

REPORTING LIVE FROM BASE CAMP:
AN ANALYSIS OF EXPEDITION JOURNALISM

An Honors Thesis submitted to the faculty of Washington and Lee University
Department of Journalism and Mass Communications

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On my honor I have neither given nor received any unacknowledged aid on this thesis.

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Katie Howell". The signature is written in a cursive style with a large, prominent initial "K".

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“There’s a very gray area surrounding a very thin line that separates ‘journalistic objectivity’ from participation, involvement, and first person, and inside that gray area is the justification for crossing the line without revealing yourself. I was hoping that the author...would be able to give me tips and rules for when to do so that would be nice and clean cut, less fuzzy and gray. But that’s an unreasonable request. When you’re breaking those Journalism 101 rules about not writing in first person, you can forget about black and white as regards everything else.”

~Veronica Rusnak, “Participatory Reporting—Trusting Guts,” p. 1

Chapter 1 ● Introduction

Two journalists are accompanying a mountaineering expedition to the summit of Mount Everest as the final touches of this project are being completed. *The Hartford Courant* journalists are among the seven-member Connecticut Everest Expedition team that planned, organized the trip, and is attempting to reach the summit of the world's tallest peak before the end of May 2004.

Since mid-March, the team has traveled from Connecticut to Katmandu, Nepal to Advanced Base Camp on Mount Everest. The main reporter, Michael Kodas, has written feature articles about the team leaders and members, news articles about the politics and rioting occurring in Nepal, and progress reports about the climb. These reports, dispatched under the headline of "High ambition: Climbing Mt. Everest and K2," have been printed as special articles in the newspaper as well as placed on a special multi-media web site link from the newspaper's main page. The other reporter and Kodas's wife, Carolyn Moreau, writes short web logs several times a week that are posted on the newspaper's web site detailing the day-to-day aspects of climbing and living on the mountain (Moreau).

Between the first Everest dispatch, published on April 8 and May 6, 2004, 27,000 people had logged on to read the web dispatches of the trip, a number *Courant* online editor Gary Duchane said "is a fair showing" (Duchane) with the web log being the most popular aspect of the site. The articles in the print version of the newspaper have also attracted reader attention. The stories' editor, Bernie Davidow,

said the stories have attracted a few calls including one about the ethics of criticizing the expedition's leader in the articles (Davidow). The stories not only deal with the mundane aspects of technical trekking but also tell the stories of the people attempting the summit, their motivations, backgrounds, experiences, and sacrifices. Mixed in are dispatches about the political problems and demonstrations that are occurring in Nepal and Tibet simultaneous to the Everest climb.

“High ambition” is not the only special series the *Courant* has produced involving journalists and out-of-the-newsroom reporting. The newspaper helped launch a six-newspaper endeavor in 1995 about hiking the Appalachian Trail. The 31-week series prompted a reader reaction that none of the papers could have anticipated. The successful series of stories showed skeptics that readers were ready and willing to read stories presented by reporters who were experiencing what they were writing about (Sobek 13). The series, “An Appalachian Adventure,” focused not only on the daily aspects and trials of hiking the more than 2,000 miles of rugged terrain, but also on the deforestation, overuse, and trail safety issues that affect the hikers and residents of the fourteen states that the trail passes through. Reporters from each of the six newspapers involved hiked the portion of the trail closest to their base circulation area and reported on the day-to-day aspects and larger issues concerning those areas (Lee xi-xxiv).

The response that the newspapers received for the series was much more positive than expected. Vic Kodis, former deputy metro editor at *The Hartford Courant* said that he received 125 calls and letters each week about the series. Regarding the

newsworthiness of the stories, he remarked in an *American Journalism Review* article that was published the same year as the series, “‘There are some people in the newsroom who don’t think this is real journalism,’ ... So why do it? ... ‘It’s partly an excuse to address these issues in a format that gains reader interest. ... If we wrote news stories [about the topics addressed in this series], we wouldn’t have anybody [reading]’” (Sobek 13).

The methods used to produce the stories in “An Appalachian Adventure” and “High Ambition” are by no means new to the journalism world. Explorations and adventures have found their way into mainstream media for centuries. From letters Christopher Columbus wrote home about his “discovery” of the West Indies to Lewis and Clark’s diary-like accounts of their expedition through the American West, explorers or their counterparts have reported on expeditions, and audiences have read these accounts with enthusiasm.

Audiences are eager to read about explorations into jungles, ocean depths, mountain traverses, and outer space, and journalists and news organizations cater to their desires. In fact, on several occasions, publications like *The Hartford Courant* in “High Ambition” have sent their own correspondents into the field with explorers, adventurers, and expeditions in order to provide interesting, detailed, and first-hand accounts of these stories that might otherwise be dry, dull, or ignored altogether. These correspondents live, breathe, explore, and experience everything alongside trained and experienced explorers, or they do the exploring themselves. Stories of the unknown, the unexplored, and the unconquered have captured readers’ and

audiences' attention since the genre first began to show up in mainstream media accounts during the mid-nineteenth century.

Henry Stanley recounted the tale of his adventure to find David Livingstone in the African jungles in *The New York Herald* (Dugard 7). And later, Nelly Bly and *The New York World* teamed up to produce a stunt and subsequent report about her successful attempt to circumnavigate the globe in less than 80 days. Remnants of these two nineteenth century stunt journalists' tactics can be seen in modern-day participatory journalism. For example, many mainstream journalists who work for such media as National Public Radio, *Time*, and *Dallas Morning News* accompany scientists on their expeditions to Antarctica each season funded by National Science Foundation grants (NSF 1; West). Similar to Bly's and Stanley's example of doing something and then writing about it, these Antarctic journalists produce large-scale stories about science, culture, and life in a place unknown to most people.

Many, often including the journalists themselves, debate the newsworthiness of such subjects. Jan Morris wrote of his trip and subsequent reporting on the 1953 expedition of the ascent to the summit of Mount Everest with the British Everest Expedition.

Still, it was only a slab of rock, and even one of its unsuccessful challengers was able to console himself with the thought that getting to the top of it would have been 'perfectly useless to everybody, including the person who did it.' Perfectly useless! So it was. The first ascent of Mount Everest contributed nothing new to our knowledge of the world, let alone the universe. Yet almost at once, the moment the news of the ascent reached the world at large, it entered the realm of allegory ("On Everest" 2-3).

Nevertheless, as demonstrated in “High Ambition” and the Antarctic journalists’ accounts, this form of newsgathering is not disappearing. It is a noteworthy presence in journalism and thus deserves further examination.

Participatory journalism, as many have recently termed it, is merely a type of reporting that results when a journalist helps to create or accompanies those who create a newsworthy situation outside the newsroom. Several types of participatory

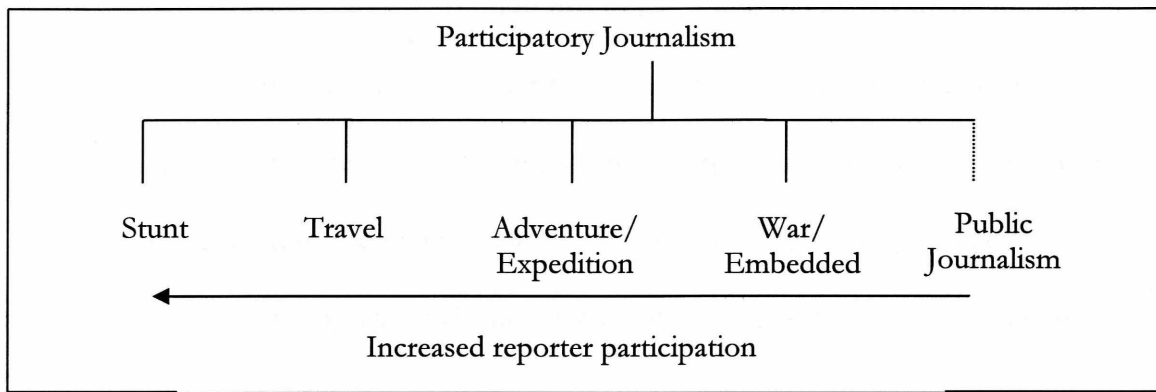


Figure 1. Types of participatory journalism ranked by degree of reporter involvement.

journalism can be identified. They are listed in Figure 1 in order of decreasing reporter participation in creating the situation. First, stunt journalism, like “An Appalachian Adventure” and Nellie Bly’s around-the-world story, is a type of participatory journalism. This type consists of journalists who actually go out and create the stunts or situations that they are reporting about. Secondly, travel writing is a form of journalism that could be deemed participatory. Travel writers live and breathe their assignment before writing reviews, critiques, and accounts of different places for the readers of their publication. Adventure or expedition journalism is the type that will be primarily addressed in this project. Examples include “High

Ambition” and the science writers in Antarctica. Fourth, and perhaps most important at this time, is war journalism. During the three-month war in Iraq and the current post-war operation in the same country, more than 450 journalists have embedded themselves among the troops in order to send back first-hand accounts to media organizations at home about the conflicts, casualties and situation there (Sloan 1).

