guru, Gabrielle Bernstein.