Public journalism is another category of writing that can be considered participatory in some contexts, though not in all. While the involvement of the journalist as citizen-journalist is similar to that of the participatory journalist, the obligations and outcomes are different, so this subtype of participatory journalism will not be included in the main category for the remainder of this project.

Little scholarship exists about the adventure/expedition subcategory of participatory journalism. There is an extensive amount, however, concerning embedded and war journalism and a minimal amount concerning travel writing. Many media critics have worried and subsequently written about the ethical issues that are raised when journalists embed themselves with troops in a foreign war. One article in a 2003 issue of *Columbia Journalism Review* suggests that embedded journalists need to take more precautions than their mainstream counterparts in order to remain fair, balanced, and truthful (Bushell and Cunningham 11-12).

With few others' studies on adventure/expedition participatory journalism to use and start from, I will pose several news values and use these as a test to determine the validity of this subcategory of participatory journalism as journalism. Beyond that, I will attempt to provide standards for all participatory journalists to use in order to

keep their reports as valid as possible. In doing this I will consider and attempt to answer the following questions:

1. What qualities are essential to qualify a piece of reportage as journalism?
2. Which standards of journalism are in play during the participatory reporting process?
3. Based on the answers to the previous two questions, should this subgenre of participatory journalism truly be considered journalism?

I have chosen to limit my study to three participatory journalists, all of whom accompanied mountaineering expeditions. While this subject is not one typically addressed by newspapers, it has been analyzed by some, including *The Harford Courant*. Any particular subject that could be considered participatory journalism could just as easily be studied here. The themes, ideas, and questions discussed herein will be just as applicable to other types of participatory journalism, including embedded journalism and possibly space exploration journalism in the future. The decision to study mountaineering expeditions was based on availability of primary sources and personal interest.

Question three is the most in-depth of the questions and will examine each of the three participatory journalists against a set of journalistic standards that are necessary in keeping this type of writing journalistically sound. Many authors have addressed dozens of standards that are necessary for quality journalism. If this type of writing is deemed true journalism, then the applicable standards will be acknowledged

and subsequently contrasted with the three participatory journalists' accounts of their expeditions. Elements of each of these standards that violate or enhance the participatory journalists' newsgathering and story writing will be analyzed and addressed.

The question of whether adventure/expedition participatory journalism is true journalism and how these journalists and reporters should act and react is an important one in today's media-centered world. Readers and audiences need to understand what information they are receiving, and this type of journalism provides journalists with the opportunity to truly understand the information they are providing.

Chapter 2 ● A brief historical outline of the three case studies

Case Study 1: McKinley, 1903

Setting

Rising 20,320 feet above sea level, Mount McKinley—or Denali as the original Alaska inhabitants call it—is the tallest mountain in North America. Located in the heart of the Alaskan tundra and the Alaska Range of the North American Rocky Mountains, McKinley was one of the first “great places” in the world that drove people to explore and conquer its reaches. It was not until after numerous attempts that the mountain’s summit was actually reached, and the date of that event remains questionable (Heckathorn xi).

The leader of a 1903 expedition to attempt its summit, Dr. Frederick Cook, would later claim a successful attempt in 1906. Critics began to question Cook’s former claims, including that of his McKinley summit-reach, after newspaper articles identified his hoaxed claim of being the first American to reach the North Pole. Recent historical scholarship and exploration brings new light into the century-long debate about Cook’s claims (Heckathorn 239). While the identity of the first person to achieve McKinley’s summit is still under scrutiny, Cook’s contributions to the exploration on and around the mountain cannot be questioned.

In the subsequent 100 years, more than 1,200 people from 63 countries have reached McKinley’s summit by a variety of routes (Klesius 3). Modern roads and technology allow the present-day explorers to avoid much of their earlier

counterparts' hardships by starting their treks at the mountain's base as opposed to traveling over two hundred miles through relentless tundra and wilderness just to reach the base of the mountain (Dunn 13).

The era of New Journalism

Beginning in 1883 when Joseph Pulitzer bought the *New York World*, the state of American journalism began to change. Pulitzer began a new system of relaying news by using sharp editorials and new typographical innovations in order to increase circulation. In fact, Pulitzer's efforts allowed him to increase circulation by nearly 3,000 percent in just three years (Wilkerson 7-8).

A few years later, Pulitzer's greatest rival would come into the New York newspaper scene. William Randolph Hearst bought the *New York Morning Journal* in 1895 and, with new ideas and cheap copies, became a formidable rival for the *World* (Wilkerson 7-8).

Tactics that these two and the smaller newspapers in the city, including the *Commercial Advertiser*, began to use became associated with the idea of *New Journalism*. Marcus Wilkerson defines this term in his study as "a policy of aggressive activity in bringing to light unusual incidents that were exploited to build circulation" (83). *New Journalism* also involved sensationalism, exposure, crusades, and muckraking to bring about reform, all of which were not entirely new to mankind, but were to the serious American press.

The term *new journalism* is also used in a more modern context to refer to the expository style of writing employed by journalists at the latter part of the twentieth

century. Throughout this project, the term will be used to refer to the muckraking and aggressive tactics used at the end of the nineteenth and beginning of the twentieth century.

New Journalism and exploration

Pulitzer believed in the moral obligation of the press to inform the public, and he believed that the best way to achieve that moral obligation was through sensational journalism tactics, such as catchy headlines, stunt stories, and a spin toward the scandalous and unscrupulous events of the day (Riffenburgh 89-92). His main reports included stories about crime and scandal, investigative journalism, human-interest stories, and stunts (Riffenburgh 92). It is through this last tactic that I begin my argument.

Other papers picked up on Pulitzer's tactics of stupefying, amazing, and drawing in readers and began utilizing them as well. One of the more popular subjects was exploration. In an age when much of the world remained uncharted and unknown to western civilization, exploration was a fascinating topic to most readers, and the newspaper giants of New York capitalized on this fact. It is because of this trend that Robert Dunn accompanied Cook on his expedition. Dunn was to report back to the *Commercial Advertiser* about the event.

The explorer-journalist: Robert Dunn

Robert Dunn had traveled to Alaska once before his expedition with Dr. Frederick Cook in 1903 began. At twenty-six, Dunn was a true "Renaissance Man" of the time. After graduating from Harvard, Dunn had been caught in the Gold Rush

craze in 1898, traveling to Alaska to try his luck at getting rich quick. When that did not work out, he returned to his home in New York to try his luck as a journalist. True to the state of journalism in his day, Dunn was a muckraker, working under the direction of one of the kings of muckraking at the turn of the century, Lincoln Steffens (Hoagland xvi).

It wasn't until 1903, however, that Dunn got his first big break—or what he thought would be a big break. He was selected to accompany the soon-to-become infamous explorer, Dr. Frederick Cook, on his attempt to be the first to reach the summit of Mount McKinley, a feat that he actually would not attain until 1906 on a different expedition. Dunn was to be a correspondent for the *New York Commercial Advertiser*, Cook's second-in-command, and the expedition's geologist.

After returning from the expedition, Dunn published articles in the *Commercial Advertiser* and his diary in book form, *Shameless Diary of an Explorer: A Story of Failure on Mount McKinley* (vii).

The expedition

Intended to be a trek across Alaska followed by a trip to the summit of McKinley, the 1903 expedition was a failure in that sense, but a success in another. This expedition became the first—and the last for another 75 years—to circumnavigate the mountain. Spending more than three months to travel more than 450 miles, the expedition party lived with and worked with each other day-in and day-out. Dunn recorded and later published these encounters between team members in his diary.

Case Study 2: Everest, 1953

Setting

At 29,028 feet, the summit of Mount Everest is the highest topographic point on earth. Westerners had struggled for decades to explore its heights and reach its summit. Attempt after attempt failed until 1953, when a conglomeration of explorers from throughout the British empire successfully traveled under the banner of the Royal Geographic Society to the top of Everest. Located on the border of Nepal and China deep in the heart of the Himalaya, Everest is intimidating even to the most seasoned climbers.

The mid-century British press

For the most part, the British press was uninterested in the goings-on of mountaineers. Ten expeditions had attempted the summit of Everest before World War II, and none received the publicity or exploitation that this episode was to receive (*Coronation* 3). During the early part of the twentieth century, *The Times* of London began to take particular interest in these mountaineering expeditions because of the exclusivity of the subject. No other publications were interested, so *The Times* took the opportunity to develop the scoop. The newspaper's interest sparked readers' interest (*Coronation* 3-4). The newspaper received exclusive dispatches from several explorers attempting to climb Everest prior to the 1953 trek in exchange for some financial backing.

By the time the 1953 expedition came around, however, the geopolitical setting was quite different from the previous expeditions. Europe had been humbled

by war, and Britain in particular was looking for a sense of nationalism among its constituents. In addition, 1953 was Coronation Year. Media frenzy emerged over the coronation of a new queen, a new beginning, and a new era. Anything that suggested British pride became associated with the coronation, including the Royal Geographic Society's plans to attack Everest (*Coronation* 5).

There was never a question that *The Times* would cover the event; however, the timing of the event and the increased interest by readers worried the newspaper that other publications would try to get a piece of the story. In order to maintain complete exclusivity, the newspaper decided to send its own correspondent, James Morris. Sir John Hunt, the leader of the expedition, granted Morris permission to accompany the group as special correspondent for *The Times* (*Coronation* 5).

Morris and *The Times* took even more precautions in order to establish their position as the exclusive producers of dispatches from the mountain by devising an elaborate code that would signal the news of a final achievement or failure. Morris would run his dispatches by Sherpas—hired Nepalese porters—to Katmandu where they would be radioed to London. The codes were used to prevent others from learning the content of the messages before they could get from the mountain to the newsroom (*Coronation* 8-9).

The explorer-journalist: James Morris

At the time of the expedition, Morris was staffed by *The Times*, was married and the father of two children. He had no experience in mountaineering. He was to remain completely independent from the expedition, paying for all his own food,

supplies, and Sherpas. Eventually, however, the effort to remain independent in such a harsh setting became unrealistic, and he ended up relying upon the team for help up the mountain, and they managed a group cooking method after the first week at Base Camp.

Morris's accounts show that he seemed to get along with all the other members of his expedition. Once he returned to England, however, he went through some personal lifestyle changes. He had a sex-change operation, became Jan Morris, and now has a successful career as a travel writer (*Coronation* viii).

The expedition

The expedition managed success after just a few weeks of climbing. Morris sent his coded message back to London, "Snow conditions bad stop advanced base abandoned yesterday stop awaiting improvement" which translated to "Summit of Everest reached on May 29 by Hillary and Tensing" (*Coronation* 138). The message reached England successfully, and *The Times* printed the news on June 2, 1953, one day before Elizabeth was crowned queen of England.

Case Study 3: Everest, 1996

Setting

Jon Krakauer's visit to Everest was similar to Dunn's trip to McKinley in a number of interesting ways. For one, his main intention of accompanying the expedition was to muckrake. He wanted to help show that the commercialization of Everest was neither good for the environment nor safe. Krakauer, like Dunn, was

already an avid explorer, having climbed several mountains and explored several areas.

He was freelancing for a number of publications when *Outside* magazine hired him to attempt to summit Everest to comment about the commercialization of the mountain. In 1996, at the height of commercial trekking, at least 15 private companies were offering clients the opportunity to climb the world's great peaks for an exorbitant fee (Krakauer 24-25). Among experienced climbers and environmentalists, the thought of inexperienced wealthy socialites performing one of the most difficult mountain climbs in the world was offensive and dangerous. *Outside*, a popular outdoor-activity periodical, had members on staff who were obviously concerned.

In exchange for waiving part of the \$65,000 fee that the independent mountaineering companies charged per person, *Outside* offered Adventure Consultants, Rob Hall's mountain guiding service out of New Zealand, tempting amounts of advertising space in the magazine to let Krakauer accompany the expedition. Hall and *Outside* negotiated a contract, and Krakauer's ticket to be part of Hall's group was bought (Krakauer 71).

The explorer-journalist: Jon Krakauer

A native of Corvallis, Oregon, Krakauer had been an outdoorsman all his life. He had climbed many North American peaks but had never been higher than 17,200 feet above sea level. Everest's Base Camp is 17,600 feet. However, Krakauer was an adventurer and had held a boyhood dream of climbing Everest, so when the *Outside*

editor contacted him about the potential assignment, 41-year-old Krakauer accepted without hesitation (Krakauer 26-28).

The expedition

The expedition progressed well at first. Krakauer wrote that he was actually impressed with the skill and professionalism that the guides took in their efforts to lead the clients up the mountain. However, the number of people on the mountain and odd weather conditions kept the teams at high altitudes longer than was safe. When the summit was finally reached by several of the clients, including Krakauer, a huge storm came and stranded several people on the mountain, among them Hall and another guide, Scott Fischer. After it was all over, 36 people had died on Everest, far more than the number who had died during previous attempts. Guides, clients, and Sherpas alike were among the 1996 victims on Everest (Krakauer 283).

Krakauer returned to the States and wrote an initial article for *Outside*. He then compiled his recollections and thoughts into a book, *Into Thin Air*, which became a bestseller (Krakauer xv-xvii). Krakauer was critical of the guides' motives and actions, however. One of the guides, Anatoli Boukreev, who survived the 1996 disaster, wrote a book in retaliation that states he was unable to assist his clients any more than he did. His book also makes attacks on Krakauer concerning his professional actions on Everest (Krakauer 307).

Chapter 3 ● What is journalism?

In order to determine whether adventure/expedition participatory journalism is indeed journalism, journalism must be defined. While this is no simple task, a brief literature review and discussion will lead to a definition that is suitable for the purposes of this project. Granted, the overarching philosophies of journalism, media, and news have been discussed and pondered by many scholars, yielding a few core ideals. These core ideals will be the ones mentioned and pondered in this project. Understandably, other aspects and questions about the nature of journalism can be raised; however, for the small size and scope of this project, only the major themes and issues will be seriously addressed.

Abstractly, *journalism* is a social institution “whose task it is to make information publicly available” (Jensen 31). This idea narrows the concept more than the dictionary definition. By further analysis, *journalism* could simply be considered anything that a news organization prints or broadcasts (Fuller 6). But this definition still leaves the question of what constitutes a news organization.

Adding to the social institution idea, one scholar writes, “The journalistic job is to fulfill the unique role that news media play in society. In the United States, as well as in other democratic countries, citizens are given the opportunity to take an active part in running their country. So the news media’s primary social function is to tell people what they need to know for self-governance” (Elliott 221).

To add more breadth to the definition, *journalism* could be “a report of what a news organization has recently learned about matters of some significance or interest to the specific community that news organization serves” (Fuller 6). Using this definition, various news organizations can serve different communities and therefore have different views about what is significant or interesting. However, *New York Times* coverage of a political scandal and TBS’s subsequent docu-drama about the same subject are both considered equal news under this definition. Most reasonable people readily agree that these two are not the same thing.

Still others perceive *journalism* as slightly different from the previous definitions. Veteran *New Yorker* reporter Lillian Ross views journalism as “factual writing” (1). She goes on to write that journalism is merely telling a story using facts. “I subscribe to the basic who-what-when-where-why-and-how guidelines in my journalism, and I follow them carefully, along with some basic traditions in the service of laughter and truth...For me, there has always been satisfaction and joy in finding or even inventing new ways of telling a story” (1).

Journalism scholars Bill Kovach and Tom Rosenstiel ponder this issue even more deeply and have produced a test that distinguishes journalism or news from other media such as entertainment, propaganda, fiction, and art. They cite verification as the distinguishing factor that separates journalism from these other types of media (Kovach and Rosenstiel 71). They write, “Entertainment—and its cousin ‘infotainment’—focuses on what is most diverting. Propaganda will select facts or invent them to serve the real purpose—persuasion and manipulation. Fiction invents

scenarios to get at a more personal impression of what it calls truth. Journalism alone is focused first on getting what happened down right” (71). Now, the *New York Times*’ piece and TBS’s fictional representation are in distinctly different categories. While both started with the same base set of facts, the docu-drama will most likely sway from the facts in order to make the story flow better for the screen.

Many will argue that the true gem of journalism—the facet that makes it distinct and admirable—is its fascination with and focus on the truth (Ettema and Glasser 175). While many other media—like fiction and entertainment—attempt to achieve different kinds of truths, few work toward this goal like journalism’s use of verifiable facts. Kovach and Rosenstiel write, “Over the last three hundred years, news professionals have developed a largely unwritten code of principles and values to fulfill the function of providing news—the indirect knowledge by which people come to form their opinions of the world. Foremost among these principles is this: Journalism’s first obligation is to the truth” (37). Ross agrees with this truth-telling idea. “The finest reportorial writers are truth tellers. There is a magical power in factual details” (Ross 9).

Gathering bits from each of the scholars mentioned, a general definition of *journalism* could be factual, truthful, and verifiable information published by a news organization that tells a story and serves a public interest.

With this general and brief definition of journalism, however, one cannot yet answer the question of whether adventure/expedition participatory journalism can be considered true journalism, because the question of who decides what journalism is

must first be addressed. While the underlying elements of journalism have been established, these standards are not valid if they are not accepted by those who consider themselves journalists or consumers of journalism.

Some argue that the audience or readers establish journalism. These people define journalism by what they choose to read or watch when searching for information. This idea does not work for all situations, however. What about the media scholars or the journalists themselves—don't they have a say in the definition of journalism? How about the government? Does it get a say in what journalism is? What about different types of publications or media—can each form its own opinion of what journalism is? This question will have to remain ultimately unanswered: who decides what is journalism? The nature of the question and resources available for this project do not allow for an extensive study of this question. A standard must be acknowledged and accepted as such. And this standard will be based on a combination of the journalist's and readers' ideas. A writer could consider himself a journalist because he works for the *National Enquirer*. If readers do not consider this publication a true venue of journalism, then is the writer a true journalist? In essence, journalists and audiences have rhetorically agreed upon a contract—a shared value of norms—to which journalists remain loyal for the sake of validity to the audience. As a result, the audience remains loyal, causing the journalists to maintain reporting about situations affecting their lives. And it is these norms, therefore, that separate journalism from other genres. Although they will be discussed in detail in Chapter 4, the norms are integrity, objectivity, accuracy, and fairness.

In thinking about the nature of journalism, one must also consider the changing state of news providers today. Typical journalism organizations such as newspapers or television stations cannot be the only people considered journalists anymore. With the advent of modern technology, anyone with a computer large enough to act as a server can put together a Web site filled with information and news (Downie and Kaiser 204). Internet magazines such as Salon.com and Slate.com have become extraordinarily popular as a genre of journalism with “opinion journalism with a limited amount of original reporting, a lot of chat and some breaking news from wire services” (Downie and Kaiser 204). Many of these sites today have become what the printing press was in Colonial times. Anyone with information can find a venue and readers if he has a little money and patience.

What does the advent and popularity of this new culture of information gathering mean for journalism? Obviously, this question could be the subject of a larger project than this one, but it is a necessary idea at least to address. While the case studies in this paper are print reporters and writers, one cannot deny the fact that journalism is going different places, and the venues where we expect to find typical journalism today may not be the same venues where we will find the same information tomorrow. In fact, they may not even provide the same kind of information. Web services such as those mentioned above open doors for an entirely different genre of journalism to emerge. Play-by-play accounts of events could be broadcast live worldwide as they happen. Instantaneous reader feedback could be used to modify or rank accounts almost immediately. Again, these questions are

beyond the scope of this project but worth noting in an investigation of the validity and future of a particular type of journalism.

Chapter 4 ● Which standards of journalism affect the participatory reporting process?

To provide truthful accounts to audiences, journalists must accept some set of standards or practices that yield the truth. Granted, different types of journalism will yield different standards and practices. An investigative journalist would employ different practices than a political columnist, for instance. Howard Ziff writes,

...A diversity of journalism enriches a democratic society and that this diversity is exemplified not only by differences of political outlook and economic strength, but also by a wider diversity of ends, a variety of ultimate commitments and goals, which generate differing concepts of the ethical and responsible, and differing ways of imagining and accounting for community experiences (154).

Following this train of thought, different types of journalism will have different standards or practices by which they are judged to determine if they achieve the product that is considered journalism by the qualifications laid out above.

Adventure/expedition participatory journalism has its own unique set of logistics and characteristics that make the practice distinctive to the sub-genre. To isolate those that are unique to the subgenre, the standards of mainstream journalism must first be analyzed.

The Society of Professional Journalists (Sigma Delta Chi) has established a set of norms that distinguishes journalism from other writing. In its code of ethics, the society compels journalists to act with “integrity, objectivity, accuracy, and fairness and to free themselves from all obligations, favors, or activities that could

compromise their integrity” (Nelkin 84). Overall, these four standards sum up journalists’ responsibilities.

Integrity serves as an umbrella term for the following three. *Accuracy* is a straightforward term that manifests the elements of truth and verification determined as the core values of journalism. No journalist would question the role of accuracy in his work. In the wake of the Jayson Blair and Stephen Glass journalism scandals, news organizations in the United States are more willing than ever to cling to and attempt to achieve this standard of accuracy.

Fairness is slightly more complex. One journalism scholar, Jack Fuller, describes it as “letting everyone compete on the same terms, regardless of the advantages and disadvantages they bring to the competition, or whether fairness requires that players carry a handicap” (33). Some question the connotative value of this statement, however. Does fairness in journalism mean that the journalist should limit facts or ideas about the stronger side while playing up the issues and facts surrounding the weaker side just to give the weaker side a chance? No. Fuller writes, “No journalist I know would favor lying to give the weaker party a more even chance of prevailing in the debate” (34). The truth standard remains strong. Journalists, instead, attempt to provide alternative coverage of minority events or ideas in order to thrust those ideas into the readers’ realm. *Fairness*, according to Fuller, consists of acknowledging and presenting the issues—perhaps in a separate article—about a minority group or opinion.

Some media scholars think compassionate journalism—stories about the sick, the poor, or the unfortunate—are not fair. They think these stories single out individuals and do not account for issues as a whole. “Individuals need to be compassionate; institutions, like news organizations, need to be fair. There’s a subtle irony when news media act for the benefit of a single individual” (Elliott 224). All these aspects of fairness must be remembered in all types of reporting.

Objectivity, however, brings to light all new issues. “Ask ten journalists what objectivity means, and you’ll get ten different answers,” Brent Cunningham wrote in a recent critique of journalists’ standards of objectivity (26). Combing through dozens of scholars thoughts and books on the subject proves this observation true. The following pages will discuss and compare several popular and thought-provoking theories about objectivity.

Objectivity has long been a question on the mind of journalists and media scholars. How should it be used? How should journalists remain objective? What does being objective really mean? Should it be a journalistic standard at all? All these questions are ones that come to mind when one initially begins to think about objectivity.

In its simplest form, *objectivity* is “one of the hallmarks of traditional journalism...the more objective the story is, the closer it will come to representing reality accurately” (Willis 53). While this idea may be acceptable to students of journalism—both high school and college—and even young reporters and news writers, one would be hard-pressed to find a seasoned editor or media critic who

accepts this definition and explanation for objectivity at face-value. Theoretically, each major newspaper, magazine editor, and television producer probably has his own standards for objectivity for his publication.

A short history of objectivity and the press

To come to these definitions of objectivity mentioned above, the media have undergone significant change in both philosophical thought and action throughout the past 100 years. A brief survey of these thoughts and practices is necessary to compare and learn from the three examples of exploration journalism studied in this project.

From its roots during the penny press period of the mid-1800s, objectivity has grown and flowered into the much-debated ideology evident today. The penny press of the 1800s was the first truly public press. It was the first time newspapers in the United States had not been tied either to political parties or to the business elite (Glasser 177). Both this fact and the advent of modern technology led to the first uses of the concept we now question. The telegraph and Associated Press both came into existence during this period, making efficiency a new and key factor in American journalism. “It was efficient for the Associated Press to distribute only the ‘bare facts’ and leave the opportunity for interpretation for individual members of the cooperative” (Glasser 177). No one questioned the press’s new approach to news, and soon it became accepted practice.

At the turn of the twentieth century, another characteristic of what we call *objectivity* emerged: skepticism. The world was entering the Age of Realism and both

fiction and nonfiction were plagued with accounts of scandal and corruption.

Muckraking—a term associated with journalism of the turn of the twentieth century—became popular practice. Journalists began to look for scandal in anything and everything. Champions of this genre emerged: Ida Tarbell, Lincoln Steffens, and Upton Sinclair.

Steffens plays an important role in the history of exploration journalism as well. A muckraker from the beginning, Steffens began his journalism career in 1892 at the *New York Evening Post*. A political activist and journalist, Steffens eventually moved to the *New York Commercial Advertiser*, where he worked from 1897 until 1901. It was there that he met and mentored Dunn. Steffens's idea for the *Advertiser* was to change it from a “wretched, old street walker of a newspaper into a lively young lady” (Palermo 37). To do this, he hired young, innovative reporters out of Harvard and Yale and put them on the streets of New York with the challenge to present New York in an interesting manner.

One of his most avid students was Robert Dunn. Working under him at the *Commercial Advertiser*, Dunn became a true advocate of muckraking and skepticism. “Steffens became known for his cynical viewpoint. . . . His orientation to journalism was that, in any given city, there is evil present; his job as a journalist was simply to ferret it out and report it” (Willis 57). Many of Dunn's less-than-seasoned journalistic practices seem less unprofessional knowing his background.

Through the Great Depression, journalism tended toward a trait of minimalism and sticking to the bare facts, and by the 1950s journalists and reporters

had a loose definition of what they deemed objective: “a strict adherence to the facts, a healthy skepticism of institutions, and a need to link facts together to form a larger picture of the event or issue under study” (Willis 60). At the onset of the 1950s, this picture began to change, however. The influence of Senator Joseph McCarthy caused journalists, for one of the first times in history, to realize how important the validity of sources was as well as the truth behind their claims.

Across the globe the 1950s were a changing time for the media. The advent and widespread popularity of television as a new medium of communication influenced print industries all over the world. In Britain, newspapers such as *The Times* began acquiring stakes in television companies in order to keep a hand on their changing field of providing information to the masses (Murdock and Golding 133). In addition, British journalists in the mid-century were little concerned with objectivity. Anthony Smith wrote in his history of objectivity in the British press, “The special correspondent moved close in on his sources and became an expert in his own right within a given field. He was faced therefore with all the perplexities of the academic scholar, all the extenuating circumstances which stood between reality and vigorous judgment on it” (169). In fact, most consider objectivity an American standard. “Objectivity in the press is an American ideal; European newspapers are expected to have an explicitly partisan view that is understood by their readers” (Nelkin 84).

It was during the Vietnam War that objectivity as a journalistic standard began to be questioned. “1960s media analysts suspected that the ‘objective’ press was

simply in collusion with institutions of power; objectivity was viewed merely as a mystification and as a convenient myth” (Nelkin 87).

Coming out of the Vietnam period of the late 1960s and early 1970s, objectivity became an issue once again for journalists and reporters. New standards had to be developed to keep journalists at the arms-length distance from the source of the story. Bias really became an issue during this period. Reporters across the country were plagued with the task of presenting information to the public while hiding their own feelings during an especially emotional time in the history of our country. Tilt, slant, and bias all became issues that journalists tried to shy away from after the Vietnam War ended.

In the 1990s and now moving into the twenty-first century, new questions about objectivity continue to arise. The early 1970s saw a spin-off of the traditional journalistic form of muckraking in investigative journalism. Newspapers, magazines, and television stations prided themselves on their ability to uncover scandals, corruption, and misdeeds. This sentiment continued throughout the rest of the twentieth century and is seen as the initiating factor for sending Jon Krakauer on the 1996 Everest expedition. Almost a decade later, however, it is harder to say that such a trend as investigation is still prevalent in most newsrooms.

What do modern journalists and media scholars think about objectivity?

Throughout the literature review for this project, no accounts of modern journalists surfaced that were advocating the state and use of objectivity in future journalism as it has existed in journalism in the past. Several offered the suggestion to

continue using objectivity until something better surfaces, and still others dismissed the idea altogether.

Journalists are biased, according to Brent Cunningham.

Reporters are biased toward conflict because it is more interesting than stories without conflict; we are biased toward sticking with the pack because it is safe; we are biased toward event-driven coverage because it is easier; we are biased toward existing narratives because they are safe and easy.... Mostly, though, we are biased in favor of getting the story, regardless of whose ox is being gored (30).

Among many things, he argues that objectivity is a necessary evil in journalism. He does not deny the faults with it—the same faults that many other scholars find—but he writes that journalists need some standard by which to operate. He suggests that journalists find an alternative to objectivity by which to base their judgments and decisions.

Objectivity is much more a controversy than a standard all journalists strive for. While the state of the theoretical practice has changed over the past century, some scholars are still not convinced that objective journalism is the be-all, end-all way to go.

Objectivity...has unfortunate consequences for the reporter, the individual journalist. Objective reporting has stripped reporters of their creativity and their imagination; it has robbed journalists of their passion and their perspective. Objective reporting has transformed journalism into something more technical than intellectual; it has turned the art of story telling into the technique of report writing. And most unfortunate of all, objective reporting has denied journalists their citizenship; as disinterested observers, as impartial reporters, journalists are expected to be morally disengaged... (Glasser 181).

It is exactly these concerns that come into question with the discussion of participatory journalism.

Some scholars even throw out the idea altogether. Kovach and Rosenstiel, authors of *The Elements of Journalism*, believe that the practice of verification is more effective at extracting the truth from reporting situations than objectivity is (72-78). They think objectivity is outdated and idealistic, which it most likely is; however, elements of it can be useful to consider situations of close source-reporter interaction such as the participatory journalists in this study.

Ethically, journalists living, eating, and surviving at the will of their subjects need standards to follow in order to provide a somewhat reliable account of the experience. Readers and audiences, while not necessarily considering all the complex issues regarding objectivity, are less likely to trust the reliability of a reporter who writes about a person whom he has just lived with and depended on for the past three months. While this journalist knows the subject better than would a bystander at the bottom of the mountain, some standards must be employed in order to keep the public's trust.

These logistics must be addressed and analyzed in order to understand the effects that the actual process of creating this type of journalism has on the definition of participatory and mainstream journalism. Using the Society of Professional Journalists' guidelines as a standard, several logistical implications must be assessed. First, objectivity is not at issue in participatory journalism. In fact, it is rarely at issue in mainstream journalism. Most media scholars and journalists themselves have given up on the ideal of objectivity as a naïve and outdated system. In participatory journalism, the idea must be thrown out altogether. Journalists living, eating, and

surviving because of their subjects cannot be asked or expected to remain at arms length in their analysis of the situation. These journalists are intrinsically involved with the situation they are reporting on, and therefore cannot remain objective by the textbook definition of such.

Aspects of objectivity are necessary to isolate and consider when analyzing these journalists. Independence and neutrality are worth considering. Slightly different from the stereotypical notion of objectivity, these standards do not expect journalists to perform the impossible—disallow their own presence as human beings from interfering with their reporting. These standards merely ask journalists to take a step back from their subjects, to remain aware of the possibility that their reporting may be influenced by the subject-reporter relationship that exists, and to make that relationship transparent to the audience.

These two standards of independence and neutrality bring to question interesting thoughts about differing purposes and goals of journalists. To one degree, journalists are expected to be accurate, fair, and truthful. Yet, they are also expected to be independent and neutral. Does this create a workable system? Do these logistics fit in with the definition of journalism established in chapter 3? The analysis and comparison of the three case studies in Chapter 6 will decide the answers to these questions.

Independence and neutrality

While *independence* and *neutrality* are both derivatives of the larger ideal, *objectivity*, they are, in fact, quite different. Journalistically speaking, *independence* is the act of

remaining physically, emotionally, fiscally, and politically separate from the person or group serving as the subject. *Neutrality* is the act of being indifferent about one's own opinions and biases in comparison to those of the subject.

Buzz Merritt describes the difference thus: "Such a philosophy can be said to endanger a newspaper's independence only if one believes that journalistic independence is grounded in journalistic detachment...—the idea that journalistic objectivity requires our indifference to the consequences of the way we present life's narrative... We argue that it is not" (183). Based on this statement journalistic independence and journalistic neutrality or indifference are two completely different things.

Some aspects of a journalist's independence obviously must be sacrificed in order to provide the hands-on and first-hand experience unique to the participatory reporting process. Other aspects, however, can create a serious conflict of interest if the journalist does not remain independent. These include financial independence and a separation of reporting from interpersonal relationships with other team members. A small newspaper in Blaine County, Idaho faces these issues every day.

The lack of anonymity and the constant struggle for distance from their subjects is the writing staff's primary concern... Since it is nearly impossible to blend into the community, the paper has stringent regulations about the staff's relationship with area residents and newsmakers... A reporter cannot cover an organization to which he/she belongs. If this becomes an issue, the reporter must quit the organization. No matter what a reporter does in his/her free time, someone will find out and comment on it, said Susan Bailey, the editor and writer of the Guide. 'If I belong to Ducks Unlimited, people would see me as pro-hunting,' said Bailey. 'If the opposite side has a story, people would question my reporting' (Sias 55).

Small newspapers are not the only ones facing these issues. Even in larger cities at newspapers with larger circulations than the Idaho newspaper, conflicts of interest reduce journalists' credibility and make it harder for them to report fairly about all sides of an issue.

Neutral reporting comes before personal loyalties and involvement with certain organizations in the objective journalist's eyes. Jack Fuller describes the concept.

This accords with journalists' description of their duty to be 'impartial' or to act 'without fear or favor.' As a description of the proper attitude in reporting a story, these oft-used descriptions have utility. They describe an aspiration, or course, an unattainable standard of perfection. Only an amnesiac could approach anything in a state of pure neutrality. But, even recognizing this, journalists can discipline themselves to correct against bias and deal with each new situation with an open mind (28).

Following this definition and other thoughts that Fuller has, truth and neutrality can be reached through experience and an open mind (29).

Since all participatory journalists have the hands-on experience of interacting with their subjects while preparing their stories, this aspect of neutrality is taken care of. Judging whether these reporters keep an open mind, however, is more difficult. Obviously, adventure/expedition participatory journalists should not let their personal grudges and prejudices weave their way into the opinions and ideas that are expressed in the final work.

The journalists should, in addition, be able to keep an open mind about their subject, whether it be a trek to the summit of Mount Everest or a trip to the South Pole with penguin zoologists. If this requires previous schooling in order to

understand the logistics under scrutiny or just a skeptical mindset, the journalists should not let their personal feelings, relationships, or grudges get in the way of this goal.

Chapter 5 ● Should adventure/expedition reporting be considered journalism?

Participatory journalism is distinctly different from the accounts published in what we consider mainstream news media in that the reporter actually plays a large role in creating the news that he is reporting on. Whether it be through a stunt or staged activity, covering the inner workings of a military unit, or accompanying an expedition team on a mountain exploration, participatory journalists play a hands-on role in creating the situations, activities, and relationships they are covering whether by creating the situation themselves or affecting their subjects lives by their very presence. Journalism theorists relate this idea to science's Heisenberg Effect—observing an event changes it (Clark. 5). While it is at issue in all cases of journalism, it is particularly applicable to participatory journalism because of the extreme relationship the journalist has with his subjects. Would things have been different if the journalist had not been there? Did the presence of the journalist ultimately create or alter situations or relationships that would not have occurred had the journalist not been present? Like most theories, this idea is ultimately not provable because one cannot recreate a situation in order to test the theory. It therefore remains an issue to be pondered and considered.

Laying the Heisenberg issue aside, the main difference between participatory journalism and other forms of journalism is that participatory journalism is reporting from a situation rather than reporting about a situation. These journalists are there in

the middle of a situation, reporting the facts and issues about it rather than receiving information about the facts and issues from those who experienced it.

With these core differences established, let us now compare participatory journalism and the particular subset of adventure/expedition writing with the definition of journalism laid out in Chapter 3. Listed there, journalism was described as factual, truthful, and verifiable information published by a news organization that tells a story and serves a public interest. No one would argue that some particular subsets of this genre are considered journalism by this definition. War journalism and public journalism both plainly correspond with the definition. Stunt, travel, and adventure/expedition writing are not quite as clear. As adventure/expedition writing is the subgenre under scrutiny in this project, it will be compared to the definition.

It is easy to assess that adventure/expedition writing is published information that tells a story; therefore, these parts of the definition are not in question. The controversies over whether this writing is journalism are raised in the adjectives and modifiers of the definition.

First, is the information factual? In most cases of adventure/expedition writing, the information is factual. In many cases, this information can be more factual than that provided by an observational journalist's account. Having the first-hand perspective can add a great deal of validity to a story. Secondly, is this type of writing truthful? Most journalists of this subgenre would argue that their information is truthful, especially the hard facts of their stories. The sticky questions come about with the reporting on relationships and interpersonal interactions observed and

experienced. No one can gauge exactly what another is thinking. Also, in this type of journalism, could personal relationships and interactions affect the reporter's ability to see the truth? Or could this be a risk that audiences would be willing to take in order to have the added benefits of hands-on reporting provided to them? These questions are hard to answer in a broad, general sense. Perhaps this question could be better answered in a situation-by-situation manner.

The third adjective in the definition asks whether the information is verifiable. Like the previous part of the definition, this question can best be answered on a situation-by-situation basis. Some of the factual details of the expedition can be verified. The people who went on the trip and the spellings of their names are easily verifiable. The route that the group took or the objectives of the trip can be easily checked. The troublesome verification issues come about in the reporting of situations that happened while no one else was watching. A reporter's account of something that happened to him alone is not verifiable nor is an unrecorded conversation or activity he undertook with another member of the expedition. Could this standard of journalism be another thing that audiences would be willing to overlook for the sake of first-hand accounts?

The definition also addresses the question of whether the information is published by a news organization. This question is one that could be raised by challengers of that which I am considering mainstream journalism. What truly is considered a news organization? Is the supermarket tabloid a news organization? Is the college dropout's Web commentary about current issues a news organization? Are

newspapers, magazines, television stations, corporate-owned Web sites, and wire services the only media considered news organizations? Most people would say no. While different audiences will value the information provided by different types of media to varying degrees, many types of media other than those listed above are considered sources of factual, truthful, verifiable information by at least one person. As long as the core values of news and journalism are established, the venue cannot be questioned. Therefore, adventure/expedition writing can come from a variety of sources and still be considered information published by a news organization.

The final part of the definition affecting the adventure/expedition participatory journalism question is whether the information serves a public interest. This is another ambiguous question. The audience or public is one of the most important judges of whether the information serves their interest. However, who is to gauge whether the material is of public interest or what the public is interested in? Granted, adventure/expedition participatory writing in most cases does not provide information that affects a reader's daily life, democratic society, or personal safety and health. It does, however, provide knowledge about the reader's world which he may not stumble upon in any other context. This genre, therefore, does provide information that serves a public interest—that of the many complexities and details of the world in which we live.

Based on these analyses, adventure/expedition participatory journalism, like many other types of writing can be considered true journalism on a probational basis. Certain inherent aspects of this type of writing cause it to vary slightly from the

mainstream journalism definition established in the previous section. Analysis on a case-by-case basis, however, will most likely prove that most examples of this type of writing appearing in mainstream media are true journalism.

Chapter 6 ● A discussion of the three case studies as independent and neutral adventure/expedition participatory journalism

Let us then compare each of the case studies to the testable aspects—truth, verification, and news organization status—of this definition in order to verify their validity as journalism. In addition, each case study will be analyzed based on the standards of independence and neutrality which are essential to adventure/expedition reporting and writing.

Case Study 1: McKinley, 1903

Is it journalism?

During the 1903 McKinley expedition, Dunn's reports to the *Commercial Advertiser* were very opinionated and written in a diary-like fashion. There is no way to tell whether Dunn was writing the truth. He includes many personal opinions and recollections in his account of the expedition. Dunn is also quick to write that he had personal problems with several members of the expedition, including racial prejudices and general distaste. Could these personal vendettas have rendered Dunn unable to see the truth in the situation he was reporting on? There is really no way to tell. Readers can only hope that Dunn's professionalism outweighed his personal prejudices and allowed still him to see the truth in the subject matter of his reporting.

He includes many accounts of his own recollection and his own actions. These statements obviously are not verifiable. No one could go back and ask one of the

other participants whether Dunn actually did something if Dunn was the only person present when the described action took place. Some obvious aspects of the account could easily be verified. Statements of places that the team traveled to or amounts of food that were consumed by each person could easily be compared to another's notes or memory of the expedition. In addition, the leader of the expedition, Frederick Cook, wrote his own book following the return of the expedition. The hard facts of the trip are identical in both publications. Personal interactions and feelings are not addressed in Cook's book.

Addressing the issue of the final part of the definition, *The Commercial Advertiser* is a news organization. The primary mission of the newspaper at the turn of the twentieth century was to seek out and present the public with information about the world and the problems affecting it. With Lincoln Steffens at the helm, muckraking his way through the city, few would question the validity of this publication as a proper news organization.

Using these comparisons, it is safe to say that Dunn's writing would have been considered adventure/expedition participatory journalism in his day and time. Today, however, he would have a harder time convincing critics of the validity of his writing as true journalism. The fact that many of his statements are opinions and few of his personal interactions with the other members of the trip are verifiable makes it hard to call this writing true journalism. The sub-genre itself has not changed since 1903, but the expectations of the journalist have. The case does make a nice contrast to the other two cases, however.

How does the journalism measure up with regard to independence and neutrality?

Dunn's very involvement within the group is an obvious conflict of interest; however, how else was he to perform his duties as a participatory journalist? If his interests had not been tied to those of the group, he would not have been able to participate in the event or compile his thoughts into the newspaper article and book. Dunn does have one saving grace in the conflict of interest scheme in that neither he nor his newspaper provided monetary supplement to the expedition, as will be discussed later in the sections about the other two journalists. He raised money to accompany the expedition just like all the other team members.

Dunn is guilty of violating one aspect of the neutrality standard. He hated Simon, a Jewish teammate on his expedition. "He was a Jew...I have the racial, not the religious, repugnance to Jews. I had never relished their race-selfishness, and scouted their tenacity under physical and mental stress" (Dunn 17). He keeps up this racial hatred throughout the diary, writing later on, "Drat him!...I only wish he had more initiative. I suppose it's racial that he hasn't. The Jew has always been the selfish follower-on, the scavenger of civilization, just as we Yankees have been the bullying pioneers" (Dunn 43). Dunn explains this hatred as a simple matter of prejudice. His snide remarks and judgments about Simon appear periodically throughout both the book and newspaper article.

Dunn generally kept an open mind about the prospects for success on his trip. For the most part Dunn is critical of his expedition. He does not naively write that his expedition was progressing better than it was just because he yearned for success.

He manages to look at both sides of the issue in some situations but not those involving his own personal grudges and prejudices. He nor his newspaper gave money to the expedition, so he is not tied to it in that respect.

Case Study 2: Everest, 1953

Is it journalism?

The 1953 Everest expedition meets all three testable standards of the definition of journalism. First, James Morris was careful to keep his own personality out of the newspaper accounts. He wrote little of his personal interaction with the other members of the trip, and he wrote nothing of their personalities. He did not let his relationship with these people affect his newspaper reporting. His facts and statements are quite verifiable. He kept meticulous notes, and several other members of the expedition wrote their own post-mortem accounts of the trip that compare nicely with Morris's account. Finally, *The Times* is a news organization by every meaning of the term. Globally, no one would question the validity of the premier newspaper of Britain as a true journalism venue. Morris's reporting is journalism, fitting every qualification of the definition.

How does the journalism measure up with regard to independence and neutrality?

The conflict of interest standard is especially important in Morris's case because he had monetary ties to the expedition. For years, *The Times* had been paying for parts of these expeditions in exchange for exclusive dispatches from the scene of the trip. Morris wrote of the former expeditions in his book, "In return for financial backing, [*The Times*] secured the copyright of dispatches from almost all the pre-war

expeditions, and became the accepted channel of information from the mountain at a time when most other papers took little serious notice” (*Coronation* 4). In the case of Morris’s expedition, however, even more monetary conflict of interest was at stake.

The Times...again had the copyright to dispatches from the expedition; but it could clearly no longer afford to rely upon climber’s journalism, produced when opportunity offered in the knowledge that only one newspaper was really concerned. This time there would be strong competition for the story, fanned by nationalist sentiment and honest patriotic pride, even fostered by the two current cold wars—between Capitalism and Communism, between East and West. It became obvious to everyone that this time the Everest part must...include in its number a professional journalist (*Coronation* 5).

Not only was Morris’s newspaper paying for part of the expedition, but the expedition was also responsible for making sure that Morris survived and had interesting dispatches to send back to London. Both the expedition members and Morris had conflicts of interest in this case. The expedition most likely felt somewhat obligated to provide *The Times* with a success since the news organization provided some financial backing for the trip. Morris also must have felt a responsibility to the expedition members to portray them in an interesting and flattering light since they were protecting him in an environment that was completely beyond his comfort zone. Whatever the case, it is nearly impossible to tell how the news is skewed in Morris’s dispatches. In his book, there are more instances exemplifying his true opinions about the process of the expedition than the newspaper accounts; however, these too, are few and far between. Nonetheless, Morris’s dispatches are most likely somewhat skewed beyond the absolute truth thanks to the various conflicts of interest on the mountain.

Morris is visibly conscious of the potential problems that could arise if he did not remain neutral. In a combination of the two standards of neutrality and independence, Morris attempted to remain physically and fiscally independent while open-minded. For the most part, this scheme was reality. He was to follow the team and report on their progress, but he was to remain self-sufficient for the most part. “Hunt had insisted that I must not depend on him for food and supplies; so I had to allow not only for my bags, but also for stacks of firewood which must be brought up from the tree line to the top of the glacier” (*Coronation* 51). While this scheme was the initial purpose, it did not play out exactly as Hunt and Morris had planned. “Hunt had said that I must be self-sufficient, and I prepared to eat my own yak-meat in solitary grandeur; but somehow the scheme fell through, and tossing my tins into the expedition’s pool, I took to feeding with them” (*Coronation* 60). Even though Morris ended up eventually feeding and depending on the group for some basic survival needs, his initial goal to remain independent is reflected in both his newspaper articles and book. He is conscious of the fact that he is dependent on his subject, and therefore tries to remain detached from them in other situations.

While Morris exhibits many of the aspects necessary to remain neutral, he ends up being much more positive about the expedition than he should have. He is very slow to criticize the team or its leaders. Even after one attempt had been made to reach the summit and deteriorating weather conditions should have discouraged the team, Morris maintained their positive attitude by writing in a May 30 dispatch to *The Times*, “No unduly pessimistic conclusions are yet being drawn here, among

persons in absence so far of any reliable news regarding the outcome of the first two attempts on the summit of Everest, originally planned for last week-end” (“First attempts on Everest” 6). While neither pessimism nor optimism holds a higher value in news writing, the Everest mountaineers obviously were optimistic about their chances to make the summit of Everest by the required date. Morris reflected these opinions in his writings, even though a counter opinion would have been useful to readers at home.

Case Study 3: Everest, 1996

Is it journalism?

The 1996 Everest expedition is not quite as clear-cut as the 1953 trip. Jon Krakauer mixes a little opinion with a lot of factual reporting and a bit of speculation to create his work for *Outside*. His personal ties to the expedition as well as his relationships with several people climbing the mountain make it a bit harder to judge whether he achieved a truthful account. Most of his facts are verifiable; however, one major situation he writes about conflicts with another account of the same event. Krakauer wrote in his book that one of the guides, Anatoli Boukreev, was responsible for the deaths of many of the people that May. Boukreev wrote his own account of the event in retrospect, describing the events differently and accusing Krakauer of suffering from altitude sickness that affected his judgment and ability to reason. Finally, *Outside* magazine is a true news organization. While the subject matter is narrowly tailored to a specific audience, the information provided fits the other standards of news, and the presentation is like that of other news organizations. Also,

the primary mission of Krakauer in reporting about the situation on Everest fits that of the mission of many journalists beginning a story. Ultimately, it is safe to say that Krakauer's writing is journalism. While some of his statements are not verifiable or do not match those of others on the trek, he still wrote with authority. The first-hand perspective lends an interesting angle to an important and newsworthy story. Most audiences were very receptive to his story and were willing to look past some of the questionable logistics of his reporting in order to receive the first-hand information about the 1996 disaster.

How does the journalism measure up with regard to independence and neutrality?

Krakauer, like Morris, has quite a conflict of interest in this story. *Outside*, paid for his ticket up the mountain by giving Adventure Consultants, his guide company, attractive advertising space in upcoming editions of the magazine. While Krakauer was not necessarily paying for his trip, himself, he was ultimately getting a free trip to the top of Mt. Everest, something that few receive, but many hope for. While Krakauer's initial purpose was to look at critically and report on the state of the commercialization of Everest and how that affected the environmental, social, and philosophical issues surrounding the mountain and climbing it, he was initially not likely to specifically criticize Adventure Consultants and Rob Hall, his guide, since their advertisement would run virtually alongside his article.

These ideas are merely theoretical, however, since Krakauer ended up being very critical of Hall and Adventure Consultants due to the tragedy that occurred on the mountain while he was there. From an initial standpoint, I would expect that

Krakauer would have been more wary in taking and receiving such benefits from the group he was supposedly reporting on.

The financial and personal survival aspects of independence are slightly more cause for concern, however. Krakauer's situation is probably the most disturbing of all. Based on the definitions of journalism described in earlier chapters, how can he be expected to tell the truth to his readers if he is dependent on his subjects for everything thanks to a hefty subsidy by his news organization? He received a \$65,000 trip in exchange for some advertising space in the magazine. He was still receiving something from his sources. In the end, this conflict of interest did not hinder his ability to fairly report the story; however, it easily could have.



The other aspect of journalistic independence—lack of interpersonal relationships with subjects—is not as relevant to these three scenarios. Each journalist was forced to have personal relationships with the other members of his team. While the writings of each reveal many of the inner working of the interpersonal relationships in Dunn's and Krakauer's cases, these interpersonal relationships are to be expected. The audiences knew that the men would have to live, breathe, and work alongside their subjects each day in order to survive. Friendships were expected to develop as well as conflicts with the other team members. While readers and the journalism world would probably not appreciate it if the reporters were more involved with any of the team members beyond the normal

relationships that each had with one another, they understand that normal relationships must exist between these people.

In the end, it is rather hard to judge from hindsight whether the journalists were completely neutral or independent in their reporting. So, were they completely fair, accurate, and most importantly, truthful? No one can be sure, but the fact that this type of journalism is popular and encouraged by readers across the world shows that this controversy is one that readers are willing to accept in exchange for the first-hand experience and account that the reporters can provide.

Chapter 7 ● Conclusion

Participatory journalism is a genre that is unquestionably present in mainstream media. The reporting style has many advocates. Whether they are reporters hiking and writing about the Appalachian Trail, shadowing scientists in Antarctica, or embedding themselves with military troops in Iraq, these journalists appear on a near-daily basis in numerous types of media throughout the country and world.

This project has attempted to identify and analyze some particular questions about a subset of this genre in an effort to pose standards or establish guidelines for reporters of this subset. First, in trying to decide whether adventure/expedition participatory journalism is true journalism, the qualities and standards of journalism as a whole were identified and analyzed. This subset of participatory journalism was generally deemed true journalism because the aspects of verifiable, factual, and truthful information published by a news organization that serves a public interest are recognizable. As in many classification systems, this standard is best applied case-by-case. Using the three case studies under scrutiny in this project, each was deemed true journalism based on some but not all aspects of this definition. Isolated parts of the definition are able to be overlooked in exchange for the firsthand experience and perspective that are available only through this type of writing. In addition, the timing and background surrounding each case study are imperative to describing each as adventure/expedition participatory journalism. For instance, in Dunn's case, the

writing style and reporting tactics he employed were standard for his day. Granted, these practices of describing the mundane, day-to-day activities of the team members and the squabbles that each have with one another would not be expected in today's mainstream media. This is not to say, however, that they were wrong in Dunn's era. This is also not to say that they are wrong today. In fact, *The Hartford Courant's* "High Ambition" series actually focuses its May 4, 2004 article on the interpersonal relationships between team members and how those relationships affect overall team morale ("Expedition member makes difficult decision" 1-3). Also, a semi-weekly web log discusses the mundane day-to-day aspects of the team members and their lifestyle in the mountain camps.

In digging deeper into the case studies, each of the journalists' works was analyzed using the standards of journalism as established by the Society of Professional Journalists. Most standards were easily established, leaving little room for scrutiny about the professionalism of the journalists. *Objectivity*, on the other hand, is a tricky term for all journalists. Everyone understands that no journalist can enter a situation with a completely clean slate. All have personal backgrounds, motives, perspectives, and opinions that enter a reporting situation along with the journalist. In a detached-reporting-about-a-scene situation, this standard is much easier to ingest. Most sideline reporters can easily keep an open mind and an arm's length from their subjects in order to understand and better analyze situations. Participatory journalists and especially adventure/expedition participatory journalists have a more difficult task in doing this. They do not have the ability to step back from the situation in

order to keep in mind other possible ideas and issues. They are in the middle of the situation, often helping to create it. Thus the unique standards of independence and neutrality and their relationship to the search for truth must be remembered by all journalists of this subgenre.

In comparing the three case studies to these standards, none completely passed. Each had aspects of his expedition or reporting that violated the core issues of independence or neutrality. In the end, however, audiences, editors, journalism critics, and even the journalists themselves must overlook these conflicts in order to have the unique perspective of the participatory journalist. If readers want to ensure arms-length reporting and relationships, they can read an account written after an event based on interviews and documentation. If audiences want to read or watch first-hand accounts of a pressing issue or event, they will turn to participatory journalism.

For the most part, all three case study journalists kept an open mind about their vulnerability and ability to reason out the truth of their situations, presenting the idea that individual reporter responsibility to his audience is the most important standard that any participatory journalist can employ. Each journalist maintained different practices while on the mountain with his expedition; however, in the end, each disallowed himself from putting the personal loyalties he had developed with the other members of the team—whether they be financial, emotional, or physical—above his most important loyalty of providing the truth to his readers.

Analyzing each of these case studies in respect to the outlined definitions of *journalism*, *participatory journalism*, *independence*, and *neutrality* provides the opportunity to pose suggestions for future participatory journalists—especially adventure/expedition participatory journalists—to remember and employ as they report.

First, participatory journalists must remember that they are like any other human reporter. They are not objective and they are not unbiased. They bring with them to the reporting scenario certain prejudices and preconceptions that are ultimately part of human nature. The journalists must be aware that they have these biases and preconceptions and must attempt to identify and then ignore these thoughts for the sake of neutral reporting. At the very least, they must acknowledge the possibility of a lack of complete objectivity.

Second, the journalists must identify for the audience a list of monetary contributions by either the journalist to the reporting scenario or the subject to the news organization. Take, for instance, a travel writer or food critic who receives free samples or trips in exchange for reviews. Many may be able to avoid slanting the news toward those who gave the gifts; however, others are unable to do so. Morris planned to be completely separate from the trip he was accompanying. He planned to cook and eat for himself, lead his own sherpas, and pitch his own tents. After some time, this process became too difficult for him to manage alone; however, the fact that he initially planned to do these things shows that he was aware of the potential conflict of interest.

Alexander Eliot proposed an interesting goal for travel writers in *Editor and Publisher* magazine. This goal is just as relevant for participatory adventure writers.

Simply by establishing a Uniform Disclosure Rule. Not through legislation of course, but as a norm of editorial practice. Every published travel piece should carry a prominent list of acknowledgements, letting the reader see just who provided what amenities to the author. Such acknowledgements should be proud and unashamed, like the ones that scholars make to helpful colleagues and institutions. To be listed thus would garner valuable publicity for the sponsors involved. Plus, it would provide a reality-check for readers to apply. Has the author provided kid-glove treatment to certain sponsors, or not? My Uniform Disclosure Rule would give the whole profession a bright new visage of sincerity. It should also encourage the travel industry to underwrite a renaissance in travel journalism by actively pursuing independent-minded, passionately concerned communicators with offers of free trips (56-57).

A similar standard for all participatory journalists would be particularly useful. A simple list of all amenities provided or services rendered while the trip or expedition was in progress would allow the reader to decide for himself what situations may have caused the reporter to have a conflict of interest and thus alter the truth.

Finally, adventure/expedition participatory journalists and all participatory journalists must remember the reader-journalist compact. The journalist is under obligation to the reader to employ a set of understood standards in order to provide a sense of validity to the report. The reader, in exchange, accepts the stories as truth and uses the information to apply to his own life.



In answering the general questions about journalism, participatory journalism, and the relationship between the two, several more questions and issues came to light. Although they were outside the scope of this project, each could bring more

information and perspective about the overall issues at stake here. Perhaps in future study the following questions and issues could be analyzed:

1. What are the standards and guidelines that public journalists as participatory journalists should keep in mind?
2. What is a more streamlined definition of journalism? My definition was very broad and based on literature relevant to this particular area of journalism. Could different definitions provide different standards or validity for adventure/expedition participatory journalists?
3. The question of who determines what is journalism is a huge one. I accepted audiences and readers without much discussion due to the size and scope of the question. Further study into this particular question could yield interesting new light on the state of participatory journalism.
4. How does the changing state of journalism—from a print and broadcast-based system into one more computer and internet-dominated—affect participatory journalism? When accounts and dispatches are available almost instantaneously and provided by a variety of non-typical sources, what does this mean for participatory journalism and the truthfulness of it?

These and many other questions could be addressed in further study.

Adventure/expedition participatory journalism and participatory journalism as a whole are valid types of journalism with certain standards that are crucial to be kept in mind by those reporting in order to maintain the delicate balance necessary to reveal the truth.

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